Introducing performance into the communication curriculum for engineers: Breaking the mould

Constance Matilda Israel

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Introducing performance into the communication curriculum for engineers: Breaking the mould

Abstract
Education in South Africa has, thankfully, not escaped the winds of change. The introduction of Outcomes-based Education (OBE) has generated much debate. How have technikons responded to the educational transformation impelled by sociopolitical change? I refer here specifically to the Communication curricula for engineers at Mangosuthu Technikon.

This research explores the effects in my Communication classroom of introducing performance, through games and a dramatic text. My intention is to subvert the potential dangers of OBE, given its behaviourist and prescriptive thrust, and a possible reversion to the transmission model in its application at Mantec. I argue that gaps in the historically decontextualised Communication curriculum may be addressed through the use of performance as a critical alternate literacy and pedagogic tool. Government policy supports the view of literacy as an inclusive act, contrasting with the exclusionary politics characteristic of apartheid. Educators also offer a rationale for the use of literary texts in developing language competence.

Vygotskian pedagogy, the social constructivist model of education and qualitative research methods condition this research. I consequently offer a comprehensive, multiperspectival view of the research experience my students and I shared during a semester, through a range of lenses and data collection tools. Many insights filtered through our experience. Students’ journal reflections are captured throughout, and their capacity to demonstrate specified outcomes analysed. I saw in their presentations the beginnings of understanding of the power of performance and body language. Texts which raised issues relevant to their sociocultural, political and personal lives, were valued. Reading in class and performance techniques heightened participation and competence in comprehending, interacting and conversing. Students’ culminating performances balanced a theoretical understanding with practical application, which drew on personal, political and sociocultural experiences. By the end of the semester, they exhibited more confidence in their own literacies and in building relationships.

The study concludes that a collective effort, made at institutional level, is necessary if we are to succeed at educational transformation through the methodology of OBE. We need a more considered, critical application, and to still seek other alternatives.

Keywords
Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Speech Communication

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INTRODUCING PERFORMANCE INTO THE COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM FOR ENGINEERS: BREAKING THE MOULD

BY

Constance M. Israel

BA Hons, University of Durban-Westville, 1984
MA, University of Natal, 1989
MA, University of Stellenbosch, 1994

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Reading and Writing Instruction

May, 2003
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Constance M. Israel
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January 23, 2003
Date
DEDICATION

To my mother and father, Rajie and NM Israel,
Whose gift to me was the Book.
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Without the timely contributions of these bodies, I would not have had the opportunity to study in the United States, nor to complete my study programme.

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCING PERFORMANCE INTO THE COMMUNICATION CURRICULUM FOR ENGINEERS: BREAKING THE MOULD

by

Constance M. Israel

University of New Hampshire, May 2003

Education in South Africa has, thankfully, not escaped the winds of change. The introduction of Outcomes-based Education (OBE) has generated much debate. How have technikons responded to the educational transformation impelled by sociopolitical change? I refer here specifically to the Communication curricula for engineers at Mangosuthu Technikon.

This research explores the effects in my Communication classroom of introducing performance, through games and a dramatic text. My intention is to subvert the potential dangers of OBE, given its behaviourist and prescriptive thrust, and a possible reversion to the transmission model in its application at Mantec. I argue that gaps in the historically decontextualised Communication curriculum may be addressed through the use of performance as a critical alternate literacy and pedagogic tool. Government policy
supports the view of literacy as an inclusive act, contrasting with the exclusionary politics characteristic of apartheid. Educators also offer a rationale for the use of literary texts in developing language competence.

Vygotskian pedagogy, the social constructivist model of education and qualitative research methods condition this research. I consequently offer a comprehensive, multiperspectival view of the research experience my students and I shared during a semester, through a range of lenses and data collection tools. Many insights filtered through our experience. Students’ journal reflections are captured throughout, and their capacity to demonstrate specified outcomes analysed. I saw in their presentations the beginnings of understanding of the power of performance and body language. Texts which raised issues relevant to their sociocultural, political and personal lives, were valued. Reading in class and performance techniques heightened participation and competence in comprehending, interacting and conversing. Students’ culminating performances balanced a theoretical understanding with practical application, which drew on personal, political and sociocultural experiences. By the end of the semester, they exhibited more confidence in their own literacies and in building relationships.

The study concludes that a collective effort, made at institutional level, is necessary if we are to succeed at educational transformation through the methodology of OBE. We need a more considered, critical application, and to still seek other alternatives.
Concerned about the few career opportunities for an English Literature graduate in Durban, 1987, and my struggle to find a niche professionally, someone once said to me, kindly: Every few years you need to recreate yourself. Early this year (2000) I was poised to begin something new, but saw myself outside the process of my makeover into dissertation-writing Ph.D. student. Now, as the October wind slews leaves into the pool, I feel myself immersed in the process, and it is part of who I am. This feels right.

There are many schisms, though. My work life, which is the environment for my research into the use of literature and performance in the Communication classroom, offers too little meaningful connection. My day is filled with administrative tasks, form filling and budgeting. Meetings eat up hours hungrily. I do not read enough here, or talk about what really interests me. I look at the poster on my wall of New Hampshire State coloured in with books and think of my friends there and how different our conceptualisations are of who we are as academics and as institutions. Of course, there are vast differences even here between the university and the technikon, and between technikons themselves. I have had to adjust to the technikon context, in which my role as head of department does not prioritise or recognise adequately that I should be devoting time to the people who work with me, gaining some understanding of their research and
professional interests, sharing ideas and plans for curriculum and teaching, responding to literature in our field, and writing our own. There are only meetings, the new home ground of the frustrated academic, to which he must adapt or die.

Students are a welcome relief, but teaching is not.

I am glad to be here, though, and there is no doubt that professionally, it has been a good move for me. I also feel that I have some contribution to make here, and that my past has led me to reinvent myself for this purpose.

At Home in Tongaat

As a child and teenager, literature was my world. Although I loved art and tried too hard to write poetry, I really lived in other people's words, and in their worlds. I read everything. I also took ballet and piano, and went to church and school with my Indian friends and relatives. I moved unselfconsciously between the cultural borders of my historical Indian-ness and my adopted western-ness, in the fashion of my generation: we did not stop to think enough about who we were against the larger canvas of Life in South Africa. Thus, for a while, it was a small world. I was Cinderella, who stayed at home to clean while my elder glamorous sister went off to university in Durban and my younger sister gurgled in her cot: the proverbial middle child, who didn't fit in anywhere. I took refuge in books and imagination.

My family has lived through many changes in South Africa, the country of our birth for two generations. My great-grandfather on my mother's side, Rev. John Rangiah, preacher, composer and educator, came here from Nellore, India, in 1903 to begin mission work amongst the Telegu Baptist community living in the green hills and valleys of
Kearsney on the Natal North Coast. His son, Rev. TM Rangiah, took over the mantle in time. My father’s father, Moses, of the Gela family in Rajamundry, literally ran away from India. He told no-one, simply got on the boat that brought him to a new land and life. After five years as an indentured labourer in the tea plantations in Glenwood, Kearsney, then as an independent farmer, my grandfather moved with his family to Chatsworth, an Indian township south of Durban, where he had purchased a plot of land. Sixteen good years later, a clash with the local community forced the family to leave like fugitives in the dead of night, with nothing but their horse and cart and a deep desolation. Their destination: Kearsney. At the manse called Gospel Hill, Rev. Rangiah, his wife and eight children lived. Over the years, it became home to many others who, like my parents, recall its happy ebb and flow fondly and reverently. Stumbling over a step in the dark verandah, in awe of the prospect of a new life in Kearsney, my father, then nine years old, met my mother for the first time. They married fifteen years later at the beautiful, old Kearsney Baptist Church.

I name you Moses Israel, pronounced the priest loftily to the strong, fair man standing waist deep in the Mokovana River near Gospel Hill, his hand on the open Bible. My grandfather smiles quietly. He had been baptised before, but nobody knew it, because he had wanted to marry a Hindu woman, my grandmother.

Who am I?
A daughter.
A South African Indian female.

Initially, in my younger years, my names seemed purely odd, anachronistic, NOT me. Constance Matilda Israel. Maistry, now. And maybe they still are, for an Indian South African Christian, but they now represent the “more than one me” I’ve come to know. It doesn’t matter what they mean or where they are derived from, their origin. After all, what’s in a name, in a word, hardly tells
what's in a history. They seem, in their very mix, to reflect the bringing
 together, dissonantly, of different parts, wholes, perspectives, times, places,
 cultures — the rather more complex composition of a person, me. They make
 me rethink my selves, ask who I am, regroup, as I am doing right now.

Yet, like a raga, it is my Indian-ness which colours my mind.

My family spoke English at home, but we can all sing the Telegu hymns we learnt
 in church, which was a classroom in the local high school. At Easter, when our churches
 prepared for a gathering of the Baptists at the Durban City Hall, the evocative strains of
 Telegu songs composed by my great grandfather were heard more frequently. My mother
 has always sung the songs of her history, often at weddings where the traditional
 mangalam is sung to invoke special blessings on the bride and groom. As a child I loved
 to speak in Telegu to my paternal grandmother, enjoying the sudden smile of
 comprehension which creased her face: Ra Ava, Kutso Ava. Bhagundava?

High School Days

I am an Indian. I attend an Indian High School, Tongaat Secondary. All the
 teachers and students are Indian. The school has a very good reputation for
 both academic performance and extracurricular activities such as dramatic
 productions and sport. In athletics and games, we compete with other Indian
 schools, of course.

... The four buses were hot and crowded, but everyone, including us
 supporters, looked cool in their whites. We had our banners, calls and cheers,
 and we were ready to help our stars win the regional school sports. I too felt
 part of the team. Tongaat Secondary was a strong contender, every year. As
 we approached the grounds at Stanger, a town some forty kilometers up the
 north coast, our excitement mounted. Other school buses, bursting at the
 seams, pulled up alongside.
Despite the heat it was going to be a brilliant day, especially if you thought about the ongoing stream of ice creams and unexpected encounters with friends and strangers from other schools. But winning made it a real triumph. Nine hours later, exhausted, we crammed into the bus again, our cheers resounding unabated and hysterical across the swaying sugarcane fields we passed, until we got home too quickly, reluctant to let go of the mood...

In school I was never very good at sport. This is something people find strange, as my parents and elder sister were strong on athletics and other games. Except for the odd field event and netball, I failed to impress on the ground. I remember coming in last at a cross-country marathon, the whole school cheering me on, oranges in hand, as I managed, with more embarrassment than difficulty, the last lap around the small ground at Fairbreeze! I was much better as a spectator.

In common with most Indians on the subcontinent, my dad’s passion is cricket. In the early days, when people of colour were banned from facilities and denied opportunities for regional and national selections (consequently our national sides are still predominantly white), he captained a club called Corinthians in Asherville, Durban. Naturally, it was mainly Indian. My mum kept score and fed everybody after a match when they congregated at No. 1 Salvia Road, our home, talking late into the night. I love watching cricket. We grew up with it, and television brought it, magically, into our homes, where the presenters had to compete with my father’s informed commentary and my mother’s shrieks of delight every time her team, South Africa, won. Apartheid or not, my parents loved the country and its cricket team. They still do.

Growing up in Durban then Tongaat, on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, I was religious and quiet, though occasionally quite daring. I had serious academic potential,
according to the experts (my family). I was the one who was going to get all the awards at
school, come first in class and become a medical doctor. That’s what all Indian children, or
perhaps more accurately, their parents, aspired to in South Africa then. Our schools were
privileged and well-resourced, and in our oblivion we spared little thought for our poorer
neighbours. I did win the prizes, but becoming a doctor was thrown out the window
officially since the year I played Juliet in our annual high school production, a sublime
affair which was a liberating experience for me. I had two years of school to go and except
for friends, found the science subjects I was doing rather tedious.

My matric class was a stable, responsible group doing the hard sciences,
destined to bring academic honour to the school. We were mainly serious
academic types, on the verge of proving ourselves as students who could
compete nationally One day, in a state of pre-exam anxiety, a group of us
decided to run away from school. For the day. We were just tired of the
pressure.

We knew where the exit gates were and when they were not guarded: we had
been prefects after all and had some experience of the hated gate duty (you had
to monitor and report who was late, which meant you had to be early). We
agreed on a time, the first interval, then signaling one another, walked
nonchalantly out the back gate, without looking back. Running down a bank
onto a narrow dirt road which ran around the school, my sense of guilt was
overpowered by exhilaration! Crossing the road quickly, we plunged into a
tall, dense thicket. I was quite scared, but felt much better when Rookie and
Gita had a fit of uncontrollable giggles. However, there was no time to waste.
The minute we were discovered missing at school, the alarm would go off and
the principal would order a search in the vicinity. We had to find the narrow
path or short cut which would take us into town, where we had no plans
whatsoever, except to buy some cokes to celebrate what we had done. Pushing
our way through the thorny bushes, which towered over us, while trying not to
soil our white school uniforms, we fell deeper and deeper into the thicket. In
desperation, we called out to Pat and the others, but heard only a faint
response. Hopelessly lost, we could not catch up. It took all of two panicky
hours to find our way out, after we heard a train whooping in the distance.
As it turned out, no-one had noticed in school. They had all assumed we were busy in another room. We never said a word either, but after that we found we could apply ourselves to the final exams more conscientiously.

In high school I started to read a little about apartheid in the newspapers and began to realize, in a vague way, that we were an abnormal society. I understood to a limited extent why the world was imposing sports and economic sanctions on us. I glanced sometimes at the pages of the Indian newspaper, the Leader, which chronicles the history of Indians and later, their role in the political struggle. I duly expressed horror when I read of black domestic workers being kicked out of white Afrikaans churches. That was the way things were. We grew up segregated, and as Indians first, a people finding our feet still in a new and strange country, who, faced with obstacles and challenges, sought our own.

I don’t think I questioned who I was or what had happened to our collective consciousness until I reached university. I cannot understand or explain why, really.

I saw our black neighbours jumping off their bus and disappearing into the darkness of Newtown, on the outskirts of the Indian area in which we lived. It was not the same bus I took. I knew that to take the wrong bus from school was dangerous; it would veer through the narrow, dusty back roads of Hambanati and end up an hour later in Isnembe, way past my turn-off at Sandfields. When it happened, I saw places and people, just like me, living outside my mind. I saw also my father coming to meet me in the dwindling light, shotgun in hand, in case there was trouble. What was an Indian girl doing on a bus for blacks?

One day in matric my English teacher called me to his desk and told me I looked lacklustre and bored. This in spite of the fact that I consistently won all the awards for best English student (sic). The truth is, I couldn’t wait for varsity to begin, to recreate myself into an English major.
Student Life at the University of Durban-Westville

At the University of Durban-Westville (UDW), at the time an all-Indian culture club, my surprise at attaining an A for English in first year was surpassed only by my dismay at not obtaining one in second year. Still, I knew what I wanted and how to get it. I knew that no matter what, I would continue with English Literature and Language as a course of study, even if there was no clear profession in sight. I read to my heart’s delight and excelled, even though I seemed to occupy a space reserved for shy but enigmatic students who did better academically than socially! After my third year in the Bachelor of Arts degree, I shared the Mabel Palmer Award for undergraduate academic excellence with a friend who continues to inspire many. Shakila’s blindness helped me see: we spent many hours in her room at the student residence in which we lived, talking through our arguments, texts and ideas.

Enrolling for an Honours programme in my fourth year was an obvious option, and I chose courses in Twentieth Century fiction and verse, Indian and African literature, Literary Theory and Shakespeare. At this stage I still kept the Language and Literature segments apart: it was the way we were used to conceptualising things. During the Honours year (required for a Masters degree), and despite my track record, my confidence and sense of “I know what I know” were severely shaken. I knew nothing. I felt myself drowning in theories, analyses and critiques from all quarters. This was a new sensation. Everything I held as solid and unshakeable became blurred at the edges and likely to collapse. Like the message of postmodernist fiction, nothing could be taken for
granted. There were no givens anymore. Theory upstaged theory in the blink of an eye, and truth, in the words of Muriel Spark, looked decidedly stranger than fiction.

I spent six months after passing my Honours exam teaching in the same Department of English in which I had earned my colours. My first salary advice slip reflected R832-00. I'll never forget that figure, the equivalent of around $80 per month. It was wonderful! I had since the second year of my studies survived on scholarships and bursary-loans: now, as a woman of means, I could pay back! I loved my students and my new status: after all, I had an office with a table or rather, a table around which four walls had somehow been constructed. Tutorials were the order of the day, but I was given the opportunity of teaching a lecture series on Muriel Spark as well. This in those days took the form of delivering lectures painstakingly written out by hand. There were many, many pages, for eight lectures of 55 minutes each. I still have them. My handwriting seems to embody some naïve person I have long forgotten.

My four years as a student at UDW were coloured by the usual experiences of campus life: flights of fancy rather than realistic plans as to what I would do with my life, as I continued, to my surprise, to excel academically. It was a time of forging new friendships and social circles, which opened my mind to a dazzling range of ideas and events. Music, theatre, fine art, dance, poetry. We went on field trips and joined student organizations. Public speeches and forums, as well as political meetings and protests, were all part of the campus scene.

The mid-eighties will be remembered as one of the worst years of student protest across tertiary institutions in South Africa. There were so many issues I had never been
fully aware of before, as an Indian female in a closed society in which we mingled with
other races (under constraint), only through church circles. Now, there was another
agenda: protest action against discriminating education systems and funding from our
apartheid government; the lack of access to education, and ineffective management
systems at the university. Exams were disrupted on a few occasions. Although student
meetings were at one stage prohibited, hundreds of students sat out hours of silent
protest in the quad. You could almost see the heat rise from the cement paving and hang
above the brown shoulders of determined protesters. Management at times like this
would very quickly call in the Riot Squad to disperse students and possibly intimidate
into submission their upstart leaders. It was a long, long time before there was any
progressive response which made sense to anyone. Those were intense, anxious days. For
some, there was never any recovery.

It was shocking with what stealth and quiet a big thing like a Caspir could steal
up behind five hundred students and send them sprawling. As tear gas
exploded around us, one day, we hurled ourselves wildly into the nearest
building. The Caspirs were right behind us, charging onto the ramps, spewing
black smoke from their bellies. In front of us the huge glass windows shattered,
but we ran into them full tilt. Through L Block, into J Block. There was no
escape. Someone I knew from high school screamed at me to get into a room. I
found myself crouching on the floor of what looked like a laboratory with five
or six others. Gunshots and shouting outside did not subside. Then, after an
interminable silence in our corner, we looked out a window facing the sports
field. A policeman was beating a student with a knobkerrie over the steel
barriers on a curb, as if moulding her form into its hollows. Further away,
people were being pulled off the road into the residences. We knew we had to
get out sometime. Skirting around J Block towards Varsity Drive, I plunged
into more pandemonium. Policemen with dogs were hot on the tails of a frantic
bunch of students charging from the opposite direction. I ran. I jumped over
barriers and ran downhill. I ran all the way down to the flat I shared with my
sister. I don’t recall how long it took.
I am a South African, first, then Indian?

Graduate Study at the University of Natal, Durban

My days at the University of Natal in Durban (UND) were so different from UDW. I wanted to think about metafiction more, and Spark’s novels were the vehicle. Her position as a Catholic who believed but questioned her faith and its rituals, and her exposé of the novel as a fictional construct that could be deconstructed and reconstructed at any time, intrigued me. I had scouted around the country for a supervisor for the MA and found one right on my doorstep, at the historically white and privileged campus over the hill.

Who was I, here? Except for my supervisor’s sudden demise during the final phases of writing, nothing much happened at UND. I took buses and trains to get there, and no-one spoke to me. I hung out at the free music concerts hours on Mondays and much the same nothing happened. White students stuck to their own crowds and the few Indians and even fewer blacks felt displaced. Our postgraduate group had tea occasionally in the Department of English, where I had a sense of perpetual unease. As the only person of colour, an Indian, I did not belong. For all my awareness-raising experiences at UDW, I was a child of the times again, a product of apartheid, at odds with my environment. Once comfortable, though, after a year or so, I was told politely that I could not attend a screening of The Crying of Lot 49 at a friend’s home because his mother would mind. She was white, I was not. UND seemed to be all gloss and polish with underlying malignance. I completed the Masters in English Literature a year later under the rigorous direction of a new supervisor, and gave up reading fiction for a while.
My First Experience of the Technikon

I had a brief encounter with the technikon as a different institutional culture around this time, as a temporary lecturer at ML Sultan Technikon, in the heart of Durban. I taught Communication in English to engineers, perhaps a hint of things to come. My strongest recollection is of being so exhausted from the teaching load that I would shamelessly put my head down on my desk for forty winks in the middle of the day. I often feel the same way nowadays.

A Stint in Johannesburg

The reality of a jobless future, despite a Masters in English, coincided for me with a need to spread my wings. Johannesburg beckoned, with its incredible job opportunities. My parents, always supportive and never cloyingly traditional in their expectations of their daughters, sent me off in a taxi. This felt like the time at the end of my third year at varsity when I left for Vichy, France: they gave me some sound advice then left the rest to God, as good Baptists do.

While my stint in Johannesburg was short-lived, I began here to develop an interest in editing through my position as technical editor-in-training for a scientific council attached to Wits University. Since then, over the past eleven years, I have edited many dissertations as well as other academic and corporate documents, a process which has given me a different type of learning experience altogether.

Back to UDW, in Search of a Career

Going back to UDW in the early nineties was a momentous decision for me. It was probably compelled more by a need to leave Egoli, the big, messy, sprawling city of
gold, and go back home to Durban, where I didn't feel so landlocked. I joined the Centre for Academic Development as a Language and Academic Skills Coordinator. My commitment to focusing on historically disadvantaged groups in education was affirmed when I chose to read for a rigorous Masters degree in Linguistics through the University of Stellenbosch. At UDW, there was nothing more rewarding than seeing a student through what could be an utterly alienating experience at university. After a short staff development stint at the University of Bristol, UK, I started to think about academic freedom more, along with the freedoms we had not enjoyed.

Initially, the striking thing about UDW was how little it had changed. This was driven home to me when, now as a member of staff, I saw again through a window the path of havoc and fear wreaked by a military vehicle as it spattered purple rain onto protestors, leaving the buildings around the same old quad an eerie shade of despair for weeks after. I looked right through the blank eyes of a very young man, the metallic green Riot Squad framing his unemotional advance as he fired rubber bullets carelessly, and felt ashamed that nothing had changed. I had come back as someone else, older and wiser, but that had made no difference.

Crossing Continents: New Hampshire, USA

My Fulbright Scholarship created a very strange juncture in my life. My absolute belief that I was ready to start a Ph.D. and that I needed to challenge myself had been accompanied by much thought and research into a plan to study further in the USA. New Hampshire would give me the opportunity to travel between disciplines, crossing the borders of Literature, Language and Education. Then, the news that I had been awarded the scholarship came just a month after I had met my soon-to-be best friend, Yogan. In a short while, our relationship had acquired a lyrical but solid feeling, and so one year later, when I packed up my flat and left bravely for New Hampshire, my family waving me off...
again, life seemed rather complicated. However, we found that being apart had its very unique strengths. Yogan's voice, one of the things I love most about him, was the only South African one I heard for a long time.

New Hampshire gave me the academic life I had dreamed about. I read again. I wrote. I started drawing a little. I met people who sustained a conversation and a currency of thought with me throughout the year and since. I felt free, academically, especially in the sense that I could formally bridge the divides of language and literature, almost an impossibility before. Even better, the options available to me allowed for interdepartmental and inter-disciplinary work, in ways which valued who I was and what I brought to the curricular experience. Although New Hampshire's snow-covered sidewalks were daunting and as alien to me as its culturally homogenous society, I also found new friends and another family here. It is both strange and beautiful how and where one can feel an unexpected sense of belonging. Nowadays, back in South Africa, I often retrace the route to Morrill, or see myself hanging up my borrowed brown jacket in the closet, next to Diane's bright pink one.

Choosing to Leave UDW Again

Back at UDW, chaos and disorder ruled. The campus was restructuring to save itself and had commissioned strategic planning exercises across the board. The Centre for Academic Development was under threat, as most employees were not permanent and funds were drying up rapidly. Moreover, its function could be decentralised. This was only one crisis against a backdrop of what can only be described as institutional breakdown, as the worker's union clashed with management amidst strikes and political
turmoil. The staff association, of which I was part, suffered deep injuries, as activists were suspended, never to return. When it became clear that management was acting arbitrarily and harshly, and in my case, when I realised that to stay would mean limiting my choices and freedom to function, I decided to go.

It had been much simpler to leave UDW before.

Finding My Niche at Mangosuthu Technikon

Eight months later, after some freelance editing, I joined Mangosuthu Technikon as Head of Department of Communication (English, Afrikaans and Zulu). I have had to regroup, to mould myself into this position. This, despite my worries about what I have to do here (as opposed to what I think I should be doing), is quite a niche for me in terms of my professional history, as it ostensibly combines academic skills development with that of language and communication. Since this is an historically disadvantaged institution, it still keeps me in the realm of development work. On a personal level, this satisfies me and makes other compromises palatable. While the crises of management and threats of strikes seem to pervade our lives on a permanent basis, driving into Umlazi every morning carries both memories of the past which haunts us, and the pungency of hope which we have for this country, our home.

After two years at Mangosuthu Technikon, I still find myself adapting to the technikon environment, and to the classes I teach. Though comparatively small, they are too large for interactive group work: 57 students, mainly male, in a small, sloping lecture theatre, three times a week. I started with the Management Science students in much larger groups of 110, so the Engineering groups have posed different challenges. Since I
teach one full-time module, Communication Skills 1a, it is this group that challenges my thinking on teaching and curriculum. However, the observations I make about this academic programme (for example, that there is no whiff of literature in a language classroom), must be seen against the background of the technikon context and the handing down of curricula by a convenor technikon. A technikon would constitute a committee which would devise guidelines for curricula for a particular course, and these would be shared with other technikons across the country. Often these would be applied to the letter, with no consideration for demographic, cultural or linguistic differences, or the very unique conditions which contextualised our institutions of higher education. Yet I must acknowledge that the face of the technikon as an institution is evolving. Historically, unlike universities, it has offered career-linked qualifications, with an emphasis on the application of skill. Today, its historical limitations have become advantages: it has established links with the job-market, and appears well-positioned to meet the social and economic needs of the country.

I feel that the conventional separation of language and literature in technikon curricula echoed separations of other kinds, entrenched in the laws of the country. Today, as a democracy, there are many lingering divisions that continue to isolate and alienate. In class, it is still not easy to get to know everyone. There is no time to talk, let alone communicate. The semester flies past as we tackle one task after another, and as I fit my teaching in between the various other administrative aspects of my job. I acknowledge constantly my need to “put my head” into my department, and to make it something. We have started a few long-term projects: revamping the study guides, using the language
laboratory, changing the way we set exam papers, devising diagnostic tests for placement into appropriate programmes, and enacting Outcomes Based Education. We could do so much so differently but seem to be caught in the complex historical and political web of the technikon and the crises in education both locally and nationally. Still, I feel a stronger sense of agency than I did two years ago. I may be many things but as a teacher, my deepest concern is that we need to examine our practice more closely. I believe, for example, that we cannot unthinkingly practise the methodology of OBE, that we have to seek ways to do so which will make education truly critical, creative and satisfying. That is, we have the freedom and power to subvert its prescriptive nature. I want to change more here. I want to feel proud of being here, and know that I made a meaningful contribution, somehow.

Durban, South Africa
CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUAL MAPPING

This dissertation is the final phase of my Ph.D. in the Reading and Writing Instruction Programme in the School of Education at the University of New Hampshire. The topic arose from my classroom teaching experience at Mangosuthu Technikon, which is located in Umlazi, a black township in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I joined the technikon in September 1998, and began teaching groups of Engineering students a compulsory first level module in Communication in 1999. Since meeting my first class, I have felt very strongly the need to scrutinize and transform our approach to the curriculum so that students and teacher-facilitator could enjoy a more meaningful, enriching educational experience together than was possible after decades of conditioning in the transmission mode. What happened during my research semester, Fall 2001 (August to November), is therefore the heart of the matter.

Background to the Study

It is culture to create a new person in a new society with democratic values. (Campschreur & Divendal in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991, p. I)

Changing cultural, social and historical contexts in South Africa have over the decades shaped its educational systems and philosophies. I begin this dissertation by outlining the stark features of these contexts in order to bring into focus my concerns surrounding the Communication classroom and its curriculum at Mangosuthu Technikon.
The issues raised wind their way through the labyrinth of this work. They inform the research decisions made en route, and lead into discussion of the choices we make pedagogically to enact more carefully the methodology of Outcomes-Based Education. I conclude with a motivation for my specific research questions and themes, and an outline of the research plan.

Cultural, Social and Historical Contexts

The many years of apartheid law and governance in South Africa have inevitably impacted its cultural, social and historical contexts. For Raymond Williams (1961), culture is a complex, multi-layered tapestry which emerges from an interactive criss-crossing with norms, institutions, conventions and relationships, forging patterns of thinking and behaving. He argues that “There are clear and obvious connections between the quality of a culture and the quality of its system of education” (p. 133).

Culture is an extremely problematic concept in South Africa. Moore (1994) elucidates two broad views: culture as dynamic and valued for its identification of difference positively, and in contrast, culture as static, “a timeless body of values, practices and beliefs...things that do not change...a changeless text” (Cross in Moore, 1994, p. 247). While today, post-legalised apartheid, cultural differences are valued as part of the multicultural nation that is South Africa, in the past this concept has had negative connotations, since it became a tool through which the dominant Afrikaner government divided people according to race. Consequently, social relationships in any context of interaction were constrained and defined according to cultural and racial difference. Morrell (in Moore, 1994) asserts that culture as a “site of political
"contestation" is entrenched in South Africa: "Most people use the concept of culture as a disruptive and boundary concept constructing an identifiable sub-group of people. That is what separate development was nested on" (p. 244). Other writers (see Moore, 1994) refute the apartheid-motivated contention that culture gives one identity and is construed as something given and unchangeable, shaping people who cannot in turn shape it.

Cross and Mkwanazi (in Kallaway et al, 1997) assert that post-1994, we should not assume that the new cultural unity of South Africa already exists in a fully-fledged form. This unity is fragile and embryonic:

It has to be struggled for and consolidated. This will certainly require an awareness of the 'contradictions and discontinuities in South African society' and the diversity caused by race, class, ethnicity, geography and other factors. In this framework, 'cultural and ethnic diversity is not an obstacle but a fundamental and necessary ingredient' (p. 136).

Today, in 2002, the positive recognition of cultural, racial and linguistic diversity in the rainbow nation of which we so naively and fondly speak, still eludes us.

The History and Impact of Apartheid Education

...I can't see this place
Properly, my eyes are prohibited
By curtains of blood
(Shoba Mthalane, 1988, in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991, p. 52)

Since 1948, from the churning pot of separate development, self-determination and social alienation, came the unmistakably rancid smell of apartheid education.

Apartheid is a policy aimed at preserving the racial identity and superiority of whites in South Africa. The Nationalist Government maintained an artificial and abhorrent divide amongst the blacks, Indians, whites and Coloureds through policies of separate
development. Christie (1990) offers a comprehensive view of the insidious relationship between the development of this worldview and system of government, and that of education in the country. In 1923, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act allowed blacks into urban areas only if they were to "minister to the needs of whites" (Christie, 1990, p. 46). In 1950, the prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Amendment Act made inter-racial marriages illegal. The Separate Amenities Act (1953) stipulated separate entrances, signs, transport and other public facilities. The Population Registration Act, a national register, classified people according to race. Blacks were required in spot-checks to produce a dompas or proof of identity to gain permission to move from area to another. In the same year, the Group Areas Act relegated different race groups to separate residential and business areas. The Urban Areas Act (1955) made it illegal for blacks (including Indians and Coloureds) to remain in a designated white urban area for longer than 72 hours without a permit. The Bantu Education Act (1953) dictated that all black schools had to be registered with the government, leading to the closure of mission school and separate higher education facilities: blacks could not, for example, attend white universities. Schools were subsequently differentiated on the basis of location, whether rural or urban and private or public, their gender representation, funding, religion and medium of instruction. Denial of access to literacy, the unequal sharing of resources and a skewed education system thus shaped the nation.

Christian National Education, a particular version of the Christian-Nationalist worldview which supported Afrikaner nationalism, entrenched racism in the schools by emphasising the right of different cultures to self-determination. Since basic schooling was
not compulsory for blacks, their tendency in the early days of educational apartheid was not to engage seriously in the forms of education offered by whites, such as mission education, because it did not give them access to the white dominated society and the economy. These systems of education did not recognise the local African culture, and the teaching that occurred in schools was remote from students’ everyday lives. Reading and writing was considered unimportant, and propagated a sexist bias by preparing men for manual labour and women for domestic work. School and education were not prioritised, which suited the white government’s western colonial ideology.

Apartheid education found ways to justify itself. The Eiselen Commission in 1949 noted that “Schools must give due regard to the fact that out of school hours the young Bantu child develops and lives in a Bantu community, and when he reaches maturity he will be concerned with sharing and developing the life and culture of that community” (Rose & Tumner, in Christie, 1990).

Education became compulsory in 1981, ostensibly opening up access to all race groups. However, it was a Catch-22 situation, and duplicitous on a grand scale. Compulsory education did not imply state-provided education for all, only that parents who could afford to send their children to school had to do so (Christie, 1990). In any event, the policy was not enforced and only 6% of those who could have gone to school, from national estimates, did enroll. Prior to democracy, although private schools opened their doors to students of other races, and universities adopted open admissions policies, very little consideration was given to developing curricula and teaching-learning methodologies to suit the black student, for whom English was a second or alternate
language, and whose history contrasted shockingly with that of whites, Indians and Coloureds. The expectation was for black students to fit in with the prevailing ‘western’ model, and hence to meet standards and norms quite alien to them.

Apartheid education was thus intent on keeping blacks aware of their station in life, namely, in lower level positions in the economy. The English they would pick up in four years of schooling was just enough for some understanding of the language of their masters, and was accompanied by the appropriate attitudes of politeness and subservience (Christie, 1990). The curriculum for black children was diluted in comparison to that of whites. It focused narrowly on arithmetic, religious instruction, singing, gardening, crafts and simple English and Afrikaans. In contrast, white children had at least ten years at school, taking subjects like Geography, Biology, Science, and the languages. Inequalities in funding, and hence quality, were perpetuated. This reflected the unjust laws of the country, and led to few opportunities for work and economic advancement. No basic bill of rights ensured equality or freedom for all: blacks were discriminated against educationally, socially and economically, in every sphere of life. As a consequence, all South Africa’s peoples were socialized into separation and discrimination as a way of life.

Social and Educational Redress: Post-1994

Our history of colonisation and apartheid, entrenched by the Nationalist government from 1948, made literacy in English, a second or alternate language for the majority of the population, a prerequisite for any role, status and recognition in society, education, politics and economy. English and Afrikaans were compulsory official
languages, both perceived as languages of oppression, promoting Eurocentric values and not merely ignoring but denying the worldview of the learner. Later (1967), these languages became the dominant media of instruction for a majority for whom they were not a first language.

The rationale behind literacy in the language of the ruling party, Afrikaans, was inexplicable. Afrikaans was a compulsory second (or third) language in the secondary school syllabus. That it was not spoken by the majority, because the policy of separate development created few opportunities for direct communication with white Afrikaners, and moreover that there was no desire to do so, as it had little economic or social currency, were irrelevant. I can speak for myself here: though I acquired the language, the process was unfortunately imbued with resistance. It was necessary to pass the subject to matriculate. At secondary school we read the Afrikaans resistance poets like Adam Small and Breyten Breytenbach and never questioned the anomaly. We had not heard of Sol Plaatje, Sipho Sepamla or H.I.E. Dhlomo.

Our human arts in chains of fungus soil
Of crippling laws and forms have now become
Commercial pantomime...
(H.I.E. Dhlomo, 1941, in Malan, 1987)

The need for social and educational reform has been felt intensely over the years by teachers and students alike: the critical question was how to bring it about. The National Education Crisis Committee, which sought approval from political parties such as the ANC, had in the eighties mobilized what was known as “People’s Education,” to effect a mind shift in the entire system of apartheid education (Love & Sederberg, 1990).
Repeatedly, other calls were made over the years for a more critical approach to curriculum which does not deny the fundamental differences of our sociohistoric contexts (see Buckland, 1982). Protest and strike action became prominent in the 1960s, through the Sharpeville shootings and Rivonia Trial, continuing through the 1970s, and culminating in the Soweto Riots of 1976. This was followed by school boycotts, university unrest and campaigns against apartheid education. Chisolm (in Kallaway et al, 1997), records appropriately the significance for education that the year 1994 brought to all South Africans:

South Africa’s first democratic election was a watershed in the country’s educational history. In the first instance, it signaled a move away from the determination of policy by a white minority state for a black majority; in the second, official state education policy, historically geared towards building a united white nation, was now re-oriented to redressing inequalities and ‘nation-building’ between white and black; in the third, instead of being predicated on exclusion and denial of rights, social, political and educational policy became based on the principles of inclusion, social justice and equity (p. 50).

Redress in education through access, massification, equitable representation and equal funding, has been the thrust of transformation and legislation since 1994. Today, despite the crises described above, a few years of democracy and development have made our institutions of higher learning places of cultural diversity, echoing the demographic make-up of the larger society. Education has indeed responded to social change and has had a role in effecting social change in turn. Many alternative options such as distance education, skills development, Adult Basic Education and Training and Literacy Programmes have emerged, run by private bodies, non-governmental organizations and labour groups. Today we have a national education ministry, with nine provincial
departments. There is also a new consciousness at work in devising policy, which is transforming textbooks and instructional material, as well as teaching-learning practice and methodology.

However, we cannot conclude by any stretch of the imagination that since 1994, educational systems and institutions have run a smooth course of development. Despite the changeover to a democratic government, the struggle for education for all has continued (see Napier, Lebeta & Zungu, 2000). Evaluation of the government’s educational policies has revealed a plethora of unresolved issues surrounding access, funding, resources and continued discrimination, noted by Bisetty (1999):

Free and compulsory education, new and improved schools, libraries and laboratories. More free text-books, more access to tertiary education. Adult literacy classes for all...The year is 1994. Five years later, it is comforting, in a way, to note the candid acknowledgement by Education Minister Kader Asmal that many of the government’s policies over the last five years have largely failed to serve poor urban and rural communities (p. 9).

Over the past eight years, boycotts at institutions of higher education have continued to occur, though considered to be somewhat abused as tools for negotiating change and managing conflict. The attendant problems of harassment, intimidation, assault, loss of academic time, financial wastage, police intervention, dismissals, conflict and legal battle, have in some cases destroyed the ethos of higher education institutions, the morale of their staff and students, and the developing culture of learning.

In the 1990s, Academic Development Centres in historically black institutions took on the daunting task of trying to effect transformation in teaching, with the goal of institutional transformation (see Masenya, 1994; Agar & Murray, 1992, and Boughey,
1994). More recently, these efforts have been decentralised, in some instances prematurely, on the assumption that all teachers are already conscientised into rethinking their curricula, methods, attitudes and assumptions. Sadly, this is not the case. The passing generation of teachers and academics may be guilty of paying only lip service to educational change (Jansen, 1996).

While generous donors have made a difference in offering access to students and sustaining them, disadvantaged rural groups have difficulty obtaining adequate financial support for study. It is a commonly held perception that the school system has not improved but deteriorated and that standards have dropped, with the result that even fewer matriculants with exemptions are graduating. Moreover, universities in the past few years have altered again their admissions policies, stipulating stricter admission criteria and fees up front, as they too are hard hit by national budget cuts. Departments are closing down, and academics are being offered options to leave.

The University of Natal in Durban, an historically white university, like the University of Durban-Westville, an historically Indian university, has seen dramatic changes in its student and staff demographics. Enrolment nationally has fluctuated since 1994. Between 1998 and 1999, for instance, a decrease of 41,000 students was recorded at universities and technikons (Bisetty & Challenor, 1999). A significant development is the increased enrolment at private institutions, and the continuing growth of the University of South Africa, a world-renowned institution of distance learning. Currently, mergers are being negotiated between a number of institutions, in the light of issues such as funding, duplication of programmes, proximity and ultimately, the need for educational
transformation and quality assurance. KwaZulu-Natal’s biggest technikons, ML Sultan and Natal, which are located next to each other but were historically the preserve of Indians and whites respectively, are merging, with Mantec joining the process later (we are awaiting directives from the Ministry). The new combined institution is now the Durban Institute of Technology. The Minister of Education has also proposed the merging of the Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville, and outside the province, that of the University of South Africa (Unisa) and Technikon South Africa (TSA), another distance learning institution.

Resistance to these proposals is in some cases being construed as a resistance to transformation (Baloyi, 2002). It comes in different forms from all quarters: management, faculty, students and unions. For example, a sector of the white faculty and black student body at Natal Technikon perceived the merger as a takeover by the management of ML Sultan, which was predominantly Indian. Financial considerations and the lack of time to consult and assimilate the changes proposed, led Unisa to take legal against the Department of Education, though they approved in principle of the proposed merger with TSA.

Given the uneven course of these developments in education, and the historical segregation by law of race groups and control over residence, education, employment, social life, legal rights and artistic expression, moving from mono-cultural education to multicultural education since 1996 has brought with it new sets of problems.
From Mono-cultural to Multicultural Education

The thoroughly abnormal context which was perpetuated during apartheid meant that culturally different groups had few opportunities to mix. In the classroom and outside, tensions have been generated by suddenly throwing together people who have had little experience of how to negotiate, respect and accept difference. Language barriers prevent communication and cultural differences close doors. There is even a new “black apartheid,” which discriminates between those schoolchildren in black townships who attend government schools and those who attend private schools (Bhengu, 2002). The older generation, particularly the black adult who was denied education and constitutional rights, has been rendered powerless while the younger generation has appropriated power. The right to entitlement of the oppressed and the shift in mindset required from the oppressor, have offset conflict in every sphere of life, including education. Like Malan (1987), Petersen and Rutherford (1991) expose not just the politics and laws of apartheid but the political discourse of oppression and its attendant moral trials. The mix, they say, which has a strong presence in the new literature, art, critique and consciousness emerging here, is explosive: “Although the debate is angry, it has moved into a world where ideas and controversies are concerned with ways of seeing, not suppressing” (p. viii).

While concern about multiculturalism is voiced in public debate, educational policy, research, non-governmental organisations and government, the micro-context reveals too little conscious, directed effort to engage these issues. For instance, there is not enough explicit classroom talk or planned reflection on sociocultural differences and values or sociopolitical change at the technikon. Questions have to be asked continually.
about whether we are engaging different contexts and experiences from home and community at “school,” or transforming our classrooms from decontextualised, intimidating settings to places of meaningful exchange. Attitudes towards multicultural education suggest still that it is “for others,” meaning minority groups, people of colour, women and victimized groups (Banks, 1994). The tendency to see another culture as the other, the foreign and unacceptable, which is to be resisted, still persists in classroom contexts, including that of Communication in English.

If culture is viewed as a way of living, dynamic and fluid, subject to change as circumstances, conditions and ideologies change, without an overt or narrow emphasis on difference that is linguistic, racial or ethnic, educational contexts have a role to play in making change meaningful and real. The school as a microcosm of society, and a developing multicultural one, can through multicultural pedagogic approaches help defuse and remove racial tension, intolerance and discrimination.

**Education and Training**

Protest action in the 1980s was also directed against teacher training and educational institutions, which were not preparing students for the job market, the culture-specific needs of our society or global competition. Moreover, the ethos at schools and in institutes of higher education entrenched a colonial system which privileged first language speakers of English and disadvantaged further the black majority. The crises in education and protest action uncovered huge disparities in resources, administration and funding. In effect, the vicious cycle of restricted access to education, the job market and improved economic status, doomed the masses.
The polarisation of education and training in this country had far-reaching consequences, according to the ANC Policy Framework (Chisolm in Kallaway et al, 1997) "The separation of education and training has contributed significantly to the situation where most of our people are under-educated, under-skilled, and under-prepared for full participation in social, economic and civic life" (p. 59). After the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the elections in 1994, the thrust has been to overhaul educational systems completely in order to redress the imbalances and inequities of apartheid and to align education with training, development and vocation. Universities have had to become more economically relevant and innovative in the programmes they offer (Anstey, 1997). Today there is a global trend to integrate or converge general and vocational education and training, following the examples of countries like Sweden, New Zealand, Canada, France, and the United States of America (Christie in Kallaway et al, 1997). Our new national standards and qualification structure, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), seeks to integrate technical/vocational and academic qualifications and skills. It links different levels of learning so that learners may progress to higher levels from any point in the system, and recognizes prior learning and experience. Chisolm (in Kallaway et al.) emphasizes that "Modular competency-based training is critical to this conception...[and] curriculum reform is at the heart of enhancing access and breaking down historical divisions between academic and vocational" (pp. 59-60). How is the technikon as an institution positioned to achieve these and similar goals?
The Technikon

The question *What is the technikon?* is pertinent because policies shaping the rapidly changing educational landscape here have acknowledged its evolving status. Like universities, technikons are institutions of higher learning within the higher education band (i.e. beyond matriculation or grade twelve at secondary school) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Traditionally, they have been places for technical education and training, focusing on the applied sciences (Engineering and Natural Sciences), practical application of skill, and experience in industry. Originally technical colleges, these institutions for the training of technologists were renamed *technikons* (the Greek *techne* meaning skill and dexterity). Technikons have not always been the first choice for matriculants, in a culture which has promoted the elitism of the university experience to those (the minority) who were allowed access to schooling at all. They carried the stigma of a lower social class and academic status for the student who enrolled there, and for the member of staff who taught there. For many, many years, a student would consider enrolling at a technikon only if she was unsuccessful in gaining admission to a university. Today, astute students may do the opposite.

Simply put, technikons are suddenly in vogue (though as mentioned, identified institutions are currently declared vulnerable and may face a closure or merger option). They are at the cutting edge of educational transformation mainly because of the economic benefit of their vocational-academic offerings, as they attempt to meet the economic needs of the country by producing graduates who can get a job. This is something not all graduates of universities can accomplish. The links technikons have with industry through
co-operative education (previously referred to as experiential training), give them a head
start over universities, which are struggling to become more socially, contextually and
economically relevant.

However, debate still rages about the status of the technikon as a higher education
institution, and more specifically, its capacity to deliver while still largely
"untransformed" academically. In some ways, its staffing, research, resources,
administration and structure as a system are reminiscent of an outdated mode of
educational management.

The Handed-down Curriculum

In the technikon context in South Africa, a convenor technikon has traditionally
delivered a core curriculum, second hand, to all other technikons teaching a
subject/module. Very little deviation would occur from this core curriculum, regardless of
contextual differences such as student demography and the language spoken by the
majority. Historically, core curricula in South Africa were devised to protect and promote
government policies. Hence they offered a skewed perspective, showing whites to be
superior to blacks in a variety of ways. Through the core curriculum, other hidden effects
of schooling were learned and transmitted, conveying to students information about the
values, rules and power structures of apartheid society. Even when the core curriculum
was not biased towards the dominant ideology, the hidden curriculum certainly was. For
example, one could communicate a discriminatory attitude to a racial group or gender
through teaching a section on communication in organisations, or how we make requests,
simply by the choice of role-players: whites or white names would have the top
management positions, hypothetically, whereas blacks would occupy lower rungs on the corporate ladder.

The chief mechanism for curriculum reform across all bands of education in South Africa is Outcomes-Based Education (OBE). Following trends in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, and the United States, where Outcomes-based Education was introduced by Spady (1991), an American educationist, the philosophy and practice of OBE has been adopted in South Africa. Its goals, according to Carklin (1997), are to make education people- and student-centered, to undo racial, class and gender stereotypes and to foster diversity, specifically multiculturalism and multi-lingualism. These are noble and necessary intentions, but they have been undermined by criticism and constraints, which I discuss in an analysis of the unfolding debate on OBE in Chapter Four, the Literature Review.

While the restructuring of curricula nationally is compulsory to meet the requirements of OBE, national standards and quality assurance bodies, there is deep concern that the traditional core curriculum has not been changed but presented in a different guise. In schools, according to Jansen (1996), the new syllabuses have merely fused the core curricula of the old apartheid departments, “thereby reinforcing and legitimizing the white education model of curriculum” (p. 7). The critical goals of educational reform thus have been reduced to curriculum reform, and curriculum reform to syllabus reform, in reality reflecting, Jansen argues, the politics of a country in transition.
Communication Curricula

How have technikon departments and courses evolved to respond to required pedagogic change, to changing methodologies and policies, and to sociopolitical change in the country? I refer in this study to curricula in the Department of Communication at Mangosuthu Technikon (Mantec), with a specific focus on the Communication Skills 1a curriculum for students in the Faculty of Engineering. Communication is a service department in the Faculty of Management Sciences; that is, it does not offer a diploma or a full academic qualification, but a compulsory module.

My observation in 1999 was that the Communication in English curriculum had not changed substantially in the twenty odd years of the department’s existence at Mantec. In 2001, new drafts of the study guide emerged, embodying our thinking on curricula in response to OBE (see the Literature Review for a description of our personal experience of the change process in the Department of Communication). The focus of Communication modules has always been on business communication for the workplace. Whether they have addressed the unique language and learning needs of our second language English corps adequately, remains questionable.

The syllabus across modules in Communication can be summarised as follows: communication theory; business communication; meeting procedure; oral communication; written communication, including summaries and reports, and job preparation. Language skills (common errors) and examination techniques are also addressed. This curriculum can be perceived as authoritarian and conservative; it has not consistently located learning within the context of changing socio-cultural conditions and contexts and, in its quest to
“cover the content,” has largely overlooked the experiences and feelings of developing learners, whose lives at home differ considerably from school. It has also not sought to develop learning within disciplines, taking into account the specific strategies and styles of learning in a range of disciplines. It is too generic, and fails to encourage the learner to construct her own knowledge, to think critically or to make meaning independently.

This traditional, old-school approach to curriculum does not, in my experience, foster reading for understanding, problem-solving, critical thinking and language development. It has not made learning meaningful to the student’s life experience or connected it to literacy practices at home. Superficial alterations to the contexts for discussion and assessment have surfaced, for instance in the use of black names in the questions set for examination. Thus, one of the questions I have asked about my classes at Mangosuthu Technikon, is whether broader sociopolitical change has induced change in thinking and learning in the Communication classroom. What do we talk about in the classroom, which constitutes real and personal experience of the curriculum? Different social and cultural contexts of students and teacher in the Communication class may mean that we are talking past each other. Consequently, because students do not share the same information that we do with others in our (still segregated) community, we assume that they are culturally illiterate.

The Decontextualised Classroom

Pedagogy which divides students from their individual histories, according to Kutz and Roskelley (1991), who echo theorists like Vygotsky, Luria and Freire, may mean that we unconsciously decontextualise knowledge and learning and set up home and school
practices in opposition to each other. This produces what I refer to as a classroom of
decontextualised knowledge, typified by the old apartheid classroom. According to Kutz
and Roskelly (1991), there is very little negotiation of meaning in a curriculum that offers
no space for students to tell their stories or share their individual experiences, feelings and
hopes. Such a classroom does not value narrative, literature, other modes of
communication, or other literacies, and does not make adequate space for students’ voices
to be heard. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) find that the arguments for narrative and narrative
knowing in the classroom by Bruner, for example, have remained unheeded: “narrative
itself is not much valued in schools... where expository, analytical genres of writing are
the preferred modes of discourse” (p. 73). This applies at the technikon as well.

Curriculum here needs to connect reading and writing, language and cognition, within a
pedagogy which derives from sociocultural context and past experience, so that students
can make learning meaningful. Knowledge needs to be constructed together, not delivered
in study guides which are often outdated and inaccessible to our students.

The curriculum for Communication has tended to regard language used at home
(the mother tongue) as a problem and liability (see Kutz & Roskelly, 1991). It sets up
first language English use as the standard to which students must aspire. The modules
patronise students by testing in a way which foregrounds second language grammatical
errors made by Zulu speakers in particular. This makes internalisation very difficult for
the learner. He is confronted with a curriculum experience which not only intimidates in
its emphasis on English, but also in its expectation of mastery of Business English, a third
register. Different nonverbal patterns, including the use of personal space, touching, and
eye contact require our close attention, since in black African cultures, avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect for older or more powerful others. Barriers to communication such as ethnocentrism and misunderstanding caused by different verbal and nonverbal codes, even within the same language, are aspects of the curriculum which do not permeate practice in the classroom, reinforcing rather than challenging cultural stereotyping. The fact that students' lives have been dominated by rural experiences, poverty or cultural and social contexts that are not western, is not addressed consciously and directly. The curriculum thus can be criticised on the grounds that it is not sensitive enough to how language defines identity, self-esteem and community. It makes the student feel disadvantaged, a condition exacerbated by the history of discrimination against blacks in this country. Ogle (1999) argues that higher failure rates can be attributed to the dominance of English, since learning is not occurring in the mother tongue.

In terms of learning style, the Communication in English curriculum, like others at the technikon, seems largely to elicit rote learning of content (meeting terminology, for example), with not enough emphasis on the development of language and learning for transfer across contexts (disciplinary, social, etc.). The need for a stronger activist style, which invites critical listening, questioning, participation and problem-solving, is crucial. A surface learning approach which supports passive absorption of information, and which is rewarded in assessment, prevails. It values learning as the reproduction of formats and facts, and language as merely context-appropriate use, context here ignoring changing sociocultural contexts in favour of the narrow confines of the workplace. As part of a system which educates, we do not, through our curriculum, value our students.
We are not self-conscious about the politics of the classroom, even if we claim to be so outside the classroom. Our curriculum has, in many ways, remained in the past.

Reconceptualising the Communication Curriculum

Language, Literacy and Communication is one of the eight OBE learning areas listed in the national education curriculum. To effect its goals, the existing curricula and materials, teaching methodologies and forms of assessment need to be transformed. The broad outcomes outlined in the Government Gazette (1997) for Language, Literacy and Communication are:

- Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding.
- Learners show critical awareness of language usage.
- Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts.
- Learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations.
- Learners understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context.
- Learners use language for learning.
- Learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations (p. 24).

Given these outcomes, I argue for the integration of learners' real-life social and cultural contexts into the Communication curriculum, so that we acknowledge diverse multicultural perspectives and many ways of knowing; for the active recognition in the Communication classroom and curriculum of alternative literacies which communicate, through specific learning activities and multiple genres, and for the use of language (including mother tongue) for learning and reflection about how we learn. I believe that this argument must be made in order to self-consciously choose how we should apply, in our unique contexts, the methodology of OBE.
The effects of OBE for a Communication curriculum place strong emphasis on metacognition and reflection. Learning about how we learn, through language use, is an outcome underpinning all planned learning activities in OBE. The importance of reflection and metacognition is accentuated when we consider that learning may be an “income” for students which is psychic and internalized but material to his cognitive development, as opposed to an observed, externalized outcome. The dichotomy created between incomes and outcomes may in fact be too simplistic and restrictive. Incomes, including what the student brings to the experience, are implied in the outcomes eventually demonstrated. The effect of close examination of how our students learn through the lens of OBE, should compel us to think about how we learn and to reflect on our own pedagogic practice. As curriculum developers we should then ask questions such as the following: What is curriculum? Can we justify our current curriculum perspective? What does it illuminate and conceal? Does it address different categories (learning, teaching, resources) and categories of difference, in a coherent and consistent way? Does it meet the vision for a transformed education in the country? (Jansen & Reddy, 1997).

To refine further the scope of OBE for the purposes of this study, I quote below the main outcomes determined for Communication in English at technikons by the National Working Group: Languages (1999):

- To communicate orally in a range of contexts including the interpersonal, group or organisational contexts, in a manner that is effective and appropriate.
- To demonstrate an ability to overcome barriers to effective communication in a variety of social, professional and intercultural contexts.
- To demonstrate the ability to access, select, read, evaluate, understand and write a range of appropriate texts.
- To demonstrate an ability to operate/function appropriately in a cross-cultural/multilingual context.
- To demonstrate the ability to listen critically and with empathy in a range of social, professional and intercultural contexts (p. 1).

The Communication course is intended in these OBE outcomes to occur in multicultural contexts, in which learners may freely draw on their personal, social, cultural and historical contexts. My understanding of OBE as a means of achieving the outcomes agreed on by the National Working Group, is that we need to begin by asking how OBE will transform us as teacher-facilitators. Looking at ourselves critically and showing ourselves to be willing to transform our ways of knowing first, are essential elements of educational change. Our own needs, experiences and contexts should be actively and reflectively engaged and problematised, before we attempt to address curriculum so that it integrates the social and cultural lives of our students.

According to Kutz and Roskelly (1991), learning involves thinking about learning and its outcomes. Teachers of Communication can help reinterpret the Communication curriculum, by actively and consciously using the languages and tools of reflection, introspection and renegotiation. Curriculum revision for OBE requires, as our own experience has shown, a curriculum process which progresses from exit outcomes to subject outcomes to lesson outcomes, resulting in the generation of knowledge by student participants in a way which acknowledges its dynamic, negotiable nature. This compels some planning, preparation and creative thinking on the part of the teacher-facilitator, no longer perceived as being all-knowing but as participant-learner. My question since 1999 has persistently been, how are we achieving these goals for the Communication Skills 1a
course at Mantec? While fully aware of the need for transformation, I felt a sense of unease, the kind brought about by being on the receiving end of rapid, large-scale change. The idea that OBE might become another form of colonization grew: was it not an imposition that reduced our teaching to a dry formula, and conditioned our learning to acceptable behaviour patterns? I saw the possibility of this happening in its focus on predetermined behavioural outcomes, which oppressed the nuances and complexities of the psychic, emotional, individual self, and its cognitive development; in the tendency for national authorities to inexplicably diminish the significance of our unique institutional contexts, demographics and characteristics in its prescriptions, when these have literally shaped our identities, and lastly, in our own institutional response or lack thereof, which is conditioned by the constraints of being historically disadvantaged. I feared many things: that we would gloss over it, succumb to a superficial practice, never get to grips with it and fail to question it. I feared that in the classroom, we would do what we have always done, especially with large groups of over 150 students in lecture theatres: the one-way transmission of information. Resorting to old, traditional practice was comfortable, after all. How could I undermine the potential of OBE to become another mode of transmission? I found myself both supporting and resisting OBE and looking for a path that I could walk, even as I felt compelled to encourage my colleagues to forge ahead. After many months, and my experiences with performance in pedagogic practice one summer at New Hampshire, another question filtered through strongly: could integrating performance and literature into the curriculum achieve some of the goals of OBE, while undermining the dangers of transmission that I saw?
Specific Research Questions

The question I explore in this study has its roots in my teaching experience at Mangosuthu Technikon: What will happen in my Communication classroom, between students and myself, in the way we converse, engage, teach, learn and reflect, if I introduce performance, through the use of a dramatic text into my curriculum? Other than seeing a potential value in terms of effecting changes in practice and curriculum required by OBE, I am interested in this exploration for a number of reasons:

- At Mangosuthu Technikon, a literary text has never been used in a Communication course, which is dominated by business communication and technical/scientific discourse. I believe that this raises questions about whether we should stick to the content of the discipline or cross disciplinary boundaries in developing language and communication. In other words, how can literature be used to develop communication and language?

- I see gaps in the curriculum, in classroom interaction and the prevailing expectations and ethos in the classes I teach, which I contend may be addressed by the use of performance as a pedagogic tool.

- I see this research project as a way of challenging stereotypes about Engineering students, the Communication course, learning and the technikon itself. The debate surrounding the technikon as a teaching-learning context may be thus extended by this study. The technikon has traditionally focused on career-oriented academic programmes, but is currently reviewing its shape, purpose and system of operation.
As noted, the Communication Skills 1a module (Coms311), one of thirteen offered by the Department of Communication, excludes any literature. As a relative newcomer to the teaching of this module at the technikon, and as a learner who is interested in genre- and discipline-crossing, including that of the broad language-literature categories, this absence is intriguing. I found the curriculum to be rather severely conceptualised, emotionless and divorced from the realities of students’ experiences. Teaching the Coms311 module over a period of four months reduced my involvement to the mere delivery of content. The module is driven by the requirements of continuous assessment. The prescribed textbook is not used consistently during course work or self-study: students refer instead to a study guide for almost all the information they need. Classrooms or lecture theatres have cinema-style seating arrangements which make group work difficult, if not impossible. Getting students to participate is a perennial problem. The course as a whole seemed mechanistic and designed to exclude anything emotive or provocative.

From my research on how Communication is perceived by students and employers (in 1999), I discovered that the Coms311 module is viewed as relatively insignificant by students, though it is compulsory, and critical to professional success in industry. In a sense, the curriculum has reinforced the stereotype of the Engineering student as inclined towards the scientific, concrete world of fact and experiment. It has done very little to challenge this stereotype. I have pondered over why students so quickly seem to assume that the Communication class is purely about meeting the demands of continuous assessment, or why they too allow the negation of all their
previous experience, the heritage of their schooling in language learning and literature, and the richness of their community and culture. Perhaps they have had no freedom to question. Did they hope at first that this class would be exciting and challenging, then have their expectations dashed? What did they hear about the module from others? What did they think of it by the end of the semester?

Given my immersion in the transformative philosophy of Academic Development at the University of Durban-Westville, and my commitment to development, I registered a deep sense of disappointment (and sometimes despair) every time I walked out of my air-conditioned office into a lecture theatre at Mantec. In a context where the need for developmental work with second language speakers and historically disadvantaged learners was even more critical than at other places I had taught, there was a disturbing complacency here. The dissonances I saw and felt led to a re-examination of my own schooling and my expectations as a teacher and administrator.

The curriculum experience at Mantec polarized and alienated our selves, our experiences, too much. My personal and professional history seeks to acknowledge dissonances but to cross them, to integrate language and literature, generic and discipline-specific discourse, writing and orality, as well as other alternate literacies which demand recognition in South Africa today. The Communication course in 1999 symbolised for me the unnatural divorce of left brain from right, science from art and the personal and “creative” from formal, academic and public expression. Teaching the module made me eager to infuse some colour into it, some conversation, some controversy. I began to think that a catalyst was required, hence my (eventual and considered) decision to introduce
performance via a specific dramatic text, namely, Athol Fugard’s *Master Harold and the Boys* (1983), as well as games and exercises from Boal’s *Games for actors and non-actors* (1992), into the curriculum. With respect to my questions surrounding OBE, rooted as it is in behaviourism, the argument for performance may appear contradictory. Performance is, inherently, outward gesture, action and movement. However, I envisaged infusing performance strategies within the learning activities planned for the module, over a period of time, in conjunction with reading a text that encouraged reflection (on learning, education and our apartheid past), keeping a journal (which encouraged self-reflection), and sustaining a conversation with students on a range of related issues (stereotyping, barriers to communication, current events, culture, identity and history). The culminating performance (Assessment 4) anticipated by the end of the semester was a planned one, and required the involvement of all members of a group in diverse, creative ways. There was no one norm or criterion to which all were expected to conform, although the overall outcomes for the assessment were clear.

**Specific Research Plan**

This study is essentially a way to gauge student reaction to the inclusion of performance and a literary text into their Communication course, specifically the Coms311 course in the Faculty of Engineering. I think this is where any possible exploration towards curricular change should start. Eliciting student opinion would give voice to the student body, as student opinion in an institution of higher learning is an important determinant of change, or should be. I expected, in conceptualizing the study, to gain some response to the following specific questions, relating to two themes...
discovered in *Master Harold and the Boys* and ranked as extremely important on the transformation agenda for education in the country:

- How would students perceive the use of literary material in this class? Would it be an irritating deviation? Something they would enjoy? A vehicle for developing communication? Would they prefer to engage only with text that is discipline-related?

- How would new experiences such as reading a literary text, participating in performance games and creating performance scenarios alter classroom interactional patterns, in terms of what we say and do, think and write?

- Would breaking the stereotypes surrounding the curriculum for engineers lead to conversation and reflection on how we learn? What implications would this have for the teaching-learning plans and programmes in the Department of Communication at the technikon?

These specific questions are deliberately located against the backdrop of educational transformation in South Africa, and are intended, as I argue in the Literature Review, to foreground the priorities of OBE as applicable to our context at Mangosuthu Technikon.

**Research Themes and the Agenda for Transformation**

This study identifies two crucial areas for educational transformation, which surface as strong themes in the text chosen for the study, and in the goals and outcomes anticipated for the classroom identified as the site for research:
How can we develop relationships through the recognition of different social and cultural contexts, both in and outside the classroom, with classmates and myself as facilitator, as well as friends, family and community?

How can we develop literacies, including the recognition of alternate and home literacies as modes of communication, with particular reference to performance techniques, the reading of *Master Harold and the Boys* and the use of artefacts?

Both these themes imply bringing the “outside” world and our social, emotional, political and personal lives, into the classroom. Like Freire’s (1970) generative themes, they were intended to raise critical awareness of our realities in society through dialogue and classroom interaction. They can be mapped alongside the questions raised above, though a period of fifty years spans the gap between the time in which Fugard’s drama is set, the fifties, and the Coms311 class at Mangosuthu Technikon in the year 2001. Both themes are priorities in the transformation agenda for education in South Africa today.

Since the unequal education system in South Africa was part of an unequal social system, which implies many other inequalities, the transformation of education is but one part of the broader social change required for equality in society. With reference to the first theme, the transformation of relationships in the classroom between student and teacher, and students themselves, is a pedagogic necessity. It would hopefully lead to the transformation of relationships outside the classroom. Literacy development, the second theme, is one way to do this, and in this conceptualization encompasses many literacies. Both these themes are explored specifically in Chapter Four, the Literature Review, and in this dissertation as a whole.
I have imagined this study, amongst other things, as tapping the relationships between the goals of OBE as a methodology, the three research questions and these two themes. What I hoped to discover during my research semester in the classroom, is how students would respond to a dramatic text, and in so doing, whether it would lead to a recognition and discovery of other, equally valid texts: the body, performance, film, artifacts, the visual arts and the media. There is support for this exploration not only in the recommended outcomes for Communication as a subject, but also in the outcomes for the development of arts and culture in schools. One OBE goal listed in the Green Paper from the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (1996), is the use of “the creative processes of arts and culture to develop and apply social and interactive skills” (p. 145). The creative processes referred to in the range statements for OBE outcomes include negotiation skills such as role-playing, improvisation and simulation, and an understanding of resistance cultures and their contribution to democracy in the country, as well as the “role of conventions, customs and cultural sensitivity in communication” (p. 157).

The kind of curriculum and teaching-learning exchange required to achieve the goals of OBE, and especially to engage social and cultural contexts in the development of Communication in English, is a socially constructed one which values social interaction and cultural interchange. Cornbleth (1990) refers to this as the hermeneutic-interpretive paradigm, which seeks knowledge and understanding in context, through interaction and communication; it involves humans, is subjective, provisional and value-laden. Various types of interaction among students and teacher generate the construction and
assimilation of ideas, relevant to the specific social and cultural situations of students, which constitute the educational process. Other resources such as texts and instructional material are only supplementary to this process, and are given meaning via interaction (recalling Vygotsky, 1978). Personal experience and understanding become the filter to new learning, leading to self-reflection. In Vygotskian terms (Wells, in Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), the classroom would be characterised as a collaborative community. It is conditioned and directed by purposeful activities which are situated and unique, which acknowledge diversity and originality, and which engage the student as a whole person. In a view which considers curriculum as a means, not an end, outcomes are “both aimed for and emergent” (pp. 60-61).

Freire’s (1973) critical pedagogy argues that education can help us conceive critically the themes of our times and within our communities, to discern the significance of change. This requires a curriculum which problematises real-life themes drawn from social life and which generates critical dialogue in the classroom. The development of critical consciousness (conscientization) and reflection, through language, requires that contexts of learning provide opportunities for active involvement. Shor (in Shor & Pari, 1999) describes Freire’s approach as “a practical pedagogy focused on writing, reading, and dialogue” (p. 21). Such an approach also assumes the democratic involvement of students in the teaching-learning exchange, particularly in contexts of sociocultural diversity, and ultimately fosters social and political responsibility.

The effects of rapid social change and totally diverse living conditions and lifestyles, reflect a need to engage difference itself more constructively. How can we
achieve this via the materials and methodologies we use in the classroom, our texts, the
design of the curriculum, assessment, classroom talk and interaction? These are political
issues, which during apartheid, were tools to achieve a larger political purpose. Post-
apartheid, they need urgent consideration. Even today, in curriculum development plans,
there is a trend to de-politicise education rather than open up debate on these issues.
Buckland (1982) accuses more conservative writers and historians of ignoring the fact that
curriculum is a product of social, economic, political and ideological history, and cannot
be depoliticised. He asserts that to view curriculum as process and not product means to
place it in a sociopolitical and historical context, to see it as evolving in response to social,
-economic, and political developments. Vygotsky along with Luria also argues that social
change influences thinking and the expression of those thoughts (Kutz & Roskelly,
1991). In a Communication curriculum, I argue, space for the expression of response to
change, in any literacy or genre which the student finds appropriate, should be
encouraged. OBE could thus be explored as a useful vehicle for curricular change which
responds to other change.

However, as I elaborate in Chapter Four, arguments that OBE will not succeed or
have the desired impact in South Africa are rife (Jansen, 1997). Already, Curriculum 2005
for schools has been modified and replaced by Curriculum 21, which is deemed more
achievable. Teachers apparently did not have the agency to effect its goals. There is
strong skepticism about the implementation, philosophy and methodology of OBE, as
well as confusion surrounding its definition, terminology, application, record of success
and status as a reform. Regardless, educators, policy-makers, academics and the Minister
of Education have all stressed that it is here to stay (Asmal, 2000). The misguided impression that it was scrapped, perpetuated by the press (Mulholland, 2000), has been dismissed, also by the press (Bisetty, 2000). Indeed, OBE has many supporters who are willing to go the extra mile to address problems in implementation (Holman, 2001; Rasool, 1997; Mkhatshwa, 1997). One group of teachers refers to the positive impact it has had on English teaching: ‘Efforts to replace an often “passive” English curriculum with a new “learning-by-doing” approach have resulted in more energized, thoughtful responses from our students’ (Rumboll et al, 2000, p. 19).

I argue that a considered practice of OBE as a methodology could contribute to transforming the Communication in English curriculum at Mantec. I believe that it does have value in this context. Ultimately, it requires that we make social, cultural and historical contexts meaningful by bringing them into the classroom, in a way which includes students rather than excludes. Our curriculum needs to discover pedagogic models which link home and school practices in learning, speaking, writing, reading and communicating. In order to transform the classroom of decontextualised knowledge, any new model should seek to create opportunities for students to make sense of their school experiences by connecting them with their personal experiences and prior learning.

My Research Plan

Achieving the Outcomes

Given the themes identified in Master Harold and the Boys (MHB) and the ways in which they may connect with my questions surrounding the use of material outside the
discipline, reflection on learning, as well as the recognition of different literacies and sociocultural contexts, I turn now to my specific research plan for the Communication Skills 1a group.

I anticipated the following specific outcomes of this study, as consequences of introducing a literary text and performance into the Communication class, in keeping with the goals of OBE and the themes discussed:

- That I would gain some insight into how students felt about staying within the discipline and crossing disciplinary boundaries in developing communication.
- That using role-play and reading and speaking in other voices would develop a different classroom ethos.
- That students would reflect on their own learning by reading and discussing a text which prompts an examination of education in past and present contexts.
- That involving students in showing and telling themselves would have positive effects on their confidence and ability to communicate.
- That the classroom patterns of discourse and interaction would be inclusive of different social and cultural contexts, rather than exclusionary.
- That the approach taken, using text and performance, would link home and school literacy practices, making the curriculum a more meaningful experience.

I took on the role of participant observer and teacher-researcher, facilitating classroom activity and integrating the data collection tools and activities into the coursework. Students were informed from our first day together about the research project (though one seemed to register this in his journal only at the end of the semester).
I wrote them a letter (see Chapter Two) explaining what we would be doing and why, and their freedom to participate or not. They were aware of being different from other Engineering groups and of doing things differently, the most obvious sign being the presence of the cameraman almost every week and the reading of MHB. Their comments in journals, in the class, on video and in their reflective responses attest to their positive reaction to this participation. It made them feel special, and it was a sign of my caring for them.

The following tools, in line with an ethnographic approach and social constructivist epistemology, were used for data collection: participant observation, questionnaires, interviews, and document/writing analysis. These were supplemented with micro-tools or classroom activities that were integrated into coursework: games from Bola (1992); the introduction of a literary text and performance techniques; concept cues; focus questions; modification of assessments; photographs and other artifacts. These tools offered multiple data sets and lenses through which to see students in the classroom and gain their insider's perspective. Attempts were made constantly to infuse the *modus operandi* of the class with group work, interaction, discussion and dialogue. In other words, sharing was important. Chapter Five elaborates on the research decisions and processes in this study.

I embarked on the (at times) perilous journey of this research project in my capacity as lecturer and Head of Department of Communication. My students would certainly have seen me as an authority figure but also, increasingly, as facilitator and
friend both in and out of class. Interaction and observation with my students as participants occurred in the classroom and outside it.

My own teaching voice dominates this documented version, particularly as I include extracts from my journal which is a representation of my story as I understand it.

As Smith (in McKenna, Stall & Reining, 1994) argues, we have conceptual paradigms, or ways of seeing the world, which may frequently conflict. They are subjectively adopted and emotionally retained...The research being done, the evidence gathered and the conclusions reached all depend on the researcher’s beliefs and expectations (p. 215).

I bring to this story the voices of my many selves. I speak most often as teacher-researcher on a personal journey, but also as administrator-head, academic-of sorts, research chair, learner, professional, friend, wife and woman. While other voices filter in and out, student voices are heard almost as strongly as mine throughout this dissertation, as they analyze, comment, critique and discuss their perceptions in their journals, reflective responses, assessments and classroom dialogue. Their presence is critical to this work and its interpretation.

Terminology

In this study I use terms which I will clarify. For instance, I refer to the classroom, class or lecture, meaning the group I teach at the technikon, at tertiary level (after twelve years of schooling). The venues themselves, the classrooms, are known as lecture theatres or rooms here, and we usually refer to them by number (L11, meaning L Block, room 11). I call myself a teacher as I write (and I am a teacher-facilitator), although we are known as lecturers (I prefer not to lecture!). Whereas we have previously referred to
Communication as a *subject* or *course* at the technikon, the language of OBE requires the use of the term *module*. I use all three terms here.

*Concept* cues, which are explained in Chapter Five, were simply new concepts we discovered in class which became cues for assessments and writing as we progressed. Also, *focus questions* were issues we raised for discussion relating to the unit of study, *our reading across disciplinary borders and the interests of this research project*. By *study guide* I mean a course pack which is printed and bound for students. These are prepared for most modules at the technikon, and include an outline of the module per semester or year, the assessments to be done, reading material and exercises.

**Conclusion: Scope of the Study**

As educational research, a study such as this draws (dauntingly) on multiple disciplines, fields, theories, methods and practices. History, ideology, communication, performance, drama in education, English as a second language, literature in language development, literacy development, language and cognition, social constructivism, ethnography, autobiography, narrative methodologies and other modes of qualitative research, all come to bear. To varying degrees, they underpin the research process and my involvement in it, as well as that of significant others. They also inform the writing of this dissertation.

The present form of this research, documentation, is but one representation of the processes which have sustained and directed its progress. Writing has been a central and critical activity throughout the project. Brainstorming, mapping, summarizing, theorizing,
expanding, emailing and proposing a possible research plan, led to regular activities such as journaling, making field notes, observing, transcribing, extrapolating, grading and analyzing during my semester with students. Reading has given rise to more writing, and writing to reading again, with different eyes. The process of documentation is continuous, revisionist and rewarding, as I see my thoughts and those of students materialize in a different form, for a different purpose and audience.

I have had to keep in mind the need to delimit and streamline.

Some factors presented conditions beyond my control. Time with students was restricted to one semester, the duration of the class, which dictates a tight schedule that is dominated by assessment. I also had to ensure that my group met the course requirements. We unfortunately lost a week at the beginning of the semester, while students were re-grouped and timetables finalized. However, this is a normal trend, and was incorporated into the overall plan determined by the course coordinator.

My research class needed a different venue, as the sloping lecture theatres do not permit group work and movement. Our first option proved too crowded, with fixed tables. The second worked well for us, though lighting was not very good for videotaping.

We had three cameramen, despite my request for someone from the technikon’s Audiovisual Centre who would remain with us for the semester. The third did most of the videotaping and editing, and communicated regularly with me. However, the level of professionalism in videotaping and producing the final copies was only just acceptable.

Students were magnificent in their adaptation to the different ethos and practice of our class. My only concern was their grappling with terms they had not encountered...
before, such as reflective responses, metacognition and classroom activities. Also, the return on the first questionnaire (Reflective Responses I) was relatively low. I discuss this in Chapter Three.

I sought permission to conduct research in the Electrical Engineering class at Mangosuthu Technikon, and was pleased to gain approval from the Head of Department of Electrical Engineering, and the Research Directorate. This study has been registered as a research project with the Technikon Research and Publications Committee since April 2001.

Lastly, I must record that despite the demands on my own time at the technikon, I have been given every consideration and support from colleagues and students. The writing of this work, which has consumed me completely, would not have been possible otherwise.
CHAPTER TWO

"THE CLASS OF 2001"

I was once captured by metafiction. This story is based on real-life events, but is only one of many possible readings and interpretations...

Connie: Bandla, in the journals I found comments from students and also their reflective responses, about the class being a place of freedom. What do you understand by that? Freedom from what, freedom to do what?

Bandla: That's freedom of expression. You laughed, you stand up and sit down...it was a great class, that's why I say "The class of 2001". If you are going to that class you wouldn't miss it for anything. You wouldn't say, I'm writing a test and I wouldn't come. It's where you were relaxed. So it was a good class.

In this chapter I narrate the story of "The class of 2001," as Bandla called it. The previous chapter has introduced the study and provided contextual background to our lives as South Africans, and as learners at Mangosuthu Technikon. I also offered a rationale for this research with a focus on the Communication curriculum, leading to my specific research questions and themes. In the next chapter, I take a more concise and organized approach to what I consider to be insights. Here I plunge into a descriptive analysis of what happened during Semester 2, 2001, making the walls of the classroom, and this research, transparent.

I include this account of our journey as a tribute to those who walked with me and as testament to what happened. It is also an attempt at further consolidation and triangulation of the data. The narrative methodology coheres, I believe, with the emic perspective sought in this study: it takes the reader inside our classroom. I use a narrative

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methodology, which allows me to paint in the rich detail of our curriculum experience, in
the process drawing three vignettes of students, although other cameos emerge as well. I
include extracts from my journal and students,’ and fold in data from the interviews, video
transcripts and field notes. Our reflective writing and thinking and our literacy histories
contribute significantly to who we were last year and who we are today. I also write
around visual images such as photographs and sections of a poster I made on the research
(which I presented at a conference in Cape Town, in February 2002). These constitute
artifacts, which are very much part of our overall appreciation and representation of
experience. The poster appears in black and white fragments throughout, complementing
the unfolding story of our class, collectively and as individuals. The personal tone of the
journal also makes it an appropriate alternative lens through which to share insights in
qualitative research.

Before the teaching term begins, I seem to be spending a great deal of time
conceptualising and reconceptualising how things will actually be done, how I
will collect data, that is, and what will really happen in the classroom. I have a
curiosity about it in a strange metafictive sense, observing myself as I observe
my students, an unknown entity right now. I wonder how someone else will
write about me if they could be a fly on the wall, whether they will see what I
see, hear what I hear and read words and body as I will. I feel like I am about
to enter a Spark novel, but wonder if that is just an old connection I am
rekindling rather than one which bears on these events in a real sense. (24/7)

From the moment I walked into the Electrical Engineering class in L11, the import
of what I was going to do struck me forcibly. It was going to be very different from all
other groups I had taught since 1998 at Mangosuthu Technikon. It almost felt like I had
been waiting to do this since then, that all along I knew something had to happen,
something would change, and now was the time. The class of around one hundred was
eager to begin the semester's work. A good sign. When I asked for my group to follow me to another venue, NW13, students scrambled for the doors and we were on our way down the corridor, out of the old, grey, L Block into the bright, new North Wing. (1/08)

Figure 1

Meeting the Electrical Engineering Group for Semester 2, 2001

The students pile into the new room and then fall silent when I stand in front, as though a conductor had waved his baton imperiously. I introduce myself. They smile back, but tentatively. I then check that they all have their study guides and share the same timetable. I begin to talk about THE PLAN (Figure 2) to integrate my research interests and goals into the curriculum this semester, but anticipate clarifying more about this
during the week. I hand out copies of a letter I wrote them, in which I include a module map, an outline of the semester’s work, and introduce my research.

Figure 2

The Plan

Dear Student

S2, August 2001

Welcome to the Coms311 class! Below is a course plan or module map for your Communication class this semester. Please remember that Communication is a prerequisite for your diploma and that attendance is compulsory.

COURSE PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNITS OF LEARNING</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Assessment 5: Journals</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
<td>Due 2 November</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Strategies: Literary and Other Texts</td>
<td>Assessment 1: Oral presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Research</td>
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<td>Literacies and Performance as an Alternate Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIT 3</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing and Reporting Styles: Newspapers</td>
<td>Due 12 October</td>
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<td>UNIT 4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Communication: Oral Meeting</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure/Formal Job Interviews</td>
<td>22-26 October</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
UNIT 5

Business Communication: Written CVs and Letter-Writing  
(Assessment 5: Journals)

This is a Continuous Assessment course, with 5 marks allocated for each assessment (20% each). The pass mark is 50%.

During this semester I invite you to participate in my PhD research project. We will be layering into the outlined curriculum a literary text and performance techniques, which will be used to develop language and communication and answer questions that I have about teaching and learning at Mangosuthu Technikon. You will be introduced to artefacts, texts, games, exercises, concept cues and focus questions. I will also be interviewing you on your thoughts about learning and your experiences in class. Should you feel uncomfortable with any of these activities, I will arrange for you to attend the other group. I have a second letter for you, detailing more of my plans and requesting your consent.

I look forward to engaging positively with you in class!

Ms CM Israel  
Room 108 North Wing

Students seemed to appreciate my summary of the semester’s work, and I took a few questions, which focused on assessment. I explained that my research may involve videotaping, moving to a different venue, and their participation in games and reading a text. They seem a little puzzled at first, but at the mention of videotaping, the ice broke. One student said he’d like to be famous and didn’t mind!

I also discussed the switch nationally to OBE: some had heard of it but did not see how it applied to studies at tertiary level. After a review of the letter, we talked about the oral topics students had discussed with the course co-ordinator. One student asked if it was compulsory to draw pictures and use them during the presentation. I thought Wow,
already, before we had even begun to talk alternate literacies, they were on the same wavelength. How did this happen? It was totally unsettling my notion that they would resist anything out of the set curriculum. Yes...I said...we would talk more about this tomorrow. I then asked: Would you like to draw something? Looking around to gauge support, he offered a reluctant, I'm-not-so-sure-what-this means Ye-es. (1/8)

The next day we talked about the oral presentation again. This time the student who had inquired about drawing said he really didn't want to do so. I asked why, pointing out that there were many ways to illustrate what one is saying. Later he clarified that he was very eager to explore these ways but was uncertain about how many illustrations we would require. Clearly the discussion has opened up on this. Only one student was reading a novel. When I asked, Do you think we should keep our discussions focussed on Electrical Engineering material and read only those texts in this class, they were adamant that we shouldn't. They would get enough exposure to this in all their other classes. Great... (2/8)

Journal writing was a first for students. They found the idea of the journal as an activity and form of assessment different and daunting. Only one student, Dumiso, had actually kept a diary and he explained to the others what he put in and why. I think I need to give them some time in class soon to practise. Despite the keen interest of the majority in the issues discussed, such as crossing disciplinary borders, one student observed that he did not like this Communication thing and wanted to just do Electrical Engineering...This was my introduction to Pallo, skeptic and critic. (2/8)
We reviewed the requirements for the journal again, discussing how it is different from a diary and a portfolio. The journal, I argued, could be a tool for learning and for self-reflective practice. I was keeping one myself. It was also a trace of our responses, reactions, thoughts and feelings about experiences in class and outside it. The group was intrigued, I could tell, but would need more convincing. The next day I decided to take in my UNH journals from 1996 and 1999 as examples. This proved to be a significant moment in our new relationship. Passing the journals around carefully, as though they would fall apart if they were touched, students laughed at pictures of me as a child, and marveled at the freedom and opportunity I had to study at this university which looked so different from Mantec. My journals were artefacts representing not only my experiences at UNH but also my life. I wanted to illustrate the use of artefacts as well as share something about myself with the class. Their reactions made me think about the resistances and the pleasures of writing about myself, as I was asking my students to do now. (15/8,16/8)

With our class numbers finally confirmed, I began to get to know my group of 31, in their second semester at Mangosuthu Technikon. There were fourteen females, making for a reasonable gender balance, and certainly indicating the growing representation of women in a male-dominated field. Communication is a first semester or Level One module. Thirteen students had completed a Pretech semester to allow them access into this level.

During the second week of term I circulated a questionnaire requesting biographical data confidentially from students, assuring them that it was not compulsory,
but intended to give me a clearer picture of the class. While some sections were incomplete, relevant information did emerge. Most students (25) were Zulu-speaking, and most (20) were between 18 and 21 years old. However, only seven had completed their matriculation (the last year at secondary or high school) in the year 2000. They came from many different parts of South Africa, with only five from Durban. Three students lived as far afield as Swaziland.

The class represented a range of secondary schools. I asked what symbols they had achieved for English and other languages in matric, fully aware that this would be no indicator of their communicative competence. Nine had C symbols (60-69%) for English (as a second language). Mathematics was both the most enjoyed and least liked subject, with Afrikaans disliked in the same measure.

Students had different reasons for choosing to enroll at Mangosuthu Technikon, but a common theme was the lower fee structure. The technikon also had a good reputation as an educational institution: it produced good technicians and engineers, and offered the academic programme they wanted.

*I wanted to save money since Mangosuthu Technikon is a school nearby. I don't have to spend money for the residences because I live at my home. And also I know that Mantec is a preferable Tech in the outside world since the result are good.*

*Some were influenced by family and role models, who proved that the quality of education was good:*

*It is the leading institution especially in Engineering and fees are better than in other institutions, and most of people who are well known to me got their diplomas at Mantec. Even my role model got it at Mantec.*

*Best quality education. Influenced by my mother and my homeboys.*
Mantec offered improved chances of obtaining employment, and in the word's of one student: it was not racial.

Students chose Electrical Engineering specifically because of the need for qualified engineers nationally and globally:

*Lack of qualified black Engineers in the country. Global change of Technology require people with the right skills to match it. Willingness to help in supplying our people with basic needs.*

*Everything that is going on in this world is about Engineering. And Engineering is a going on process since the beginning of the world...*

They also considered the Electrical Engineering programme to be marketable, and held the faculty and institution in high esteem. In fact, the department produced good engineers who could transfer theory into practice, and they had had positive experience in vacation jobs in the field. As a career, it would pay well and had good prospects for females as well:

*It has many job opportunities especially when you are a female, besides that I had love for Engineering while I was growing up.*

For some students, other options and choices had closed. They were late for registration and selected what was available:

*I did not intend to do Engineering but I chose it because I came late. Went for selections and succeeded. Had no way back and adopted the cause.*

*It was because of my subjects that I was doing at high school. It was my 2nd choice and my first choice (doctor) was unsuccessful due to financial problems. It is a challenging course. It is a course full of practicals.*

Others found the focus on technology in Engineering and the causes of things interesting.

Lastly, enrolling for the course was a long-awaited dream and goal.
Referring to our module map, we soon started preparation for the first assessment, the oral presentation, focusing on the characteristics of a good presentation, and linking this to Communication Models, Intercultural Communication and Barriers to Communication. Students were a little stumped by the requirement that they use some sort of visual aid. When I described the plan for our oral assessment, that it was not to be a formal, technical demonstration of a piece of equipment that they use as Electrical engineers, it was only Pallo who reacted negatively: *Oh, what is this, why do we have to...* Others looked surprised but keen when I said they would present themselves, not as typecast Engineering students but as people with lives and literacies outside the classroom. They could talk about one aspect of their lives in detail: an experience, their history or past, their family, an event, their hobbies and interests, their beliefs and customs etc. At this point, Pallo said, somewhat derisively: *Okay, I'll tell everyone how I got married and then divorced.* I responded that that was fine, if he wanted to, though I knew he was being sarcastic: it was just good to get some reaction and response. I asked students if they all knew one another. They did not. Hence I explained that this oral presentation was a chance for us all to do just that. Again, I brought in the idea of the journal, which also presented our selves, in a different form.

The next day we opened with discussion on the visual aid requirement for the oral presentation again. Pallo the sceptic brought it up: *Should the visual be hand-drawn or would something else do?* We brainstormed both terms: visual and something else, leading nicely into a discussion on the visual arts and artefacts. They again seemed flummoxed at the freedom they have in choosing the subject of their presentation and what artefacts
would illustrate and express their ideas further or in other ways. We brainstormed new concepts, cues for performance activities in class, which I was going to explore as a mechanism to filter out possible restrictive applications of OBE. Pretexts, literacies and home literacy practices: students had never come across these concepts before. I felt that our discussion seemed a bit disjointed and that they were struggling to make sense of new ideas and the approach being taken. I decided to shift my emphasis to activities which would be more concrete stimuli and give us more space to get to know one another, recognising that we are not anonymous students and strangers, despite our differences.

Surprisingly, Pallo jumped at the opportunity. (17/8)

Pallo is a thin, wiry young man, whose face is very expressive. I saw questions in his eyes many times during the early days of our acquaintance, and later, wreaths of smiles. During the first week that the class met, it was Pallo who talked boldly of the confusion among students as to which group they should attend. Another course, Computer Skills, had split them into three groups, which exacerbated the mayhem, along with the fact that Comm Skills sounds like Comp Skills. Pallo pointed out that many students had simply followed us to our room because they wanted to!

It was from the very beginning that Pallo made his voice heard.

*My name is Pallo, born in Gauteng 22 years ago, but moved to Bergville in Northern KZN when I was two years old. I attended primary school in Bergville and moved to Durban for my high school education. I attended Newlands East Secondary school where I passed my matric in 1996. After my matric I went to Johannesburg Technical College where I stayed till 2000. If there's any time in my life I feel I wasted, is my time at JTC. (1/8)*
Pallo took a particularly critical stance on barriers to communication such as stereotyping based on racial prejudice, cultural differences, religion and gender. He related everything to historical conditions in South Africa and the way we register difference.

Pallo: I remember when we read those newspaper clippings there was one that was talking about whites and blacks. There was a lot of generalising and we specifically based on stereotyping. We spoke about that... being Black does not necessarily mean this is what we do, being Indian does not necessarily mean this is what we do. I think we talked about religion and when we asked you what church you go to, I think you said Anglican church if I'm not mistaken.

Connie: Baptist.

Pallo: And to someone like me you always expect someone from an Indian community to be either Muslim or Hindu, something like that.
One of the first pieces of short writing that we did in class was on an experience we had all shared: death. Pallo volunteered to share first, telling us how he had lost his sister, who was twenty years old, quite recently, and I started to see a less flippant side to him.

I discovered that Pallo’s connectedness with his family was strong. He writes in his journal of looking forward to going home for the September break, and of how much he missed his parents and girlfriend. Pallo’s considered his father to be a Man of Magnitude (a question explored in *Master Harold and the Boys*), and he appropriately decided to do his oral presentation on the power station in the Drakensberg, where his father is employed. His preparation, spanning two weeks and including a visit to the station, was intense. A journal entry captures a developing literacy in someone already very literate and confident, showing a willingness to evaluate his own performance:

I did my presentation. I was so nervous and I couldn’t recognize my own voice. But I felt I did well. I felt that giving us freedom to do whatever suits our fancy was simply a knockout as we were talking about what we know...After watching all the presentations I feel mine just wasn’t personal enough... (29-31/8)

When Pallo reviewed the games we played in class in his interview, he connected them holistically and critically with other aspects of our experience and current events: group work, which was an integral way of interacting and learning for us, other assessments, and the opportunities we had for getting to know one another as people. His astute assessment of world events and institutional conditions at Mantec is also evident.

Connie: You know, we also played games in class, leading to the performance at the end. Is there any particular game or activity that struck you as most interesting?
Pallo: If I remember correctly, the game where we had to play certain parts without actually saying any words. That was interesting even though I didn’t actually go up to do it but I found that interesting.

Connie: That was powerful because it asks something different of students.

Pallo: We didn’t actually say any words but we just had to think, okay, that is playing certain parts... I found it interesting.

Connie: The Building Character Relations Game... Getting up and doing something, getting into groups, did it change how you got on with other people?

Pallo: Yes, a lot, coz I remember for one group we were preparing for an interview. I almost chased one of the members of my group and afterwards became close friends but in the beginning we were really fighting a lot.

Connie: What were you fighting about?

Pallo: She wasn’t pulling her weight.

Connie: Because you did make those comments about people on the group and responsibilities...

Pallo: She wasn’t pulling her weight. Same with the report, but it was guys only, so we just spoke about it and we all pulled our weight.

Connie: But when you discussed those kinds of issues, did it change how you felt and participated?

Pallo: Not really, coz I felt I had to pull my weight as much as I can then the group would not sink.

Connie: You took more of a leadership role?

Pallo: Ya, I actually brought them up when we did the report and the interviews as well...

Connie (later): And how did you feel about the whole experience of the class when you look back at it now? You’ve had other experiences of being in classes at Mangosuthu Technikon. What do remember about it? What do you think about it now - on reflection?

Pallo: Now I think it’s the one class I really had fun in, maybe it’s the fact that it didn’t have anything to do with Engineering or Mathematics. And I think you are the only lecturer so far... maybe because our group was not a large group... I think you almost know all of us on a first name basis. You took your time to get to know us and most of my group members, I know most of them. All that I’ve learnt about them I’ve learnt from our Communication class, you know just going to class here, the only people you get to know is the people that you are close to.

Connie: So in a sense the system of the technikon prevents one from getting to know other people, from getting to know the differences between them socially and culturally...

Pallo: It’s difficult. Mmm... maybe it’s the scope of work that doesn’t allow that but it’s difficult to get to know a person as a person and not a person as a student.
Connie: Any other comments?
Pallo: I think of what we have done in class...issues we discussed...the World Conference against Racism, September 11th. I'm disappointed that the world might actually be headed to something like that, in this case with the USA and Iraq. I thought maybe the world would have better ways of solving such things other than war. And of course I'm disappointed with the World Cup Cricket...

Our discussion about cricket went on for another twenty minutes.

One day I walked into class to find Pallo teaching, quite animatedly. Everyone looked at me, grinning. Of course he had struck up the pose after he saw me approaching the building. You couldn't keep the mischief-maker and performer in Pallo down. And for someone who professed not to like reading, he sure read a lot in class!

Connie: One of the issues that I'm really interested in is...you know we read Master Harold and the Boys...how did you feel about that, reading in your Communication class?
Pallo: It was something different from what was done by the other groups and was interesting. Some of the people in class did that at school and I hadn't and I found it very interesting.
Connie: Well, you are saying that you found it interesting, but why do you think we chose to read it?
Pallo: Maybe to improve literature coz not everyone reads, so by doing that everyone got a chance to read as were taking turns, and also it somehow reflects on what the country was before the 1994 Elections.
Connie: You found it interesting?
Pallo: Yes, I found it interesting.
Connie: But I know from what you said in your journal and I don't remember everybody's as clearly as yours, you said you hated to read...I felt in class that you were enjoying reading.
Pallo: The thing is some of the things we were doing in class like the interviews, we were actually doing that part, but the text work, I really didn't enjoy much of it...reading, sometimes I read novels, I'm okay with that but not all the time. In class I like to get through classes as quick as I can. Go out and see the next thing around the corner.
Connie: So you are talking about reading in general and not specifically Master Harold and the Boys...
Pallo: Yes, reading in general.
Throughout the semester, Pallo made a consistent contribution to classroom debate. As one of its chief protagonists, he actively sustained the ebb and flow of its ongoing conversation. One student, Nomsa, writes about him in her journal:

_In my class there is a guy who shouts most of the times and he's always paying attention...he's a good, intelligent boy, even though he doesn't like to be called "boy," but "the man."

_Though initially resistant to the class (even before I spoke of research and videotaping), Pallo confessed by the end that it was the most interesting for him.

_Last day in the comms class, I somehow have a bitter-sweet feeling - happy because we've finished, sad because I enjoyed the class...Confession: At first I loathed communication but Miss Israel made it so enjoyable it ended up being my favourite.

To generate ideas on writing in our journals, we used a newspaper article on a sculpture by Hilton Gasa. Gasa's statue is described by the writer, Clarke (2001), as "a towering symbolic edifice of granite in which five skulls, a skeletal hand, and an open book, where Durban's struggle heroes have been recorded, remind people that though people's skin colours may be different, they are all made of the same material bonds. The statue is entitled _Mathambo Hlangeni (bones unite)_" (p. 9). I could see that students found this introduction of "other" texts unusual, especially when we started to read _Master Harold and the Boys_ (MHB). It was almost as if they had to suspend their perplexity in order to allow themselves some pleasure in engaging with it.
One day the class concluded with Boal’s game What am I? What do I want? As the Joker, I didn’t intend to read out all the responses but they enjoyed this so much - lots of laughter and guessing going on about who’s response was being read - that I continued. There’s definitely a positive sense of sharing developing in the class, of bringing personal identity in, and of self-discovery. (27/8)

Who am I? I am a student, first child at home, a netball player.
What do I want? Money to buy a book. I want to get married. I want to be treated very nice.
Who am I? I am a student, a SA citizen, a Christian.
What do I want? To get a diploma, to help AIDS victims, to meet my Saviour.

Who am I? I am a nice and cool lady, a confident student. I'm a 'kwaito lover' for life.
What do I want? I want to be nice and cool till I grew up. I want a better future.

Tolakele, referring here to the hugely popular township music which blends rap and hip-hop, was not the only kwaito lover in class. More so than others, she seemed to grasp the idea of the journal as a personal record very quickly and filled it with photographs of herself and her family.

Figure 5
A Photograph from Tolakele’s Journal
Tola is the proverbial earth mother. When she talks, everyone listens. She is also a natural raconteur. This became obvious at her oral presentation, when she spoke on a rather unusual topic: *What bothers me most...the first of everything*. She found that the first time she did something always ended up being embarrassing in some way. Tola had everyone in stitches, describing how she took a taxi for the first time to the Workshop, a shopping mall in Durban, and did not know how to say where she wanted to go. This can have disastrous consequences!

Her journal begins:

*Are you interested to know about this classroom? READ THIS JOURNAL TO FIND OUT MORE...*This is the first day we meet to start our lecture. We walked quietly and peacefully to this beautiful venue under resource center. It was quite intresting. She (Miss Israel) told us how we are going to do things for the whole semester. About assessments. She seemed to be quite nice and wonderfull. Happiness!!! Excitement!!! Joy!! Laughter!!! (1/8)

Tola grew up in Richard’s Bay, a port town on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. Perhaps this explains her love of swimming. She includes in her journal a picture of herself as a baby, but it bothers her that she looks older than one in it. I like this photograph. Despite the mandatory white dress, bobbie socks and shoes, there is a hint of the Tola I know. Her huge eyes fixed on the camera, she is clutching a little brown book in one hand, and scratching her ear with the other, while a rattle lies abandoned on the couch. The innocence of childhood etches the picture.

Tola’s life is not easy. The past haunts her. She cannot forget it.

*Death is like a thief.*

*I remember when it stole 5 members of my family. I couldn’t believe it!* 

*When both of my grandparents died as well as my three brothers.*

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I wished I also died. I cried till my eyes were deepen to their sockets. 
It was a strange funeral in my life when we buried all of them. (3/8)

In her copious journal entries, Tola expressed concern that we were reading a text (MHB) in class that a few students had read already, a text which ironically focused too much on the past. She was not alone in this. She also felt that we could have done more with it, given our interest in performance.

Tola: I think, like, we should have done something, maybe we should have take parts that was played, play it in the whole: it would have been more interesting.
Connie: You know, when we talked at the end and during the course of the semester about those three questions: should we remember the past even if it is painful? Some people felt that Master Harold was making us remember the past, and they felt it was opening up old wounds. It was not nice. How did you feel?
Tola: Well, I felt it was somewhat true. Like...past is gone, you should forget about the past, you can never change the past but you can always change the future. We should concentrate more on our future.
Connie: So do you think it is not a good idea for us in a class like this, Communication, to remember the trauma of the past?
Tola: Not so much bad, but for the Communication class... I think it should have been something else, not exactly, like it should have been a history class or something else. But it was great.

In class Tola was never afraid to be different, but was also never disrespectful of difference in others. What I found intriguing was that her mostly restrained public personae contrasted somewhat with the person I encountered in her journal. Here, there was an exuberance and self-confidence she couldn’t suppress. Her controlled conversation was transformed into positive assertion, affirming eloquently her identity. When she was appropriately cast as mother of the student who is called for an interview in the final performance, she played the part with aplomb, showing her unusual, deep maturity while allowing her playfulness free reign (I include the script in Chapter Three). She definitely
enjoyed the infusion of performance into the curriculum throughout the semester. I felt that the performance activities evoked that side of her.

Today we are talking about articles in the newspapers. The one that really touches me is that of creams to be light. It says "Light creams are dangerous". I always wonder why people should wonder if they are dark. They think if you are dark of course you are ugly. It's an old boring fashion. People should be proud of what they are. I am dark and I know I am beautiful, lovely too. No-one can tell me that she is beautiful than me because she is light, No! I always thank God for making me dark: the colour of coal because that is where the diamonds are found... (12/10)

Figure 6

Tolakele in Her Role as Mother in Her Group's Performance Piece
I am going through various resources again as a way to organise my thinking on theory through the practical experience of researching in class and teaching. Waghid's (2000) position on Engineering Education and his argument for an eclectic approach which enacts OBE, resonate with my own views on the curriculum experience of Engineering students at Mantec. Of course he is not referring specifically to Communication in English, but surely this course, which is intended to prepare the student for the workplace, can open up even more possibilities for the development of critical thinking, reflection and active learning, contextualised within real life scenarios. I had various moments of affirmation reading Waghid: the everyday speak on learning in the new South Africa of academic development types like myself permeates the article. On a practical level, I took from it, on rereading, an intention to facilitate more group work and collaborative activity in class. I particularly liked the description of the critical educational framework as emancipatory: “...its purpose is to contribute to change in people’s understanding of themselves and their practices and thus free them from the constraints of society” (2000: 262). I intend to pass this article on the other academics in the Faculty of Engineering and of course, in my own department. (27/8)

Today we read MHB again, with students commenting on the performance of the play as another literacy. So, we were getting somewhere. Focus Question 3, on how the characters present themselves, generated a lot of discussion. Sam was a better dancer than Willie and intelligent. He knew about how blacks were treated in prison (how did he know that?). Willie was worried about the dance competition and did not understand that he should not hit Hilda. Hally was a white boy who was “nice,” and who went to school.
The text revealed some stereotyping: there were teachers like Mr. Prentice, cast in an authoritarian mould, who many in the class agreed they had encountered, even at Mantec. Other observations focused on the fact that the young white boy should be addressed as Master, evoking the way we lived under apartheid, and again, that the black man should know about jail. Bandla, an older Swazi student who was sent to Mantec by his company, commented wisely that such observations also depended on who read the play. The discussion centred around the stereotyping that would occur if the variables changed: for example, if the class was all-white, if it was scheduled twenty years ago, or if the teacher was female. I concluded by showing how the text can be used as a lens through which to see and hear other aspects we have been exploring such as cultural differences. (28/8)

Figure 7

Bandla (with the hat) and His Group: Nhleko, Bule, Dudu and Dumiso

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The oral presentations at the end of August signified a turning point in the class. The first ten students were refreshing, given my experiences here. Students often choose the same item from their Engineering Lab to demonstrate and so presentations can be repetitive. Last semester I suggested they demonstrate any piece of electrical equipment, from outside the context of the lab, which helped. Today’s presentations, when they essentially had to demonstrate themselves, or something about themselves, showed them to be creative, resourceful and capable of applying themselves to a different task.

One student, Nomsa, did a wonderful presentation on plants but missed the point about demonstrating herself completely. Another, Dudu, started somewhat disjointedly on “The more the merrier,” but showed she was using proverbs as a framework to describe her family and its history. They were building blocks in her plan for life. She concluded with Nothing venture, nothing have/gain. Gcina spoke movingly of the woman who had brought her up, her Gogo, or grandmother. She was very fluent in her tribute to her grandmother. When, like Dudu, she described difficult, painful times in her life, I thought of how the classroom could/should be a space for not just sharing but confronting the past, our emotions, our selves. Confronting concepts such as stereotypes and literacies in class will hopefully give us all a keener sense of how meanings and perceptions change all the time, depending on context and how we see. So far the concepts have not been deemed “unpopular” (Britzman’s term, 1999), but strange, new and unfamiliar. We will certainly encounter different reactions, I think, when we begin to locate ourselves more critically within the world of Master Harold and the Boys. (27/8)
Bheki impressed us all with his self-confidence and star performances at school and in sport. He demonstrated how he would conduct a choir and sang the Hallelujah chorus, to everyone's delight. At the end he quoted scripture, thanking God for everything. Thabani, steeped in the practices of his church, preached a sermon entitled "Jesus Lover of My Soul," showing how Jesus had changed his life. He made effective metaphoric use of the body, gesture and drawing to illustrate a man (sin and evil) stopping a train (the world) in its tracks. This evoked many reverent Amens, despite his lack of eye contact.

Figure 8

Bheki (extreme right) and His Group: Justina, Mr. Phoza, Winston and Wonderboy
From this point, especially when Bheki starts, the students are almost raucous (we’ve moved from formal to informal but are they too rowdy now? Are they showing enough respect for the speaker? What about audience/listener responsibility?). They seem to find Bheki’s Swazi confidence and swagger quite amusing, but he stuns them with his prowess as a conductor and singer. Then the atmosphere and response changes dramatically with Thabani, his preacher’s voice as appealing and supplicating as if he is in a church pulpit. There are lots of quiet, reflective chorus responses, mmmms in agreement with his sermonising. In the darkened room, arms outstretched like Jesus on the cross, he looks quite magnificent.

Video Session 5 (6)

We started with summary writing, the second assessment, early in September, referring closely to the notes. We had to apply ourselves to interpreting graphical representations (bar charts, pie diagrams, graphs etc.), and I felt that students were a little tired. After the tour de force of their oral presentations last week, who could blame them. Maybe it was me: I resist reliance on text which prescribes too much, and I had already tasted the rewards and surprises of something different. When we started with a practice exercise, though, things perked up a little.

I put up a quotation by Thabo Mbeki (Leviev-Sawyer, 2001: 1) from his opening address at the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR):

We meet here because we are determined to ensure that nobody anywhere should be subjected to the insults and offence of being despised by another or others because of his or her race, colour, nationality, or origin.

The WCAR was dismissed by Pallo and Sandile as a waste of time and money and as stating the obvious, whereas others felt that it was useful because it made a statement about existing issues, for the world to see and address. Gcina told how she and some friends had walked into an anti-racism march in West Street, Durban. It was the first time something like that had happened to her and it had made her aware of the conference. She

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felt that something had to be done to counter the view that all South Africans were racist, because of the past.

Reviewing Summary Writing, our discussion turned to what we referred to as border-crossing: students were interested and curious about having a task now that required them to be factual, scientific and sparse in their use of words. As preparation for their assessment, they were put into groups of six and asked to read newspaper clippings. They had to identify the main points, discuss them to gain consensus and understanding, then write them down. Bheki’s journal entry on the WCAR (Figure 9) also comments on the article he summarized about the horrors of life in a concentration camp for a non-Serbian woman. (6/8)

The next day we looked at the different efforts students had made at summarising one of the articles used in group work, on the formation of an Anti-Racism Movement. Mrs. Nolte, a white housewife in Northern Province, was invited to the WCAR to talk about her fight against the brutality of racism. She recounted two incidents which moved her to act: a white farmer setting his dogs on a black boy who went to collect his wages, and a rugby team which allegedly hunted down a black boy for sport. Mrs. Nolte’s sticker, signalling her non-discriminatory stand, read Right of Admission Reserved. This triggered a painful reminder for me of a time when I was teaching in UDW’s Department of English, a new and nervous English Honours graduate. One day I ventured for the very first time to a mall on the beachfront, only to find myself thrown out by the proprietor, who argued that I didn’t look like I was going to buy anything in her store. She pointed to the Right of Admission Reserved sign in small letters on the door. I was aghast and later
Figure 9

A Page from Bheki's Journal

28°C

Very hot

The day was beautiful with clear sky. The lecture was
interesting as usual. In the lecture we discussed about the
World Racism Conference which had been held in Durban
at ICC a week before this one. One of my classmates es-
criticised the South African government for spending too much
money on what he called "useless" meeting. For hosting
the World Racism Conference, South Africa had to spend a
lot of money instead of giving that money to the needy.

The government hosted a conference which in actual fact
wouldn't help more of its citizens, because other people
hadn't paradigm shifted as far as apartheid was concerned.

That was a very hot topic to debate on. Mrs. Israel told us
about the way she was discriminated in one of the shops in
Durban. We were then urged to summarise the following
extract taken from the news paper. This

was one of the most painful experiences. She was guilty of being a "non-Serbian
Muslim intellectual", she said. For this she was locked up at Omarska for
two months by the Serbians. Omarska concentration camp.

"The nights were the worst for the Muslim women prisoners being held at
Omarska", said her colleagues. She was held in Omarska concentration camp.

First they would have to clean up the blood on the floor - left from the torture sessions of
the fellow male prisoners. Their living conditions were too terrible. We
And then the guards would come in and start at every quarter of an hour counting the dead.

The guards were sadists, "they might leave us alive", who were Serbian - used to visit and treat her
because there were others younger than her. By the time she had never seen her before.

But she didn't, I can never forget that." Eventually she was released, "wearing the
same dress in which I had been arrested" but

Under the garms she wore the handmade dress of her Serbian colleague, who told her hardy.

Her only wish was to be free and she lived in Srebrenica as a refugee for four years. There she
back "there until she described the "night-time" started a women's support organisation before

TANIA BROUGHTON

"Her only wish was to be free and she lived in Srebrenica as a refugee for four years. There she
back "there until she described the "night-time" started a women's support organisation before

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very upset in a way I found difficult to articulate. I insisted she go ahead and call security
to remove me, as she had threatened, and that she amend her sign to read *No Indians,
Blacks and Coloureds Allowed.* That would have been clearer. I liked Mrs. Nolte’s
subversion of the old apartheid use of the sign.

The class wanted to talk about this and similar issues in more detail, and I had to
draw them back to the skills of summarising. In the middle of our discussion I was
distracted by Gcina, who was holding something up and pointing to it. It turned out to be
her copy of MHB, and her question, which she was mouthing cheekily, was *When can we
read again?* I could only smile: it felt like things were starting to come together: the
discussions on racism, sociopolitical issues, students’ lives, our reading, being who we are
and where we are...(7/9)

One of Boal’s exercises suggests the reading of newspaper articles to evoke
history, thereby bringing the past into the present, and inviting critical examination of
how it shapes us. To support our developing *contextualised* classroom ethos, and in
tandem with our reading of MHB, we talked one day about National Youth Day, better
known as June 16th, which commemorated the 1976 Soweto March. A peaceful march
protesting the imposition of Afrikaans in schools and other inequities, ended tragically as
police opened fire on innocent students. This year, twenty-five years later, another march
remembered the heroes and heroines of the past, like Gasa’s sculpture. I used a
photograph from a newspaper article on National Youth Day (2001, p. 21) to capture
the history of struggle in the country (Figure 10).
Figure 10

Soweto 1976

interrupted 1976 march continues

DAT OF INKANTI: Twenty five years ago scenes such as these erupted throughout the townships of South Africa as the youth fought against injustice.
Increasing awareness of current issues across the world led to reflection in the journals. Wonderboy's journal includes a poem on democracy, showing his concerns about the way national sociopolitical change impacts on individual lives.

**What is democracy?**

Democracy will not come today, this year,
Not ever
Through compromise and fear.
I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my own two feet
And own the land
I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course
Tomorrow is another day.
I don't need my freedom when I'm dead
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.
Freedom is the strong seed
Planted
In a need
I live here too,
I want freedom,
Just as you

My class looked different the day after September 11. I had watched the tragedy unfold on CNN, and wondered if anyone would bring it up, or whether I should. I wanted to observe a moment's silence.

There was a new student in the group; apparently he was from another class and just wanted to attend. Everyone was amenable to that.

We did talk about America. There were some opposing views on what happened... (12/9).
Nhleko: Big news around the world everyone is talking about it. The attack in America. This is the big disaster that happened in America. Thousands of people died. Everyone is shocked about it. Around the school, in the taxis, in TVs and radios everyone is talking about it. Mr. M gave us the photos from the computer in the Yahoo news that showed us how the Pentagon and World trade centre were damaged. This type of attack left many questions in people’s mind, like who did the attack? And why? Why they choose to destroy the Pentagon and World trade centre. These are types of questions that we are asking ourselves in the class.

Bheki: Mrs. Israel wanted us to comment on the American issue but I didn’t utter a word because I would burst into tears. The following was my prayer for them:

Heavenly Father, I pray for the souls
That have died in America.
If in any way they have wronged you,
Please Lord forgive their trespasses and heal their land. Amen.

Pallo’s comments jarred with most, though he expressed deep sympathy for the loss of lives. He felt that the US had it coming: they had not helped by resolving the Middle East crisis, and their relations with Israel, whose military was killing Palestinians daily, provoked this act of terrorism. I asked if the attack evoked any thought of the Racism Conference at all. Dudu said it did, but Bandla felt it was not about racism. Pallo argued that the US position and support of Israel did have an effect and so did the Middle East crisis.

Looking confused, Mbali asked what was the problem in the Middle East. Pallo explained with authority that Israel had taken some land from Palestine and there was a battle to get it back. He asserted again that slavery in Sierra Leone and other places had cost us millions of lives and that while today’s tragedy was bad, we should not exaggerate it. For a moment no-one said anything. Some half laughed, shocked at this view.
Mbali even gestured dismissively at Pallo. She asked if this was war, then.

Figure 11

A Journal Entry from Pallo

11 September 2001
What a shock, World Trade Centre
and the Pentagon got bombed.
at around 16 00 hours this afternoon.

12 September 2001
Less than 24 hours later the
Americans already have suspects
and are threatening war, how
typical? America has it a
long time coming they almost
boycotted the World Conference
against racism because they
couldn’t have it their way. They
are such bullies.

One day I had a meeting at the BAT Centre off campus, and relying on a
colleague’s transport, got back fifteen minutes late for my class. The message that I could
not be in class early was not delivered in good time. The wrought iron gates were ajar, and
Msane, our cameraman, was rolling up his equipment. A few students were there,
working on their reports. Some had left, but had been captured on videotape. After my
apology, Msane urged me to have a look at the snippet quickly. It was amazing. The class
was singing, raising their voices to the heavens, in beautiful unison. I had no idea of how
this happened or what it signified until I read Thabani’s journal:
Ms Israel told us to meet in our meeting room by 12.30 pm. As students we went there, but she was not there. I went to her office to look for her but she was not there...We waited for a few minutes but since others were to visit their homes for holidays they departed. We left with few and Nkosi and his chain started to sing...They asked me to join them, I did and I also asked other brothers to join us. I started the song [Jerusalem the City] and the whole class joined us. I started another one and another and we all stood up and went out by the spirit of that song. Although others they were bored because it ended up with no Miss Israel, but since we were singing, our hearts were comforted.

(29/09)

Master Harold and the Boys

Reading Master Harold and the Boys in class was a central focus of classroom activity. Some students had read ahead. One day I asked for new reader-actors to come out front to read and for others to some forward, closer to the front of the room. While this was happening, Sandile, moving right to the front, asked: Miss, I just wanted to know, why are we reading this book? I observed that that was a very good question and drew everyone’s attention to it. Sandile was quick to specify: he was wondering why we were reading this book, Master Harold. I assured him that I understood his question but wanted some opinion on why we were reading a literary text at all first. No other group was doing this as part of their course-work. (11/10)

Pallo felt it was because reading was good and we learned through it. Gcina thought that we developed our language; Bheki, that it made us think. I felt that these were good responses as this was indeed a Communication class, in which we ought to read. We had done too little reading thus far, over the years. I then raised Sandile’s question again: Why MHB? He picked it up and asked, Why not another book, then
answered his own question. His voice, sad and serious, shaped a critical moment for me as a researcher:

_Miss, if only the ending wasn’t so bad...it makes us think about bad things, which happened already...and so it’s hard to think about these things._

Figure 12

_Master Harold and the Boys_

"MASTER HAROLD" ...and the boys

Athol Fugard

I asked if he would have liked a happy ending. He smiled and nodded.

I said, _So you don’t want to think about or remember those days of apartheid?_ 

_Why?_
Everyone was very still and attentive now, some nodding and agreeing as Sandile spoke: *It makes us remember how we were treated...when Hally spits at Sam, it's not nice, we want to forget those times, it's painful.*

Feeling alert inside, I commented on how interesting and thought provoking this comment was, and that it was true that we could have read another text in class. I wanted students to talk more, so I asked more questions: *Was it a bad thing to remember bad times? Should we forget? What value is there in remembering?*

There was silence for a few moments as the class, and it seemed especially Sandile, mulled this over.

Deciding it was wiser to leave these questions with them, I suggested they think about them and maybe journal their thoughts. Then, indicating that MHB was a deliberate choice, I asked what they thought would have motivated me. Dumiso said it was because it was written by a South African. I asked for examples of other texts we might read, and Mbali said *Shakespeare*, eliciting laughter. Pallo was quick to point out that Shakespeare was too difficult and not connected with our lives, whereas MHB was about South Africans, and we could identify with them. Bandla, who was unusually quiet up till then, argued that MHB... *shows diversity, how we are different, as people and also what we do...* He was referring to the contrasts in life experiences and living conditions between the blacks and whites in the text. I extended this to show that MHB also allows us to map some differences between how things were, socially, politically and educationally, in the days of apartheid and now under democracy. Drawing on critical literacy theory, I asked students to consider the choices made by Fugard in the text, about what to include,
what characters to shape, with what cultural backgrounds, sharing what similarities and differences. These choices informed us on the issues we have constantly talked about in class: who we are and how we learn; also, how our histories and culture shape us and find expression in all facets of our lives, including our decisions and actions. I had introduced these issues deliberately from the beginning.

Sandile’s journal entry summarises his thoughts at this stage in our reading:

Hey man, that book is not fit to be read at this time. I mean the discrimination there left me wondering why our lecturer chose that book out of all others... Really after I finished it; it gave me some thought on how we were treated in our country. I mean that fairness joke is the rudest joke on the planet. I wonder why we were treated like outsiders in our ancestral country. The less I thought or write about that book the better... I raised my concern about why our lecturer chose Master Harold and the boys out of all other books. She explained to me that it was because that book is associated with our past and because of its grammar. She even went on and said it is sometimes right to know your past. (4/10)

Sandile is tall and reserved. He struck me as enigmatic, a quiet activist. I could almost picture him in a ragged black beret. For the first few weeks in class I had to prompt him to speak. Then, when he presented on himself as an “Unworshipped Hero” in the third person, I realized that he had much to say, and was never going to lose his cool saying it.

Hello, welcome to the journal of Sandile. Firstly let me introduce myself to you.

I am Sandile, the first son of M. and Mrs LB Ntaka. I was born and bred in Ixopo (Natal Midlands). I start my schooling at Webbstown Primary at Ixopo and graduate to Marienthal High where I matriculated in year 2000... (20/8)

This is the skeletal structure of my presentation. It is about someone who strive through hardship and become victorious at the end... Today we were presenting and I think I didn’t do that bad. But anyway I will hear from my lecturer on how I perform.
To put you online, we were asked to choose any topic which will show ourselves. As someone who like to motivate others I choose a topic which will motivate other students and give them courage to excel in their studies. That’ s why I choosed an unworshipped hero and anyone who will finish his/her diploma of course will be a hero...(29, 30/8)

Sandile was always conscious of the dynamics and participation in the class, and in his journal analyzes why students were non-responsive on occasion, and whether they took their responsibilities in terms of learning and meeting course requirements seriously.

He observes:

I think the class is starting to get together well now. I mean the spirit of togetherness is electrifying when we read Master Harold and the Boys. They are committed and read well compared to our start. We were promised to watch our presentation cassette and we are just waiting for that long-awaited date. (18/10)

Thinking of the class, he made a critical observation in his interview, showing sensitivity to gender equality and understanding, against the traditional norms of Zulu culture:

Connie: When you think back on the class, do you think that it changed your understanding of yourself, did it have an impact on you?
Sandile: Yes, of course it has, where I am coming from, how we are living, the men, they speak... The women who are told in the inception to talk and are not afraid to say how they feel about something. I think in the class we were given a chance to hear what the females have to say and that they know what’s going around. I think it changed my mind.

His journal writing and participation in class chart a progression from analysis, reflection, introspection and critique, to voice and action, as I show later. Like Pallo, he found the Building Character Relations Game stimulating.

Connie: We also played various games and performance activities. Which did you like best?
Sandile: I think that one when a person comes and mimes and you have to guess what they are saying.
Connie: Building Character Relations.
Sandile: I think that was good.
Connie: Why that one?
Sandile: I think it is good. It gets us to focus and stretch your mind just to be able... and you can try and relate what is happening, try and guess what he is trying to do.
Connie: Playing these games in class, did they change how you related with other people?
Sandile: Yes, because when we are playing those games as a team. When you play as a team you get to know each other well, you get to know how others think, and critic it as well. It did help.

Figure 13

Sandile as the Candidate being Interviewed in His Group's Performance Piece
With Boal’s game in the background, I raised questions surrounding alternate literacies and the use of the body, relating them to MHB: What did we identify as performance, as communication? What did we identify with in this text? Someone mentioned ballroom dancing, hesitantly, but Pallo retorted that they were more into kwaito and other things nowadays. I agreed, commenting on how this text was nonetheless an eye-opener, not least because it showed that it was not only whites who had recreational interests such as ballroom dancing. In fact, this was a favourite pastime amongst many blacks, despite Hally’s narrow perception that it was lightweight and silly.

Sensing a debate in the air, a few students argued that they did do ballroom, and loved watching the dancers in their stylish costumes. I referred to an article on Giselle again (Figure 14), from the arts and entertainment section of a daily newspaper (Hathway, 2001), and our conversation focused on how the picture of a white and black partnership represented changing times. We were no longer in the 1950s, the world of Sam, Willie and Hally.

Then, seizing the opportunity to link things up, I asked students if they had seen the photograph from another local production: a bench, with a “Slegs Blanke” (only whites) sign posted on it (Daily News Tonight, 2001). What was its significance with respect to MHB? Sandile and those who had read ahead nodded knowingly: Sam could not sit on a “Whites only” bench (Figure 15). The bench symbolised his disillusionment. How many of us were still sitting on that bench or a similar one, I asked? (11/10)
of girls who they were sworn to men | by force, exhaust them in a
This is only to save death. Uh, | on her; shield her down but then
bro back into

WINNERS: Ntintili won the | section in the
Ballroom and LS | Championships held this month

White's Only Bench

by choice of Master Harold and the boys as a dramatic text exists today. Weinman in 1985, | £choa

Figure 15

The St. George's Park Tea Room as a wet and windy | Port Elizabeth afternoon.

Table and chair have been cleaned and are tidy. She | 1965,

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Towards the end of October we completed our classroom reading of MHB, with great interest and lots of audience participation - mainly expressions of anger at Hally and sympathy for Sam. We recoiled when Hally starts to refer to himself as Master Harold, asserting twice over his so-called superiority. Pallo and Gcina read these roles, both attempting to intonate and project the mood and feeling, though Gcina struggled more. I was impressed with this effort. After a while we needed someone to read Willie’s role. Sandile volunteered and had the right voice for it. Discussing the painful turnabout that Hally makes, the class grew sombre.

Then something interesting happened as we read.

In the text Sam asks Willie if he should hit Hally in retaliation, and Willie responds negatively. However, as Sandile read this, very beautifully, he changed the words to the affirmative. There was a small stunned pause as we all realised what he was doing. Then he did so again, and maintained the new stance he saw fit to give Willie, as someone who would in fact retaliate in anger. Willie later admits that he would want to hit Hally if he had spat at him, but then, movingly, that in reality he would probably go to the back room and cry. Hally was only a little boy after all.

By the end, Sandile even sang the Sarah Vaughan song, in a mocking, nursery rhyme style and tone.

We have come a long way in the class. I liked Sandile’s quiet but radical initiative, though it altered the textual meaning. It was as if he needed to take matters into his own hands and restore some dignity to Sam and Willie, but also to make his own meaning. He read between the lines, conscious of the issues of race, culture, language, power and
identity which prevented any neutral reading. Consequently, he was also able to challenge
and question what is often taken as given. He could see beyond the obvious manifestation
of action, to the social and cultural practices from which it derived. These issues were
closely connected with our understandings of literacy, and I hoped that students would
start to connect the literacies we were exploring in class with those of their own lives and
experiences. (24/10)

Connie: Sandile, remember we read Master Harold and the Boys in class.
How did you feel about reading that text?
Sandile: I think it shows us about our different cultures and to see how our
country has changed now since that book.
Connie: Why do you think we chose to read that book?
Sandile: I think why we chose to read that book just to think back what was
happening in the past and to see how people reacted to different cultural
backgrounds and how people of different cultures can come together. I think
basically you choose that book just to show us that we can work together
without focusing on our current background and different cultures.
Connie: You remember we asked three questions at the beginning. One was, is
it good to remember the past even if it is painful? Some people felt even in their
journals that it brought back trauma and pain. Did you feel that way?
Sandile: No, I think it is important to know the past, because I think as a
person when I grew up...I think the past plays a major role. I'm a person who
faces the problem, and not go on with the problem. You must remember where
you come from.
Connie: When we read Master Harold and the Boys we were doing some
border-crossing that means we were crossing from Electrical Engineering to
another field, and changing our methods in class. I'm not sure what your
response to that was. Do you think that was alright, do you think it was
something we could do in the Communication module?
Sandile: Yes, miss. I think it was good because in our discipline we are not
taught on the basics of communication, we are not taught on how to work
as a group, how to communicate, how to be equipped. I think reading this book
has improved our communication skills a lot.

In the last week of term we talked a little about the images we had encountered in
the play, and connected these with the sociopolitical issues of the day and the past: the
whites-only bench, the kite-flying, the dancehall. I drew attention to the comment Sam makes to Hally, when he says he doesn’t know anything anymore (p. 59): *You sure of that, Hally? Because it would be pretty hopeless if that was true. It would mean nothing has been learnt here this afternoon, and there was a hell of a lot of teaching going on...one way or the other....* I wanted to know from students, *what did they think was “learned”? What was “taught”? Where was the classroom? Does learning and teaching go on only in a classroom? How could we apply these questions to our own experience here in this classroom? Have things changed since the days of Master Harold?* (24/10)

Walking around the room on the last day of class (31 October), I chatted with groups about their exams and plans for the holidays (Figure 16). Most will leave immediately for home after their paper on the 9th. Sandile inquired about what I would be doing two years from now, whether I would still be at the technikon. We discussed the problems facing technikons and institutions of higher education right now, and the tenuous position of Mantec given the merger of the other two technikons in KwaZulu-Natal, ML Sultan and Natal Technikon. Bheki asked whether I was Ms or Mrs., indicating a preference to use the latter, which was fine with me. He assured me that his journal, which was still to be handed in, was “beautiful.” Others like Bandla and Pallo informed me they would see me on the net. I thanked Thabani for his consistent help as class representative.
We concluded the semester with three questions I felt compelled to ask:

*Is it good to remember the past (even if it is painful)?*

*What impact has the past had on the present, in South Africa as a whole and on the learner as an individual?*

*What learning took place here, what teaching?*

Journal entries from Nomsa (Figure 17) and Thabani (Figure 18) present very different responses. Nomsa includes newspaper clippings about protest, while Thabani considers the experiences of the past and its people.
Figure 17
A Page from Nomsa’s Journal

1960: Sharpeville Massacre
For 42 years the world had turned a blind eye to the racist policies of the apartheid state. It took the brutal 21 March 1960 massacre of 60 unarmed civilian protesters — demonstrating against the pass laws, which effectively denied black people citizenship in their own country — to focus world attention on apartheid's depravity. The massacre sparked world outrage, and inspired the formation of an international anti-apartheid movement. Back at home, the massacre convinced liberation movement leaders of the futility of pacifist struggle and strengthened the hand of militants (then including Nelson Mandela) in the African National Congress and Pan-Africanist Congress who had argued for the use of armed struggle. The two movements soon established military wings, Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) and Poqo, respectively.

1976: Soweto Uprising
The 16 June 1976 student uprising is one of apartheid’s many ironic twists. Apartheid architect H.F. Verwoerd designed black (Bantu) education policies intended to turn black students into “hewers of wood and drawers of water” in the service of white South Africa. But these policies gnawed at the rising consciousness of black youths until the class of 1976 turned black education upside down. Countrywide student riots, beginning in Soweto, were sparked in reaction to government’s unilateral introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in black schools. Although the student uprising was not directly organised by South African Students Organisation in the early 1960s, the uprising — now commemorated as Youth Day — foreshadowed the central role played by the youth in the 80s and 90s during the final onslaught against apartheid.

June 1955: The Freedom Charter
The demands of the liberation struggle waged by indigenous South Africans were etched forever in history when the Congress of the People adopted the Freedom Charter, describing how wealth in post-apartheid South Africa would be distributed: “The mineral wealth (of the) soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole. The land shall be shared among those who work it ... and all the land re-divided amongst those who work it to banish famine and land hunger ...” The state shall recognize the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits ...

“All people shall have the right to live...

1972: Durban Strikes
A wave of spontaneous mass strikes involving 60,000 black (African and Indian) workers shook South Africa, giving birth to radical black trade unionism. Occurring against an apartheid legal backdrop that outlawed black political organizations, the strikes — sparked by low wages and high inflation — put the labour movement at the epicentre of the liberation struggle. Beginning in the Pinetown-Durban area, the strike spread to other areas, including the Western Deep Levels Mines at Carletonville, where police fired on a crowd of strikers, killing 12. The 18% pay increases won by some of the strikers failed to dilute the new labour militancy, and a wave of illegal strikes continuing to 1979 — and resulting concerns among white employers over lost productivity — forced the government to include African workers and their unions in the industrial relations process, in a failed bid to contain worker...
Figure 18

A Page from Thabani’s Journal

@Should be remember the past
@Does the past impact with the present

4 October 2001

"Master Harold..." and the boys

To me it did not mean anything, except the book that uses a very bad language [filthy words] and embarrassment words, and I was wonder why me chose that kind of book, uses such words. In fact nothing interested me.

But the day Sihle pointed something about the story I started to notice that others are serious with the matter. Sihle pointed out that as the book telling us about the past, it hated us since it reminded us about how our forefathers hit lived under the apartheid. Although it was late for me to catch, fortunately I managed to catch up.

I started reading the book, living these words aside, trying to understand what going on.

On the last day of reading that was 24 October, the story was more interesting as it was revealing the true colors of characters.

One thing I noticed here, our forefathers were very patient, taking from the way Hally talk to Sam and splitting to his face, and Sam never hit him, after all he continued to show him another lesson.

After all disrespect and apartheid is something that I hate too much. It is something that hurt me and is something that I cannot stand for, so although there was a story but what I noticed, it was went deep to our mind and were wee
Bule’s journal addresses the first two questions directly, her comments contrasting pointedly with a photograph of school children in the new South Africa (Figure 18). In the article, the writers argue that the onslaught of English in school and on the playground means losing one’s heritage of indigenous languages (Masemola & Khan, 2000).

Should we remember the past even if it’s painful?

Yes I think we should remember the past even though it’s painful like for instance that we can know and recall where we come from, what were advantages and disadvantages of living in past years compared to how we live now So that we can tell our future generation about our lives in past years...

Does the past impact on the present?

Yes it does like in our social relationships. In past years there was apartheid, a white men knew nothing else about blacks but only that he is better and he’ll be a boss every time upon a black...In Education long ago white schools were only for whites but now it is better that we have multiracial schools but the fact remains that it is white’s school. What is amazing and questionable is that you won’t find a white in the black’s school.

Nomusa, like Thabani, reflects on the effects of apartheid on people she knew:

This drama was very interesting because it was talking about the things which happened in the past that were not good like the way the black people were undermined and the way they were discriminated by the white people. It just remind me about the way how my father grew up with, which was very sad...

Saying goodbye, Mbali’s final words in her journal stayed with me throughout the writing of this dissertation:

Thank you for making the Communication class fun in every way. I understand it was part of your research. But to us it was more than that. I’m actually glad I was one of the lucky ones who were in your class. Normally you attend classes and finish the semester without knowing each other. But in our class we knew everybody and respected each other...
School Children in the New South Africa

Languages are under siege and the culprit is none other than English, the pre-eminent
in his first of a two-part series, Daily News reporters Thabo Masemola and Farook
and other role players to find out the extent to which this has occurred in South Africa.
used to save indigenous languages from annihilation.

The Group after Our Final Performance

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CHAPTER THREE

IMAGES, INTUITIONS AND INSIGHTS

Introduction

One of the essential attributes of an ethnographic methodology is that it is the emic knowledge of the informant(s) that the ethnographer seeks... However, the final ethnographic report cannot consist of this emic cultural content alone. The mere act of arranging it for an ethnographic report imposes an etic structure on it, and any interpretation the ethnographer places on the emic data forces it into an etic structure. But arrangement of emic data and interpretation are essential if the strange is to be converted to the familiar so that it can be understood in other contexts (Spindler & Hammond 2000, pp. 42-43)

Sifting through all the data gathered, typed and transcribed after four months, I found not only trends of response and thought patterns, but also other significant moments of interaction and development, which are discussed in this chapter. There were many things that we learned and unlearned. In a very real way, though, reflection on the intuitions that continually shaped our understanding as participants, as well as images of our experiences, filter throughout this work. While insights gained cannot be confined to the artificial location of a file or chapter, I have nonetheless organised them into three main parts:

1. Assessments
2. Reflective Responses
3. Video Sessions
I elaborate first on the five assessments since they serve as signposts of change during the research. The specific and enabling outcomes and the knowledge underpinning each task are outlined, as well as other (sometimes negotiated) criteria for assessment. I also analyse students’ responses to the task, taking as my point of departure the criteria for assessment. Video clips and excerpts from student journals and interviews offer snapshots from different angles throughout, some revealing students’ concerns about a task as they prepared for it and others their reactions and reflections after its completion. While this is by no means a quantitative study, I include the most basic statistics and the range of scores attained, for information, comparison and clarity.

The analysis of the assessments is followed by a detailed discussion of responses to the questionnaires, Reflective Responses I and II. I reviewed each questionnaire and response closely, summarising interesting, significant and recurring views.

The video clips selected for discussion raise what I consider to be further significant moments for students and myself, when we turned a corner or gained some new insight. I think that they also focus the lens sharply on what students were thinking, and what our expectations were in the classroom.

In analysing data from my field notes, the assessments, reflective responses, interviews, journals and video sessions, I sought to stay on track, in other words, to remember the purpose of the study. I therefore attempted to seek answers firstly to my specific research questions:

1. How would students perceive the use of literary material in this class? Would it be an irritating deviation? Something they would enjoy? A vehicle for developing
communication? Would they prefer to engage only with text that is discipline-related?

2. How would new experiences such as reading a literary text, participating in performance games and creating performance scenarios alter classroom interactional patterns, in terms of what we say and do, think and write?

3. Would breaking the stereotypes surrounding the curriculum for engineers lead to conversation and reflection on how we learn? What implications would this have for the teaching-learning plans and programmes in the Department of Communication at the technikon?

Ultimately, I was interested in what implications our curriculum experience would have for the students’ sense of themselves as learners, and for teaching-learning plans and programmes in the Department of Communication at the technikon.

Secondly, I sought to discover whether our curriculum experience would enact the two themes prioritized in both Master Harold and the Boys (MHB) and the national education agenda for transformation:

1. How can we develop relationships through the recognition of different social and cultural contexts, both in and outside the classroom, with classmates and myself as facilitator, as well as friends, family and community?

2. How can we develop literacies, including the recognition of alternate and home literacies as modes of communication, with particular reference to performance techniques, the reading of Master Harold and the Boys and the use of artefacts?
Underlying these themes is the contention that our classroom should become a multi-dimensional context into which we could bring our social, emotional, political and personal selves, expressing these selves through multiple literacies.

While scouring the data I also kept asking the following questions: What was anticipated? What was found? What were my preconceptions and expectations, as well as those of students? Were the goals of OBE met, and to what extent? What was our experience of OBE, from the perspective of students and myself as teacher-researcher? Was ours a decontextualised classroom? Was it a safe environment? Did it invite confrontation and challenge? Did we break any stereotypes and cross any borders, with respect to discipline and understandings of what curriculum and instruction should be like?

In studies such as this, there is a dual urge to revel in the unwieldy nature of the data and, precisely for this reason or characteristic, to try to be tight and meticulous when it comes to analysis, to impose some order. I compromised by organizing the chapter into the sections outlined. I find no possible way to simply repeat the questions raised above and to provide an answer. Responses and thoughts are instead elaborated as they weave their way into different parts of our journey.

Assessments

In the sections which follow on outcomes, in particular for Assessments 1, 2 and 3, I must acknowledge the work of the course coordinator. Except for editing changes, information on the outcomes is extracted from the departmental study guide for Coms311.
(2001). I devised outcomes for the other assessments in line with my attempt to apply critically the methodology of OBE.

What will become apparent in the analysis of assessments is that it is the first and last two assessments (1, 4 and 5), which relate specifically to the research questions. Assessments 1 and 4, the oral presentation of self and the final performance, revealed a progressive grasp and demonstration of concept cues such as artifacts, pretexts, literacies, performance, voice and body language. These cues informed our preparation for the assessments in conjunction with our reading of MHB and the games we played. For example, we asked: What artifacts could we associate with Sam, Willie and Hally? Why and how should we avoid stereotyping in our conversation and interaction in class and outside, as we encounter difference? In Assessment 5, the journals not only contained artifacts representing the writer as a person outside the mould of engineering student, but were themselves artifacts. Here students recorded responses to the research questions, which were raised in class regularly. Consequently, the patterns discerned in the journals centre around developing literacies, developing relationships, local, national and global events, and reflection on learning and thinking. In other words, Assessments 1, 4 and 5 were intended to become windows on student thought and experience, in relation to the research questions and goals.

In contrast, Assessments 2 and 3, the summary and report, did not relate directly to the research questions. They did reveal valuable information, however, and offered an opportunity to compare assessments and student responses to the tasks set. For example, the report introduced group work and the need to function as a team to achieve a
common goal, as well as the skills and processes involved in seeking, organizing and writing up information. These became critical strengths for Assessment 4, the performance. Although summary writing proved to be the most difficult task for students, they found practising with other material prior to the actual assessment interesting and useful. This furthered our discussion on crossing disciplinary and curricular borders and what was considered an accessible text (the article on cattle farming, MHB, newspaper clippings etc).

I present Assessments 1, 4 and 5 first, as they speak directly to the goals of this research.

Assessment 1: Oral, August 2001

The Outcomes

The specific outcome: By the end of this task the student will be able to make an oral presentation in the presence of her peers, demonstrating or revealing some aspect of herself (her history, life, family etc.), using an artifact or visual aid.

Enabling outcomes: To achieve this outcome, the student will be able to understand, discuss and apply the following:

1. Active listening.

2. Strategies for effective reading for different purposes (skimming, scanning, intensive and extensive reading).

3. Research as an activity (getting information from people and archives and using it).

4. Planning and preparing a timed presentation.
5. Using a visual aid or artifact during a presentation.

6. Using performance techniques, including body language, to communicate.

7. Responding to questions from the audience.

**Underpinning knowledge:** The task assumed knowledge in the following areas, as a combination of coursework, prior learning and reading:

1. Barriers to listening and communication, including stereotyping.

2. Effective intercultural communication.

3. Communication models, focusing on the Cyclical Feedback Model.

4. Information searches, including use of the library.

5. Criteria for a good oral presentation, including target audience, purpose of presentation, use of cue cards, body language, voice (pace, tone, volume, modulation), pitch, verbal fluency, role-playing and polished delivery.

**The Task.** The task was for students to make an oral presentation, demonstrating or presenting themselves. Given the stated goal of getting to know one another in class as people with lives outside, they were to share something about themselves and their lives. They were to read/speak/present in other voices, using performance techniques and any visual art/literacy, linking the literacy worlds of home and school. As noted, an artifact or visual aid was essential.

*One student (no longer in the class) had a question: If you have chosen the topic, is it compulsory to draw the pictures, to highlight some points? I don’t know...*  
*C: Do you want to draw some pictures?*  
*Nooo (from more than one student). Laughter and consensus.*  
*(Mmmm, I think, here we go).*
C: What do you want to do, if you think you are presenting on a topic. You are referring to the oral presentation. What do you want to do?
S: We want to talk.
C: You want to talk. You don't think charts are important?
S: Do you get marks for the pictures?
C: Do you get marks? You might! This is very interesting to me. What do you think will happen in this class...this is a Communication class? (We are off to a good start, I think!)

Video Session 1(1)

Assessment Criteria. The assessment criteria were discussed in class initially when the task was introduced then in further detail a week later. By then students had had some time to consider the criteria, in response to my (quite unexpected) request that they contribute to such decision-making in assessment. We eventually settled on the following criteria:

1. Preparation (research, planning, choice of topic, rehearsal, familiarity, use of time)
2. Voice (volume, projection, modulation)
3. Body language (eye contact, gestures, posture etc.)
4. Use of artifacts/aids (integration of other literacies)
5. Response to questions

These criteria were chosen deliberately, but are typical criteria by which to assess oral presentation. However, they also embody the outcomes and underpinning knowledge for this part of the syllabus, and forge links with the goals of the research.

C: What we did last week is we looked at a few concepts, new concepts like “artifacts” and “literacies”, for example. There is more than one way of expressing oneself (referring to slide, Concept cues 2). What do you understand by the word “performance”? Try, somebody?
Sandile: How we did something.
**Dudu:** The result of doing something.
**Mbali:** The ability to do something.
**Gcina:** To imitate...to pretend to be someone else.

**C:** To pretend. Pretend that you’re an actor, pretend that you’re in a TV commercial, pretend that you’re a storyteller...is there something wrong with that?

*(Ouch! I am too bald-faced again).*

**C:** Have you seen a performance, where people perform or act? Has anyone taken part in a performance?

*There is some discussion but little direct response.*

**C,** putting up slide: You know what I did, students, you know I was quite intrigued by this word, so I thought, that for the purposes of this class I would actually look up the word in the dictionary...look at this...

Everyone reads.

*Video Session 3 (2)*

**Analysis.** Emerging patterns are discussed according to the criteria for assessment.

Marks ranged from 51 to 78%.

**Preparation.** Generally there was strong evidence of preparation. Students did understand the demands of the task, with two (6%) exceptions: one student presented on Plants and the other on a Visit to the Drakensberg Power Station, with no revelation or demonstration of ‘self’ (although Pallo had chosen a similar topic appropriately). There were seven students (23%) who were less prepared in the sense that they read too much, were not familiar with the contents, had no structure, and offered too little information (three took less than the required time of five to eight minutes), or too much information (four rambled on beyond the time allocation). The majority of 22 (71%) seemed to have absorbed the activities and discussion leading up to the oral presentation of themselves. They chose a topic that revealed something about themselves (their role-models; hobbies and passions, especially religion and sport; academic history; life sketches; parents and family trees). There were some unusual approaches to the topic, such as being
embarrassed when doing something for the first time, the meaning of names, recounting a childhood incident involving stealing mangos, and telling a joke.

Fleshing out the topic meant conducting some research, including asking parents for information about the past, or delving into histories to piece together a family tree. Managing the available time required planning, structuring the presentation and choosing its contents carefully. Students also had to decide how best to introduce and use their chosen artifact (a prerequisite). While some students had cue cards, they did not need to use them as they were familiar with the contents and had rehearsed adequately. Most gained confidence as they proceeded.

In four cases, there was an abrupt end. However, from experience with other classes I realized that students often conclude written and verbal communication with a quick comment like *That is all* or *That is all I have to say.*

*Siyabonga:* On this day it was my day of presentation. I was nervous and I got into a panic. I knew I had to present but I kept hesitating. Left and right students presented and I hoped to stand up when one student would present poorly but the graph seemed to rise higher and higher. I told myself I was man enough to do this so I stood up and presented. As I presented I told a joke and everybody laughed including Ms Israel so I was happy and knew that I had score myself some marks.

*Voice.* In terms of volume, projection and modulation, 36% (11) of the students were rated good (with reference to comments made, my notes and mark allocation). Ten students (32%) were considered satisfactory in their use of voice. They were too soft or if audible, failed to project their voice across the room (as the videos reveal). Also, a lack of eye contact and familiarity with the contents necessitating reading, which directed their
voices downwards. In most instances, there was good projection and pace, and where students started off hesitantly, they showed considerable improvement as their confidence grew. There were ten students (32%) whose use of voice was excellent: they were clear, audible, well-modulated and very expressive.

**Body language.** Eye contact was a definite problem, but has its roots in cultural norms. It is considered disrespectful to look at others, those older and in positions of authority, directly in the eye. Though we discussed this aspect of body reading and the need for eye contact in specific contexts, as well as how to maintain contact and hence rapport across a room, my notes indicate a need for more eye contact overall. Only 42% (thirteen) of the students made good eye contact, using appropriate gestures, posture and body to express themselves and to maintain rapport with the audience. Some examples are worth mentioning. Two students broke out in song, one conducting a choir, which became the class itself, as they took up the Hallelujah chorus from Handel’s *Messiah*; another posed happily in his shirt dotted with signatures of school friends, while a third demonstrated the art of kung fu, to great effect.

**Use of artifact/aid.** This was possibly the most exciting part of the oral presentations, as students came up with the most creative and innovative ideas. However, nine students (29%) did not bring in an artifact or aid, to my surprise. While some apologised for this omission, as they did not have anything with them on campus, others simply ignored the requirement. This was drawn to their attention after the assessment
was done, when I invited discussion and questions on their overall mark and the comments I had made.

We had a wonderful array of artifacts on show: slides; cassettes, sheet music; academic certificates and sports medals; the shirt with signatures from friends; charts with flow diagrams; pictures and photographs; an item of clothing sewn by a mother; a watch; an old R1-00 coin (a lucky charm); Biblical texts; magazines, a pair of jeans; braided hair; an ID photograph; a red kung fu shirt and cap; a casiotone and postcards of Durban’s beachfront. This last artifact somewhat sadly evoked the dark days of the Group Areas Act for me: here was someone living fifteen kilometres from Durban’s Golden Mile, who still saw it through the eyes of a tourist.

The artifacts were chosen with great care. Students seemed to have fun with this assessment and commented on the difference between what they were required to do as opposed to their friends in other Engineering groups.

Responses to Questions. Eighteen students (58%) were considered very good in their responses to questions from the audience. They had gained confidence by the end of the presentation and were at ease. Responses were well-framed, direct and interesting. They clarified matters for the students who raised questions and revealed a capacity to respond appropriately.

_Themba, who really loves soccer, makes this observation: “When they [people] come in their numbers to the sports field, they forget about their race, that I’m black, I’m white. They forget about their culture, about their differences.”_
Lots of questions follow, with Gcina commenting “I still think you need a profession, as you can’t play soccer for life”. Themba’s response that it depends how you use and save your money gets loud approval. He has a good command of the language: he talks about how you have to start playing soccer at a tender age to turn professional. I also like how Pallo precedes a question with a comment: “Themba, I know you like soccer, so do I, but next year the world cup will be held...where?” He has done this before, and it is almost a politeness marker as well as recognition of the formality of the event.

Video Session 5 (3)

Assessment 4: Performance Piece, October 2001

The Outcomes

Specific outcome: By the end of this task, the student will be able to prepare for and conduct himself appropriately in a job interview, employing suitable communication strategies, including performance techniques, in a variety of roles (interviewer, interviewee, HR consultant, careers counsellor, sibling, parent, professional, friend).

Enabling outcomes: To achieve this outcome, the student will be expected to do the following:

1. Research information on job interviews (preparation and requirements).
2. Draw up a Curriculum Vitae and letter of application.
3. Analyse an advertisement.
4. Display effective role-playing as an interviewer, an interviewee, a parent, an HR consultant, a professional, a careers counsellor, a sibling and a friend, cast in a performance scenario.
5. Work in a team to choose an advertisement, write a script, devise scenes, rehearse and present.
6. Display appropriate verbal skills and body language with respect to posture, style, tone and level of formality in devised scenes.

Underpinning knowledge: To achieve the above, the student will be expected to know the following:

1. The definition, purpose and assessment criteria of formal job interviews, including the different types of questions posed (open-ended, closed, probing, rhetorical etc.).

2. The need to speak in different voices in role-playing (given the various roles described), particularly the roles of interviewee and interviewer.

3. How to use performance strategies and techniques to communicate in different contexts.

Assessment Criteria. Again, as for Assessment 1, the criteria for assessment were discussed with students beforehand and we settled on the following:

1. Preparation/research/rehearsal
2. Performance
3. Contribution
4. Role-playing
5. Voice/projection
6. Use of artifacts/aids

These criteria, students felt, were similar to the criteria for the first assessment, which was fair. Unlike their experience of the first assessment, they had gained familiarity with concept cues and performance itself during the semester. They felt that there should
be an attempt to allow not necessarily for equal contribution by each member of the group (as roles required different input, and the interviewee, for example, had a bigger role than a mother giving him advice), but appropriate contribution, depending on how the role was developed.

The Task. Students were put into 6 groups and required to devise performance pieces on interview preparation. There were 3 scenarios, so two groups shared a scenario each. I reproduce only one scenario here, as an example of the task set. The other two differ only in the roles suggested.

Scenario 1: Groups 1 and 2

Please read your study guide, pages 58-59 for background information on this task. Aspects of the task are modified for this class. Note that the following activities are required of you: group work; choosing an advertisement; researching; scriptwriting; rehearsing; role-play; presentation/performance.

You are part of a group of 5/6. Each of you will take one of the following roles: applicant for job (interviewee); mother; father; brother/sister; professional neighbour.

Your performance should take at least fifteen minutes. You should individually contribute at least five minutes of this time. You may use whatever props or artifacts you choose.

Scenario 2 (seeking information in preparation for an interview) for Groups 3 and 4 included roles such as applicant for the job (interviewee); HR representative at a company; counsellor at a Careers Information Centre; friend;
referee, and any other person/s. Scenario 3 (the interview itself) for Groups 5 and 6 included roles for the applicant (interviewee); general manager of a company; HR manager; head of department or supervisor; union representative and any other person/s.

Analysis. All six groups grasped the task demands and created a performance which revealed a good understanding of the concepts and activities which had characterised our classroom for the semester. As noted, there were six groups and three scenarios. What was interesting was that the groups sharing the same scenario produced something quite different, in all three cases. Other than the similar delegated roles and some common advice on job preparation from professional friends, neighbours and career counsellors, the scenes devised and the script, context and dynamics were all very distinctive. All groups scored within a range of 60% to 67%, showing their overall consistency in effort and outcome.

I picked up in the journals a competitive spirit among groups as they prepared for this assessment (see also Pallo’s comments later in this chapter and in Chapter Two):

Mbali: I went to Pallo’s group, they threatened me and my group. They said no matter how prepared we are they thrash us tomorrow. I told my group about it. They said, they are looking forward but they are not scared... Yes, Pallo’s group were good but I must admit I think we beat them. We threshed them. Well done to everybody.

Preparation/research/rehearsal. Groups were very successful in developing real-life micro-situations such as friends chatting or a family sitting down to a meal. Their scripting was highly detailed and entertaining. They seemed to grasp the quite sophisticated need for an angle, which they exploited fully. They also showed evidence of
researching a range of aspects and activities related to interviews. In all groups a number of different scenes unfolded, with some occurring concurrently and others offstage. Teamwork and collaboration were evident as the performances took shape.

Everyone is dressed for their parts, and start taking their places. There is a nervous excitement in the air. Group 1 starts moving furniture around to set the stage for their performance. The presentations are original. They are generally good. On video the ease of students is evident, as is their detailed planning and rehearsal. Phones ring on cue and matters proceed logically. For instance, the call from an HR officer informing the applicant of an interview the next day, interrupts a conversation between friends.

Video Session 10 (5)

1. Performance. A very good understanding of performance and of the use of the body, were conveyed as students became actors. There was a practical application of concepts, confident participation and effective use of the body and movement. One group seemed to lack substance in that the script allowed for lots of excitable reaction but little meaningful exchange when the interviewee heard of her pending interview. There was due consideration in the last two groups of the formal nature of the interview, in sharp contrast to the first and second groups, where the setting was informal. In the latter, a note of formality crept in, appropriately, when the interviewee consulted a careers counsellor. There was improved eye contact and rapport compared to previous efforts, except for one group in which characters had their backs to the audience on occasion.

2. Contribution. Students were wonderfully democratic about giving everyone a chance to contribute, and their teamwork shone through. Input by different characters was substantial, appropriately in-role (friends, family) and knowledgeable (the HR rep, the careers counsellor). Characters were developed into real-life personae: they were not

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flat or one-dimensional even if they were cameos. The last two groups, performing the
interview itself, distributed questions and time allocations fairly to all members of the
panel.

*These students are natural actors. They are expressive and emotions are
shown transparently. Scenes are played out with individual quirkiness and
style, which come through in the conversations as well. Much of the interaction
is peppered with humour and fun. They have researched topics and gathered
relevant information, and elicit good, interested responses from the “audience.”
The audience is quiet during the first presentation as they assimilate this new
activity, which we have anticipated for a while now, but this changes drastically
with the presentations which follow!*

*Video Session 10 (6)*

3. **Role-playing.** All groups cast members into the roles suggested, in some cases
with more than one person in the role of friend, sibling or girlfriend. The journals reveal
some conflict over who was to play which role, preference for certain roles and
nervousness, but this was not evident in the performance at all. Not once did any student
forget that he was in-role, even when audience reaction was intrusive.

4. **Voice/projection.** Groups generally improved as they went on. The main
criticism in my notes is that they were soft at times (this was even referred to by an
interviewee during an interview). The actors could have been more assertive overall. One
group was excellent, while another tended to project too little because, as mentioned, their
backs were to the audience.

5. **Use of artifacts/props.** All groups made creative use of a variety of props and
artifacts, including furniture for scene-setting, food, utensils, TV remote controls, books,
newspapers, cell phones, files, and notes. They were also in costume, which lent almost a
festive spirit to the occasion.
I include here a script of one group's performance, with Shadrack and Nhleko as the brothers Simphiwe and Blessing, Tolakele as the mother, Bandla as Mr. Dlamini and Patrick as the father. The script indicates that it was for Scenario 1. Setting the scene with gesture, dialogue and props, was very important to this group.

Scene 1: Blessing and Simphiwe are brothers who live in the same house but seem estranged.

Blessing: Sorry...I'm glad to see you.
Simphiwe (Blessing's brother): I spoke to you long ago, last week.
Blessing: Last week?
Simphiwe: Remember we were not getting along that well.
Blessing: But why, what's wrong, what's happening?
Simphiwe: There was some problem; it's not a matter of discussion.
Blessing: Okay, not now. But you know that girl, she is the bomb and... It seems as if you like her.
Simphiwe: Ja, I like her so much.

The telephone rings, Blessing answers the telephone...

Blessing: Hello...
Caller: Hello, can I speak to Simphiwe, please...
Blessing: Hold on. This call is for you.
Simphiwe: I wonder who this can be.
Caller: Hello, is this Zama...
Simphiwe: Yes?
Zama: I'm the secretary of SABC company. We have received your application. I called to inform you about the interview which is to take place at the SABC offices at 11 o'clock tomorrow. So be there.
Simphiwe: Tomorrow?
Zama: Ja, tomorrow.
Simphiwe: What is the interview about?
Zama: Well, interviews are, as you know, about the job and the company.
Simphiwe: Thank you, goodbye.
To Blessing: I just received a call that I must come for an interview for SABC, I've applied for the job of SABC reporter.
Blessing: This is good news, man.

Scene 2: Simphiwe goes and tells his mom in the kitchen.
Mom: I'm so happy! You have to go to Mr Dlamini and ask for some advice, maybe he will help you.
Simphiwe: Which Mr Dlamini?
Mom: Mr Dlamini, the professional one, our neighbour, The one who knows everything about those things that you need. Maybe he is the one you can trust. Go to him now, don't hesitate, go now...
Simphiwe: I will ask my brother if he can come with me.
Mom, to Blessing: Go now and accompany him....
Simphiwe: Mommy said you must go with me to Mr Dlamini so I can write down some questions of how an interview is. Can you accompany me?
Blessing: Okay, fine.

Scene 3: The boys go to Mr Dlamini, the neighbour and knock on his door.

Mr Dlamini: Oh, what is happening, who can this be?
Blessing: Hey man, hello Mr Dlamini.
Mr Dlamini: How are you?
Blessing: We are fine.
Mr Dlamini: So what do I owe this surprise? You have a lady now?
Blessing: No, you know about ladies...
Mr Dlamini: About soccer? You not talking about girls, soccer, so you are going to rob someone today?
Blessing: No! No! No! We are here about something that is very serious.
Mr Dlamini: Did someone die?
Blessing: My brother is getting to a stage of being a man.
Mr Dlamini: He is getting married?
Blessing: No! It's something very important, my brother has applied for something.
Mr Dlamini: Oooh, a job...
Blessing: Something like that but he will explain everything to you.
Simphiwe: Mr Dlamini, last week I applied for a reporter at SABC and today I got a call to come for an interview tomorrow. So my mom advised me to come to you and I wanted to know as a grown up, you have been to an interview before?
Mr Dlamini: Ja.
Simphiwe: How is an interview conducted? How do people behave like, when you are going into an interview?
Mr Dlamini: Okay, I must tell you an interview is just to test your capabilities, if you can be entrusted to do the job or not, if they can rely on you because they will want to invest something on you. There are many things that you must do and not do in an interview. There are some tips that I can give you.
Simphiwe: I like that.
Mr Dlamini, fetching a book from a shelf: But some of the things you are going to get from this book. I'm going to give you this book. First of all you must be presentable, tie and all, when you get to the interview. When they call you in the interview just be confident and don't read anything from your notes. Remain in eye contact with them, make sure you don't look down at the table, otherwise they will feel that you are a skelm and won't give you the job...
Simphiwe: Okay.
Mr Dlamini: Another thing is, you must know the company, you must know what the company is about and you must try to be at least fifteen minutes early. What time did they say you must come?
Simphiwe: They said I must come at 11 O'clock.
Mr Dlamini: So maybe you must be there at half past ten or quarter to eleven so when they call your name you will be ready. But I'm going to give you this book and you are going to read this chapter. I know you hate reading, you boys. But this is going to help.
Simphiwe: I got my diploma three years ago. Let me go and read.
Mr Dlamini: All the certificates and all the original certificates you must bring along to the interview. But if you have a problem you can stop by in the morning. I hope I have helped you.
Simphiwe: Thank you, Mr Dlamini.
Mr Dlamini: Sharp, Sharp, Sharp!
Simphiwe (cheekily): Mr Dlamini, I hope you will be able to buy me those cigarettes.
Mr Dlamini: Ja, Sharp! I will walk you out.

The boys start back home...

Scene 4: At home, Mother is busy in the kitchen. There is a knock at the door...

Mom: Who's there? Oh it's you, darling. How was your day?
Dad: It was fine.
Mom: What you want me to do for you? Bring you something to read?
Dad (smiling): Make me a cup of tea...
Mom: Okay. Can you guess, I got some good news for you? Can guess the news?
Dad: What?
Mom: About your son, our son. Our son was called for an interview in the SABC company to be a journalist. So now I ask him to go to Mr Dlamini our neighbour, the one we trust to get some advice.
Dad: This is good news for me.
Mom: Oh yes, this is good. You get fed up with him now he got his diploma and he's sitting at home. No more! (Sighs with relief) Now we have to thank God for this. I'm going to prepare for supper.

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Scene 5: Later, in the kitchen again...

Mom (setting the table): This is the time for supper now.  
The boys knock on the door...  
Mom: Come in. You guys are back.  
Blessing, to Simphiwe: You need the prayer coz you are going to get that job.  
Mom: You have to prepare yourself after supper. Please boy, I know your luck is changing.  
Dad (trying to motivate Simphiwe): I know you are a hardworking boy and I know you will do me proud. I know you are a dedicated person like me, you must know that.  
Mom: This is true, son; you have to go on your father’s way. Okay? All of you and even you too (to Blessing, sternly).

Scene 6: Later, in the lounge...

Mom: I think it is time for you to sleep now.  
Simphiwe: Today I will sleep very early.  
Dad (yawning): Today I’m also very, very tired.  
Blessing: Dad, don’t forget about tomorrow. You have to buy me some togs so that I can kick the ball hard. I have applied for striker.  
Mom (orders them loudly): Go to sleep!  
Blessing and Siphiwe: Good night, mom.  
Mom: Good night, boys.

Journal entries express the positive experience of students with this assessment:

Thabani: Wow! It was another time students coming up with an amazing acts on stage. Well, this time intelligence was needed in our performance, I think. We all did well, the way I saw.

Tolakele: This was the most enjoying day to me. My group and I did very well on mock interviews. It funny and interesting. Also other groups did marvelous job. I couldn’t believing, everybody was ready to play his or her role.
Assessment 5: Journals, November 2001

Excerpts from the journals are integrated throughout this section.

The Outcomes

Specific outcome: By the end of this task, the student will have compiled a record of the semester in the form of a journal, which will enable her to review her academic progress (including the curricular experience) and her individual progress (as a learner and more holistically, as a person).

Enabling outcomes: In order to achieve this outcome, the student will be expected to do the following:

1. Regularly write down (critique, comment, narrate etc.) thoughts, feelings and views.
2. Access creative and alternate forms of representation and literacies such as graphics, fonts, maps, pictures etc.
3. Select items purposively for inclusion (indicating their value for the individual).
4. Respond to and reflect on classroom, curricular, home, social and world events and experiences.
5. Review the journal regularly in order to learn about self.

Underpinning knowledge: The task assumed knowledge in the following, as a combination of coursework and prior learning:
1. The requirements of keeping a journal.

2. Alternate forms of representation (from coursework).

3. How reflecting on learning (metacognition) may be valuable.

The Task: For Assessment 5, students were required to keep journals from the beginning to the end of the semester. They were to record their thoughts, observations, feelings and views about their classroom experience, their home lives, their roles as learners and as people with varied interests, world events or any other issue of interest to them. Since only two students indicated that they had kept a diary before, we spent some time in class during the first few weeks, then at regular intervals, discussing what a journal was, what went into it and why, and how representing feelings and perceptions this way may aid thinking and learning about self as well as other aspects of the curriculum.

Criteria for Assessment: The only criteria discussed were that students wrote regularly in their journals, that they showed a clear understanding of the concept of the journal (as this was their first experience of keeping a journal for this purpose) and that they explored alternate literacies and forms of representation where possible. They had carte blanche otherwise and were to hand in their journals at the end of the semester.

Analysis: In my analysis of the thirty journals (one student had left the campus suddenly), I found patterns centering around the following, which were related to the outline of the requirements and outcomes for this task:

1. Developing literacies - artifacts which speak, alternative literacies and forms of communication etc.
2. Developing relationships - home life, friends, recognizing social and cultural
differences etc.

3. Bringing the world into the classroom - local, national and world events.

4. Reflection and metacognition – a sense of the self as a learner and thinker;
   commentary on the classroom experience, including *Master Harold and the Boys*;
   being videotaped; crossing borders in terms of discipline-specific or generic
   material, and assessments.

These categories intersect in many interesting ways, as the journals reveal. The majority
of students met the requirements of the task, with scores ranging between 48 and 76%.

Developing Literacies

As many as twenty students (67%) made an attempt to represent their thoughts
in forms other than print, showing a recognition of other literacies.

They also accessed different genres, by narrating, summarising, writing
notes, poetry and letters. Except for a few which relied only on handwritten entries,
the journals are filled with drawings, press cuttings, mind maps, graphs, proverbs,
photographs, pictures, mottos, definitions (concepts introduced in class), questions
and answers, confessions, direct comments to me as the lecturer, SMS messages,
self-analysis, quotations of Biblical texts, responses to the three questions raised,
stickers, outlines of dreams and goals, recollections, cards, and weather reports.
Two students included jokes; three inserted prayers and poems, and a few folded
pages into intricate sections to reveal selected information like a CV, “lessons from
life” or what was happening in class. Wonderboy’s journal, like Dudu’s and many
others', includes drawings and self-reflective thoughts about his future and religious faith. Bandla pasted in copies of a hymn, *Praise the Lord, my soul!* in both the Zulu and English versions.

The videotape as an alternative form of representation linked to alternate literacies, was one of the aspects of our experience most students liked, even if they appeared to be shy initially.

*Ntini:* I was happy...cos we were being videotaped in class and I like a camera very much.

*Dumiso:* We can communicate using hands, signs, objects, body language. The interesting part started when we had to do role playing, not speaking but communicating using body language. It was a lot of fun. Really this class is turning to something to look forward too...Being videotaped while learning I have a feeling that this kind of learning will be effective...we learn different on the style that I'm used to...This style of learning is interesting cause for the first time I felt free like expressing my view in class.

The journals included information on students' home lives and the events which characterise daily experiences: bailing someone out of jail, church activities and religious commitment, living in Durban, taxi travel, being the victim of a crime, hobbies, pets, fashion expeditions, pop idols and sports heroes, bursary interviews and holiday pastimes. They showed who they were again, in a form different from the oral presentation. Their unique, personal style is evident in their writing:

*Thabani:* On the taxi coming to school in the morning, while it was rainy. While the taxi was waiting for the robbot to open, one car was coming behind us. The driver could not stop the car so he just turned the car outside the road and the car knocked down the lady and the lady rose up instantly and dusted herself.
Developing Relationships

Journal entries reveal a consciousness of the need to develop social relations both within and outside the classroom. The majority of students (28 or 93%) commented on their relationships with others including myself, in class and outside it. They saw themselves as social beings and part of a larger community. However, they acknowledged that they did not know one another in class and would not have forged some relationships, were it not for the different curricular experience we shared, particularly the games and performance activities. They felt that the class fostered a sense of camaraderie. In it they encountered others with different social, cultural and religious backgrounds, and they learned to cross class, language and personal/psychological barriers.

Themba: I’ve learned truly that communication is everything. I spoke with people I thought I’ll never talk with because of their class.

The experience of breaking communication and class barriers, as valuable, was also corroborated in the interviews:

Dumiso: It had a huge impact coz even now we’re like brothers. When we talk about Mrs Israel’s class of 2001- second semester, all those guys are together.

Bandla: ...You happened to know a person you wouldn’t know, maybe he isn’t your friend but you have to work as a team.

More than one student observed that the class was free, and like a family which did things together. A few focused on their relationships, the scares of pregnancy and how this affected them, the intention to propose, and how conflicts were resolved.

A few students wrote of the death of close family and friends and a memorial service for students on campus, perhaps stemming from the writing they did in class on
death as an experience we share. Many students problematised their active roles in church organizations, including that of youth leader (Thabani) and intercessor (Sbongile) in prayer. Religious fervour permeates many entries.

Nomso’s emotional letters to her friends and to me show a deep concern for growing relationships. She appreciated her friends’ care when she was ill and that they cried with her when she cried. One, to another student in class, registers also her sense of the importance of education today:

_Dudu my friend_

*If it wasn’t you my friend I don’t know. I remember the first time I saw you that how you reacted towards me, you’re friendly. You are the one that I’ve been studying with even though I feel like not doing study, but you always says that “Nomusa, my friend, it is your future that you playing with?” After your words I think of my future, the way that I want to be, and then I realized that my future lies on my education and then I decided that I had to study no matter what. You are the good friend.*

_Wish you all the best_
_Nomusa_

Also interesting was the relationship building that occurred through oral presentations and the nicknames given to some students after they revealed something about themselves:

_Shadrack: We’ve been laughing at each other because other were left with nicknames during the presentation. They now calling each other with that names, like the girl who talked about her granny and the coin she’s now called ‘intombi ye dol’ which means girl of a doler._

_Dudu revealed in her interview that she was nicknamed “Arthur,” after a kwaito star._

_Dudu: Ja...We are more friendly, even when we are relaxing, we refer back to the things we were talking about in the class. You know, we were given the names from the class when we delivered presentations._
_Connie: Yes, like girl of a dollar!_
_Dudu: Ja._

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Connie: What is the name they called you?
Dudu: My name is Dudu.
Connie: No, I mean the name they called you in the class? The nickname...
Dudu: They called me Arthur... (laughing)... coz I said last time that my favourite thing is I like kwaito music and they called me Arthur.

Other entries make reference to circumstances and problems (economic, for example), which conditioned the lives of their families, and shaped their own identities and relationships:

Thabani: I also realized that most of us likely talked about their parents especially their mothers and grandfathers, of which we did not get to know their identities (what kind of person they are). While others telling us about their experiences in their life that gave us the picture of how does someone think in different situations. I also found that most of us coming from poor families.

Naledi expresses her gratitude for her relationships with God and her mother. Komotso in very personal entries describes her disappointment at meeting an old friend who was pregnant and unhappy, and her father’s advice regarding relationships. She includes pithy bits of advice on life throughout. Mbali tracks a minor conflict with a friend (also in the class), over a few days, showing how it was resolved:

I talked with my friend today and I’m glad we worked our differences, now things are back to normal.

In relation to the use of space and interacting in groups (which led to the forging of new relationships), a few students comment on the comfortable venue: they could see one another, move around and get into groups.

Justina: It was a good place because each and everybody can see almost the whole class simultaneously.
Winston: I won't forget to appreciate the class that we are using. Sometimes you can find that a class is too hot or too cold and there is no reason for feeling comfortable as a result the students become bored within the first 20 mins of the lecture. Our class was not like that, it was always in an acceptable condition. The class that have chairs that can be moved in order to form a group. So it is a very good class.

Journal entries on working in groups also revealed how students interacted and what conflicts arose. I discuss this later, but also refer to group work in Chapter Two.

Bringing the World into the Classroom - Local, National and World Events

Many students (eighteen or 60%) included material on a number of world events, relating them to discussions in class. Bringing the world in and examining sociopolitical changes and developments, as well as our reactions to them, was a goal of the study. Hence I introduced various issues and events, sometimes as they came up and at other times as a consequence of Boal's reading newspapers exercise, reading Master Harold and the Boys, listening to oral presentations or searching for examples to illustrate a point in Communication Theory.

Current affairs which featured in the journals were diverse, bringing in news that was local, national and international: the Mr. And Ms Mangosuthu Competition held on campus in September; the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in August; discrimination and the apartheid history of South Africa; September 11th and the American-Afghanistan conflict; church activities; sporting events and teams; Govan Mbeki's death and anthrax scares.
Given their levels of cultural and critical literacies, Pallo and Sandile make frequent
descriptive and evaluative reference to world events.

*Sandile: We had some little talk show in the class about the WCAR. I chose
to record my views on this conference and state some reasons. I think SA can
only benefit economically on this conference. Although it is for the whole world
but they waste most of the time on the dispute between USA and Israelites. I'm
talking about Zionism and the view of Americans. They should have address
issues like discrimination of Africans in overseas countries; xenophobia;
treatment towards gays and lesbians and so on. But they say that half a loaf is
better than nothing perhaps the racism rate will decrease and everyone will be
able to do the work he likes, play the sport he likes and visit everywhere
without any fear of being discriminated.*

Pallo emphasized the importance of broadening our scope of knowledge in his journal as
well as interview:

*Pallo: When we are here [at the technikon] we don't actually get to talk much
about current affairs. But I remember in class one time we spent a lot of time
discussing this. I think there was a conference at one stage on racism. I think
we actually spent about two periods discussing that and we actually got to hear
almost everyone's view on that. Also when we discussed newspaper clippings
that we brought. We discussed a lot of things just to get to know other people's
views, think about something other than engineering.*

*Connie: And there was September 11th as well.*

*Pallo: We also discussed that.*

*Connie: So talking about those things took you a little bit out of the classroom
as well.*

*Pallo: Yes.*

*Connie: Do you talk about these things outside the classroom generally?*

*Pallo: Unfortunately, you find not everyone is up-to-date sometimes and you
really can't.*

Reflection and metacognition. Students' consciousness of their own thought
processes and as developing learners, who reflect on their fears, progress and successes
against the more holistic backdrop of their lives, emerges most strongly in their journals.

Almost all students commented on their progress as speakers and some listed the marks
or grades achieved in other modules, along with a pledge to do better. This includes reflection on how their relationships had grown, as well as their ideas of themselves as individuals.

Tola's comments in her interview indicate that the games and alternate literacies influenced her level of involvement in the class and sense of self:

Connie: What about other things we did in class like playing games, performing?
Tola: It was great. I enjoyed that more, presentation where everybody was just themselves. They were enjoying themselves.
Connie: Do you think it changed how you got on with other people these activities?
Tola: Yes, I've learnt to be myself, I've learnt to communicate with other people, I've enjoyed talking myself in class, everything.
Connie: Did it change the way you participated, the fact that we had dialogue and games?
Tola: Ja, a lot. Coz I have learnt to use things to draw, we were drawing, using it to communicate, everything was great.

Despite having many differences, students also found equally that they shared many things. In group work which required the sharing of information and skills, they learned the importance of practising. Given the difficult task of summarizing, practising is recognized by Tola as necessary:

We did a summary writing today. Me and my group summarised this article. We did very bad. It was like we were reading the whole story. Anyway it was not big deal because we were practising...Practise! Makes! Perfect!

Students also note the changes in their levels of self-confidence, and their communication and vocabulary by the end of the semester. New skills were learned all the time, including new concepts and ways of communicating. Although this classroom experience sometimes created a level of discomfort, students enjoyed it.
Bheki: The communication lecture is the lecture that I enjoyed most than any other because it’s where I get enough time to practise English and to relax since it is the subject in which I don’t calculate solving for “x” and “y”...

Nhleko: Our classes were interesting and were funny, anyone would come up with something funny. What I like is that we were learning at the same time and it makes us to learn easily since we were united.

The journals revealed a high degree of self-examination, in some instances stimulated by the challenge of presenting in front of an audience:

Shadrack: There’s a lot of things I hate about myself but most of all its that I’m shire. When everybody is talking like when there’s something or discussion I don’t raise my views, no comments. But today I tried by all means to be like other...

Winston: We were thinking that we are so clever when we present but we get a very painful lesson. That to be honest does not mean that you are a fool.

Students also reflected on their individual perception and negotiation of the classroom experience, including the reading of MHB, the use of performance techniques, videotaping, assessments in this and other classes, and group work. References are made to these throughout this document.

The journals in some cases linked students’ reactions to Master Harold and the Boys with the three questions raised at the end (Focus Question 5) about remembering the past. Direct responses to this question are found in the journals, sometimes following on from our classroom conversation. The journals thus constituted one way of remembering not only our history but a more recent past, that of the experiences we shared during the semester. Given the comment generated and the implications for my research questions, I focused specifically on this text in my interviews with students.
Connie: How did you feel about reading Master Harold and the Boys in class?
Dumiso: What I have to say is that it helped me a lot to improve in my language and my English, the way we use to communicate in the communication class and make to feel comfortable, no-one is pressuring you, you just feel free.
Connie: Why do you think we chose to read it, that book?
Dumiso: I think we chose to read it because it is about the youth and how we grow up, like for example in this country where there is a lot of corruption and violence.
Connie: Do you think we should have assessed it in some way? Should we have assessed our reading of Master Harold and the Boys?
Dumiso: No, I think the way we have done it was all right.
Connie: Tell me, do you think that when we discussed those three questions, do you remember, when we talked about the three questions...should we remember the past and is it painful? Some of you wrote in your journals that it opened up old wounds, that we shouldn’t have read that book because of that. How did you feel?
Dumiso: Since I didn’t know much about the past I think it helped me a lot to discover what happened in the past. So I achieved a lot.
Connie: Did you feel that reading this text that was not related to Electrical Engineering...was it interesting. Did you find it interesting, useful?
Dumiso: Of course it was useful! For the fact that I’m studying Electrical Engineering doesn’t mean that I have to study something that is related to engineering. I have to study something else so that I can explore different things.

Dumiso’s reaction, which captures that of most students interviewed (90%), is substantiated throughout this chapter and others. In contrast, Tola, Justina and Dudu offer a perspective which makes complex the use of such a text. Justina and Dudu describe both their attraction and resistance to it.

Connie: Justina, you know we read Master Harold and the Boys. How did you feel about reading the book?
Justina: Reading it was the most I enjoyed in class. And about the context of the book, I think it tells more about what happens in the past, you know and as far as I can see, now no more the same as it was before. As the book states it was before and everything has changed. There is no apartheid anymore.
Connie: Did you mind talking about the past? Some people in their journals said that it opened up old wounds and they didn’t like that? How did you feel about that?
Justina: Anyway we as the younger generation we didn't fight the apartheid or know about the past. We can see the pieces of it and it wasn't good. Most people have suffered a lot, like you have seen something on TV about the police made the dogs to attack black people and you can see that was apartheid. And that was so horrible.

Connie: Do you think that it was all right to remember all that trauma in our class?

Justina: Ja... (with some hesitation now). Actually, it wasn't good, anyway the fact is, that past you have to talk about it, to pass it from your heart, but it's not good anymore to talk about it, coz it won't help.

Connie: Do you think that kind of text should be in the Communication module?

Justina: I don't think it will help because it is just talking about the past and in my own view I don't think past is more important to us. I think what is more important to us is the future.

Dudu concedes that we need to remember the past occasionally.

Dudu: Master Harold. It was just a play; it was a play of course and it was interesting but although sometimes I felt bored...it was a play of how the blacks and whites were reacting and if you can compare now the things to Master Harold what was happening during those times and the things that are happening now, there is a great improvement between whites or I can say between different races. They are now more friendly compared to the time of Master Harold. I found that play was really interesting although sometimes it was boring coz everywhere you were usually bored by the past things. But it must be told now and again...

Some Recommendations. The journals make recommendations about the Coms311 course, which are best conveyed in the students’ own words:

Tola: I wish we did some debating, open talk and talk shows. Just to argue about issues and hear other people's views...I wish we could do communication from S1 to S4 and groups must never change.

Dumiso: If only we could have a communication lecture everyday...

Sandile: I think the timing for the interview assignment is totally wrong. I mean we went for interviews before we do them at class and I think that is somehow unfair.
Bheki: Communication skills are very important to each and every student. The skills we get in S1 will help us the rest of our life. My view is that the department of Engineering does something about this issue, by trying to extend the communication skills up to S4. A far as I’m concerned, the more we are taught communication skills, the more communicative we become.

Siphiwe: Collectively I can say that I learn a lot from Ms Israel’s class like new word literacy feasibly artifact...thus I wish to find her also in Communication II...

Assessment 2: Summary Writing, September 2001

The Outcomes

Specific outcome: By the end of this task, the student will be able to write a summary of an article, framing the key points of the original text in a coherent, logical way, conveying a clear understanding of the text and its graphical material.

Enabling outcomes: To achieve this outcome, the student will be expected to do the following:

1. Read and comprehend technical textual and graphical material.
2. Grasp the main and supporting ideas of a text.
3. Organise information and present it logically in a readable manner.
4. Interpret and analyse facts, figures and relationships from a range of tables, pie charts and organisational charts.

Underpinning knowledge: To achieve the above, the student will be expected to know:

1. The characteristics, scope and purpose of summaries in an Engineering environment.
2. The procedure to be followed in comprehending, dissecting and summarising a text.

3. The means by which numerical and statistical information can be presented to the reader and how this graphical representation can be manipulated to provide varying interpretations.

4. How to analyse and interpret data obtained from pictograms, pie charts, bar charts, graphs and tables.

The Task: This is the first written task given to the Coms311 students. They are required to summarise an article called *The Beef against the Beef* by J Madeleine Nash. This assessment was the same for all Engineering groups, and in our class we did not modify it at all (unlike other assessments). The task reads as follows in the study guide:

The world is currently facing a mini-crisis with regard to the diseases which are affecting cattle. In many parts of the world, including Southern Africa, foot-and-mouth disease has resulted in the loss of millions of head of cattle. In Europe, mad-cow disease has resulted in the deaths of humans as well as livestock.

The passage *The Beef against the Beef* by JM Nash refers to a book by Jeremy Rifkin, which claims that modern cattle farming is responsible for the problems that the world now faces with regard to diseased cattle. The article is about 1400 words in length and has three bar charts. You are required to summarise the passage and the charts to around one-third the length of the original (+550 words).
Your summary must draw a distinction between the author, Rifkin and the writer of the article, Nash. The bar charts need to be interpreted and analysed. You may provide sub-headings should you wish. Your summary must follow a logical sequence. Provide an introduction and a conclusion which are relevant. Provide a suitable heading. State the number of words used.

Assessment Criteria. The criteria for assessment, other than the above, were as follows (and non-negotiable):

1. Comprehension of the entire passage, reflecting a grasp of the main idea of the passage.

2. Organisation of the information in a coherent fashion, including evidence of being able to decipher the numerical and graphical data presented in the passage.

3. Rewriting the summary in your own words in accordance with the meaning of the original text.

In this article, Nash writes about the rise in demand worldwide for beef. She talks about modern methods of farming which contribute to increases in animal diseases, the opposition to cattle farming of other environmentalists and how tropical forests are destroyed to provide grazing land. Water, a rare commodity, is used most by cattle farming. This leads to global warming, and production of the third highest amount of methane. Nash asserts that overgrazing is destroying grasslands; that the grain used to feed cattle could be given to humans dying of hunger, and that richer nations are benefiting more from cattle farming than poorer ones. She critiques the book Beyond beef: The rise
and fall of the cattle culture by Jeremy Rifkin (1993), which blames cattle farming for many ecological disasters.

As noted, this distinction between Nash and Rifkin as writers of different pieces, and their views, was to be made clear in the summary, preferably in the introduction which should outline the problem. Nash’s conclusions focus on the loss of a bond between man and animal, as other kinds of animal farming are also destroying the environment. She notes that decreasing our beef consumption would be beneficial to the individual’s health and global ecology, but that the real solution would be to control population growth.

Nash uses three bar charts: the first shows the high amount of water consumed by cattle farming in comparison to other grains and products; the second that after two naturally occurring phenomena, cattle farming produces most of the harmful gas, methane; the third that cattle farming is least efficient in terms of food product output compared to input. These charts should be interpreted and integrated into the summary.

Other than format requirements (number of words, title and subtitles, heading, cover page), the summary should be logical and clear.

Analysis: During preparation and after assessment, students expressed considerable discontent with this task and its level of difficulty. They were unhappy as they considered the contents of the article irrelevant to them.

Nomusa: On 24 September I was writing the summary writing which was saying “The Beef against the Beef” which was the most boring thing I’d never met before, in fact it was not boring, it was just that difficulty; it was not understandable, was the many bomberstic words...
Dumiso: *This summary about Beef against Beef is boring, man. It will be better if we're writing a summary about the present issues not boring stuff that happened long ago.*

Students also complained that the requirements for summary writing were not easy to grasp and apply, and that they did not like or enjoy the task. Perhaps, some suggested, the article would have been more suitable for Agriculture students, indicating possibly a preference to stay within disciplinary boundaries. They were quite surprised to have passed at all. Sandile’s journal entry sums up the experience:

_We did some summary writing skills and the class didn't participate as usually. Perhaps they were bored by the topic or they don't know how to summarise. We also summarized some articles and the mood got some boost when everyone take part..._

Mpilo’s journal entry during a preparatory exercise, using a newspaper article, contrasts with the perceptions above:

_We are doing summary and the topic is an interesting topic which is about racism._

Bheki and Dudu comment in their interviews that there was value in border-crossing with reference to the summary and MHB, though they did not like the former:

Connie: *How did you feel about that? That we should read Master Harold and the Boys?*

Bheki: *You know I still have one in my room, I was just checking that this morning. And I felt that it was something good. Coz you know in school we are busy calculating, but in times of Communication we are to sit down, read that. I don't know if it was a essay or short story but it was something, you know, it was a good thing. And I think it should be carried on, be done in other Communication classes like in Electrical Engineering, S1 or Pre-tech. I think it will be carried out; it is a good book to be read by students...*

Connie: *It was not connected to Electrical Engineering, like the article in summary writing. So how did you react to that? What are your thoughts on that?*
Bheki: I don't think that there was a problem with that. As Electrical Engineering students we are not only living on this planet for Electrical Engineering but there is also other issues that are touching on this. So that we also be connected with things around us.

Connie: So do you think in the communication module we should read texts that are not related to Electrical Engineering?
Dudu: Which are not related...
Connie: Like the summary text and Master Harold – they were not related to Electrical...
Dudu: Ja.
Connie: Why should we do that?
Dudu: It is because we are not living in an engineering world, so you must be taught everything that you may come across around the world. If you are engineer you have to talk everything in engineering but not everything is these things, coz we are working with different people, we not going to work with only engineers. We will meet different people from different faculties, so we must be taught everything, just to give a big picture, just to be aware how they are living, how are they different from us. Doesn’t mean if you have different faculties you are so different and we won’t meet again, that’s why it must be told and to show that we can share some ideas with others.

Students scored within a range of 43 to 67% for the summary, with 22 scoring below 60% (the most in comparison to other assessments). Trends contributing to our understanding of whether the outcomes were achieved or not, are outlined below, and were found to be similar to observations made by other lecturers about their own groups.

**Trends towards Achieving Outcomes:** All but three students (90%) fulfilled format requirements, despite the low scores attained (which suggest that the overall outcomes were not as successfully achieved as other tasks). Some were quite creative in the titles used and a few extended this to subtitles. Paragraphs were evident as were attempts at logical constructions. An effort to grasp the discourse, the concepts and the argument was clear and encouraging, given the general difficulties with this task. Editing, redrafting and reviewing were apparent in two-thirds of the scripts (67%).

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Trends against achieving the outcomes. Despite drawing attention to the two writers, students did not mention Nash or any distinction between Nash and Rifkin. They also did not recognise Nash as female, though this may be understandable as gender is often ignored in translation from Zulu, and the names were unfamiliar. They also referred to Rifkin by his first name, informally. The diction revealed some confusion in comprehension: scares water for scarce water; plumbed and plumped the cows for pumped; in tanden and expidient, showing carelessness in transcribing. Chunks were taken from the text, especially the introduction, suggesting the extent of difficulty students had with beginning the task. Irrelevant details leading to nonsensical statements were included in the summaries, for example on cows as vermin:

*Most people think of the word Vermin as scuttling cockroaches and staff like that but Mr. Rifkin, the most prominent polemescist describes it as they are big, brown-eyed ungulates that graze the rolling countryside, chew their cud and moo.*

*The treatment description of the animals from birth to slaughter made Rifkin’s stomach brim with righteous indignation.*

The use of the present tense and confusion between tenses was common:

*The International Rivers Network blames cattle for wasting water resources while Food First denounces the feedlot.*

*Overgrazing of cattle has destroy grasslands.*

There was poor sentence structure, as the following extracts reveal:

*The American environmental movement, Jeremy Rifkin manager to blame the world’s burgeoning population of the bovines for a staggering spectrum of ecological ills.*
Rifkin decide himself to criticize the world for growing fast population of bovines for the falling over range of the study of the relationships between people, animals, plants and their environment ills.

Problems with the use of the article and concord were also common: Cattle had problem of hunger. There was inappropriate use of connectives, leading to flawed logic:

According to Rifkin critics, there were many regularly accused him of taking a nugget of truth. But according to Rifkin, he raised the spectre of beef contaminated with viruses, including a bovine immunodeficiency virus, that label as the cow Aids, although there is no evidence that the virus could infected human.

There were no poverty and global; Rifkin was accused of nuggeting the truth and enlarging it beyond the reason.

Last area was that grain fed to cattle.

Rifkin was very hungry.

Students misunderstood the central issues, in some cases, as this sentence indicates:

Jeremy Rifkin of America was worried about the vermin as the problem that was facing the country.

Some conveniently left out any interpretation of graphs and others reduced the article to too few words. Lastly, the three typed efforts were dogged by poor spelling, sentence structure and punctuation, with no clear paragraph construction.
Assessment 3: Feasibility Report, September 2001

The Outcomes

Specific outcomes: By the end of this task, the student will be able to write a technical report, bearing in mind the subject, the aim and the audience and employing the correct style, structure and format.

Enabling outcomes: To achieve this outcome, the student will be expected to do the following:

1. Distinguish between different types of reports.
2. Conduct research employing various means to obtain data and seek the truth about a problem being posed.
3. Use the appropriate tone, register, style and format to write the report.
4. Organise information, including summarised text where necessary, so that it is presented in a readable manner.

Underpinning knowledge: To achieve the above, the student will be expected to know:

1. The characteristics, scope and uses of reports in an engineering environment.
2. The techniques of conducting research, including the use of the library, the ability to interview people, and the ability to obtain data from measurements, estimates and observations.
3. The techniques for transmitting information in the form of graphical representation to supplement textual material.
4. The procedure in comprehending technical texts and presenting these in summary form.

The Task. The core requirements of this assessment were not modified, again to ensure that course priorities were met and to offer room to compare student responses to different types of tasks, within disciplinary borders and without. However, it was conducted as a group rather than an individual exercise. Students were put into 6 groups and were required to work closely with the detailed information on feasibility reports in the study guide. The task read as follows:

Assume that you serve as technical advisor to the SRC (Students’ Representative Council).

The Management of Mangosuthu Technikon has requested that the SRC, together with other stakeholders, present a feasibility report on converting Dr. Seme Hall into an all-purpose in-door sports arena. The Management has found that no such facility exists and there appears to be a need for such an arena in order to attract prospective students to the Technikon.

Using the guidelines presented, write the report for the SRC. The report must follow the generally accepted conventions of report writing and must be presented to the Principal by the due date.

Assessment Criteria. The following criteria for assessment were outlined:

1. Presentation of report using correct format, structure, style and tone, displaying a high level of readability.

2. Evidence of intense research into the criteria for evaluation as well as evidence of research into the matter being investigated. The writer must show that various types of investigative techniques were employed to obtain raw data.
3. Use of technical terminology indicating a full grasp of the technical and engineering background of the problem being investigated.

In this report, five criteria were deemed essential in determining the feasibility of converting the Pixie Seme Hall on the campus into an indoor sports arena, as a measure to address declining student numbers. These were: effectiveness, technical feasibility, desirability, affordability and preferability. Specs for the hall were provided and students were encouraged to visit it, as well as an indoor sports arena. They were to share tasks in their group, conduct research, draft the report and finally present a comprehensive document with specified sections and subsections, as they would in a work environment. They could choose to write up sections separately, provided they maintained logic and cohesion of contents, or they could write sections up together. An individual and group mark would be given.

The class has done its Summary Writing Unit and is now moving on to Report Writing. A few students did Report Writing last semester in the Pretech group. I try to get a definition of a report, to suss out our understanding of it.
C: Tell me, if you are going to be working as an Electrical Engineer at Eskom, will you be writing reports?
SS: Yes.
Today they seem a little lost and muted. Some have written a site report, but Mbali is “not sure what it is really.” Turns out they haven’t done this yet in their Engineering practicals.
C: We do know what reports are...maybe we haven’t had too much practice. I want to go on to discuss different kinds of reports. The OHP is not working for some reason and I cannot use my slides. Before we go on, I decide to brainstorm “research” and show how it is connected to report writing.
C: What is research?
Gcina: When you find out information.
C: You notice in this word “research” there is the word “search.” Some people say that you do RE-search, that you redo something when you do research... you gather information, to address a question, to solve a problem. Do you think of yourself as a researcher? Have you researched anything?
Pallo says that for the oral presentation he did some research. He went to the library and the power station and walked around and asked questions.

C, linking research and the report to presentation: We research, report, present...this is done in the work environment.

Video Session 7 (4)

Analysis. Students struggled a little with the task at the beginning, then found it both challenging and interesting. Their timetables were full and they lived in different areas, making it difficult for them to meet. Since the task required research on a campus site, class time was set aside for them to meet in their groups to do justice to it. This they appreciated and enjoyed: the venue was made available, and I used the opportunity to assist groups in whatever way possible. Journal entries revealed later that students had in preparation read up on report writing, as this extract shows:

*Buie: A report can be looked at as the “bringing back of news” but when the news involves Science or Engineering, this news must be reported in a way that is verifiable and objective.*

Groups scored within a range of 51% to 76%. The trends discussed below as contributing towards achieving the overall outcomes and negating those outcomes, were found to be quite common to other Engineering groups.

Trends towards Achieving the Outcomes. A tremendous effort was made by all groups, and generally, collaboration among group members was evident. There were concise introductions which summarized the contents of the report. Groups compiled very interesting appendices, which included pi-graphs, bar graphs, list of specs, photocopies of other sports arenas, interview schedules and responses, and pictures from Mantec publications. References were used, indicating the research done. There were detailed and motivated sections on costing under the criterion of affordability. There was
a fair and substantiated sense of why other alternatives were rejected. The limitations and scope of the report were addressed showing a good understanding of 'feasibility.' Students problematised the issues critically, and with detail, producing comprehensive reports. There was one typed report, and presentation was of a higher standard than the summary.

Trends against Achieving the Outcomes. Poor spelling was evident, and format requirements were neglected (headings, numbering etc.). Figures were used carelessly in cost estimates (which were not realistic). Fragments and omissions were found occasionally, leading to gaps in logical argument and vague comments. Concord and prepositions were still a problem for students. Sentences were too long, with poor use of connectives. Likewise, diction could be improved. References were incomplete. Tense was used inappropriately (the past tense, third person was required, except for the recommendations), and there was confusion between conclusions and recommendations. Supporting information was found in the main text instead of the appendix. The overall package was patchy, suggesting poor group work and collaboration.

There was considerable misunderstanding of the criterion of preferability and confusion over other criteria. A tendency to resort to long-winded story-telling, with a degree of repetition in sections discussing different criteria, was also noted. Editing and final drafting were certainly necessary, as typographical errors, incorrect numbering and poor spacing were evident.
Shadrack: Me and my group, we worked hard, very hard, we were preparing the Report writing. We spent hours in the Library doing research...I now know how to write a report but after a lot of work we did. But its better cause we did this in group, I wonder if we were in ones what I was going to do.

Reflective Responses

Two questionnaires were devised and distributed to students, eliciting opinion confidentially on their classroom experiences. The aim of this data collection tool was to formalize self-reflection (metacognition) about their own learning, to encourage students to think critically about what we were doing, to use writing as a tool to learn and to engage in the process of assessing themselves. The questionnaires will be discussed separately, although responses overlap.

The focus of the questions was on classroom experience. Responses to questions are discussed, noting strong themes and trends as well as individual voices. A recurring theme is substantiated by data across questions. For example, students describe their classroom experience as free, in response to Questions 1, 3 and 5 of Reflective Responses I as well as Question 6 in Reflective Responses II. Similarly, their evolving thoughts on Master Harold and the Boys span a range of questions.

Reflective Responses I. Only thirteen students completed these questionnaires. Perhaps taking them home over the September break increased the likelihood of a poor return. Regardless, the feedback from these students is valuable for this study. The questionnaire read as follows:

- How would you describe the Communication class? Is it what you expected (in terms of other classes, your expectations etc.)?
2. Have you encountered any new concepts or ideas in class that interest you?

3. What activities/experiences have you enjoyed most in class, and why?


5. Any other comments?

Question 1: How would you describe the Communication class? Is it what you expected (in terms of other classes, your expectations etc.)? Responses were very positive, focusing on the comfortable atmosphere in class and how it fostered a love for Communication. The class was refreshing, in contrast to other more difficult subjects, though that also depended on what was being done in the class.

I would describe this class as the best I ever attended. The atmosphere is pretty good. I get as much information as I wasn't expecting. Hence, it has created the love of Communication. I always feel happy when it's Wednesday, Thursday and Friday because I know the class will be good. (1)

Our classroom was clearly a different experience, as students felt free, which made getting to know one another so easy. They also felt free because they were not compelled to present on something related to Engineering, which was the expectation, and because they could express their individuality:

Communication class is a very interesting class. It wasn't what I expected in terms of other classes cause we were free to express what personalities we had i.e. what we liked. (11)

The curriculum experience was also different, more realistic (related to their own experiences), and made them feel at home. This phrase speaks volumes, as it indicates the ultimate degree of comfort and ease which one associates with family relationships and the type of interaction one has at home. Students expanded on this in their interviews:
Dumiso: We just feel like you are home. That feeling, that belonging. You belong.

Pallo: Relaxed, look forward to the class. At home you don’t have to check what you are going to discuss, you just talk about anything. That was another nice thing about our class. Sometimes I could come up with something, discuss it for sometime before we do what we actually prepared for that day.

Though the expectation was that the class would make students bored, and there would be lots of hard work only, this was not so: it was the only class that one student looked forward to, and for most it was interesting and full of fun.

*It is a nice class and once you’re in you feel at home but at first (before group elections) I thought Communication class was the only class that was going to make me bored, but now it doesn’t like as I thought it was going to be.* (8)

There were two somewhat negative responses, one indicating that the class was very fine but that reading was time wasting. The other indicated that it was possibly not good all the time, though colloquial use of English as an ESL speaker may imply quite the opposite: *Sometimes it is a good class, no.*

**Question 2: Have you encountered any new concepts or ideas in class that interest you?** There was a definite YES in response to this question. Concepts listed include prejudice; the interview; the idea of keeping a journal and ideas generated by me (the lecturer) and other students, made possible by the open atmosphere in class.

*Definitely I have, like the idea of keeping a journal. It teaches me to take note of the things happening around me, rather than in a daily basis but even in a weekly basis.* (7)

*I can proudly answer this question by boldly saying Yes. There are so many concepts which we have discussed about in the class which have interested me. One of them is “prejudice.”* (1)
The class was friendly, leading to a love for the work done. New ideas were learned through the presentations, and from *Master Harold and the Boys*. These were useful to students as human beings, and helped increase their vocabulary. They also learned how to do things via presentation, orally, and how to sustain communication. Students recognised that there was a need for confidence and volume when presenting.

The idea of freedom in class, of videotaping, working in groups and sharing ideas, were all new to them.

*Yes, as people were presenting I found many ideas that are useful as a human being. There are many new concepts I have encountered which were increasing my vocabulary. They were from: the lecturer, my classmate and *Master Harold and the boys.* (5)*

**Question 3: What activities/experiences have you enjoyed most in class, and why?**

Students listed various activities/experiences as most enjoyable. Being videotaped was a highlight for many, who often connected it, along with the games we played, with a sense of freedom (see Question 5 for further comment).

*We were given much freedom than the other classes for the presentation and I just love videotaping.* (9)

*Dumiso: The games made us open up, even if you ask yourself, how did I do that. You felt free to do anything.*

*Connie: I'm glad that you mentioned that word. Some students have also talked about that they felt free in class, they felt at home in class. Let me look at that word “freedom”: what do you mean, you felt free – free from what, free to do what?*  

*Dumiso: It like something when you are studying, you have that pleasure- ness in you, you say I want to do my best, but when you realise that whatever you do the person that supervise you give students freedom, you always try to do our best.*
Other activities and experiences that they enjoyed most included reading other
texts (crossing disciplinary borders); having a comfortable venue; the lessons taught and
advice gained by listening to others presenting; delivering a speech, which was a chance to
talk about themselves and the things they loved, and finally, keeping a journal. The
journal allowed them to reflect on themselves and a more recent history, as they
responded to newspaper articles. Reading helped them discover new words, which
improved their English and vocabulary:

*Reading. I enjoy reading. It also helps me discover new words. It also give
improvement towards my English.* (7)

The oral presentation at this stage of the semester stood out as most popular. It helped students get to know one another because they could speak about themselves, in a
personal way.

*The presentation. Because I was talking about my family. Something that
interest me the most is: Everyone was happy because there were doing
something they know. I gain many things in communication class.* (3)

**Question 4: Which activities/experiences raise questions for you? Explain further.**

Questions were raised about whether it was necessary to change classes in the beginning
(I presume when students were put into groups), and about why we were reading *Master
Harold and the Boys.* The following response, echoed in the interviews with Bandla (and
Pallo, in Chapter Two), captures the sense that reading literature is not the norm:

*Reading a novel in class! Didn't understand why but I was happy with it
because we learnt more things excluding our syllabus and of course my
reading skills, were up graded, I suppose.* (11)

Bandla: *I'm not good with reading. It was okay. I only read inside of class.
Once I'm out of class I don't read, I only read the newspapers.*

Connie: *Do you think it (MHB) had a place in the Communication module?*
Bandla: Yes.
Connie: Why?
Bandla: Literature, people like me who don't do literature, so it helps just to get another aspect of life.

The experience of preparing for an interview raised other questions, including the way marks were allocated in the presentations.

Is the interview it left me with big question like preparation for interview. Before I did not think it before. But after makes me to know it. (12)

There was no response from seven students, possibly because they did not grasp my intent in asking the question, and the use of the phrase “raise questions”. Some commented in classroom discussion that they were surprised as they had never been asked evaluative questions such as these before.

Question 5: Any other comments? Positive comments indicate that the Communication class was the class students liked best; it was good and gave them a sense of freedom. Being different also made the class nice, easier, more interesting and enjoyable.

Our communication class is very good and I wish other classes to be free like us so that everyone will enjoy being in class as ourselves. (5)

The idea that we made things slightly different from other classes was very nice and I found things easier and raised my interests. (11)

Students elaborated on this sense of feeling free in the interviews:

Tola: ...it was interesting coz I've said we just enjoyed ourselves, being just ourselves. There was nothing to be scared of, even if you were in front of the class we were just free to talk, to communicate with everyone.
Connie: You actually used the other word that I was going to talk about, which is free. People also wrote all the time that in the class they felt free. I want to know free to do what, freedom from what?
Tola: Like eh...in other classes you don't feel free to say something coz you are

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scared to say something because it is not right. Ja, in our class we were free to say anything, about yourself, about the class and everything we were just talking about.

Criticism from one student suggested that there was too much freedom of choice, leading to students negotiating terms such as when to hand in an assessment or what criteria to use to assess a task. Freedom here is thus perceived negatively. For this student, it meant not giving the traditional Communication curriculum adequate attention.

There is too much freedom, students if there are other things/work to do and communication they rather do that other subject knowing that they will ask for more time to do communication, in such a way that others they ended up knowing nothing in that particular part. (2)

A wish was expressed that Communication could have been scheduled for this group in Semester 1, which is longer and would have given us more time together. Suggestions were also made that we arrange a debate to improve vocabulary, that we continue with Communication up to S3 and that other aspects such as learning skills are included in the module.

There was no response from six students, I presume for reasons similar to those cited already.

Reflective Responses II. Twenty-seven students completed this questionnaire. By this stage students were far more aware of our different course plan, with its focus on performance. The questionnaire read as follows:

1. How do you feel about using material outside the discipline in the Communication class?
2. Comment on the literary text we are using, indicating whether you think it “works” in terms of developing language.

3. Comment on three things you have learned about yourself or others in the course of the semester, in this class.

4. What activities/experiences have you enjoyed most in class, and why?

5. Which activities/experiences raise questions for you? Explain further.

6. Any other comments?

Question 1. How do you feel about using material outside the discipline in the Communication class? Responses indicate that discipline-crossing was valued. The majority of students felt that border-crossing gave them information about the world and taught them new things, of which they were previously unaware. It succeeded in broadening their minds about ways of communicating and behaving. One student acknowledged the fact that the class experience fostered the sharing of information.

*I feel good. I am happy to find more information concerning our world. It helps me to know how to deal with things, because in this class we share information.* (1)

Topics outside the discipline (Engineering) were more interesting since they raised issues students could relate to, which were relevant to them. Concepts such as racism and the effects of the past on the present, were considered important to understand. These were clarified through newspaper articles and discussion, which encouraged the sharing of ideas and different views.
...The article about racism was really interesting coz, now I know a difference between a racist and a non-racist. There were many things that I didn’t know but now I feel that I have a clear picture about racism. It was good for me and other students to be informed about this in the class. (2)

Newspapers in particular were appreciated. Students felt it was useful to be reading the papers when the World Conference Against Racism was in progress. One observed that the only time he could to read newspapers was in this class, as he did not have the opportunity (meaning the means, or money) to buy newspapers.

A few students observed simply that they felt comfortable with the use of MHB, in contrast with those few who blanched at its graphic expression in the beginning. They found the text interesting and enjoyed reading it, as it also informed us more about our (apartheid) past. It seemed to me that what they brought to the class, their cultural literacy, became instrumental in developing more critical literacies, as they began to question the government and education, as well as social systems of the past, and to evaluate what had changed.

Students felt that engaging material other than a mathematical/scientific text was relaxing and stimulating, but also necessary. It was useful in planning and researching for a presentation and interviews. The idea of the journal, which brought in personal information, was different from that of the business portfolio or other modules, which denied such information. The use of material outside the discipline helped build their communication skills and confidence.

It was good because we learnt a lot on that materials. I mean the ideas I’ve got from the text book gave strength, on our behaviour and motivates me alot. (17)
Border-crossing with learning material and text was implicitly connected to border-crossing in terms of curriculum and instruction. To introduce new methods, ideas and patterns meant a new way of doing things, in contrast with set patterns. How did students feel about this? While perceptions are conveyed in journal entries and responses to more than one question in the Reflective Responses I and II, Thabani’s concluding comments in his interview suggest that the methodology adopted was strange and unexpected but valued:

Connie: Are there any other comments that you like to make about the class?  
Thabani: What I can say is that I wish that something like this could be continued...other lectures to experience, to do something like that - although it is not easy but I just wish that it could happen.  
Connie: Why?  
Thabani: For the benefit of students so that they can easily learn, because I think that purpose of communication is to learn to communicate to each other, with each other, not only about our course. In any way of communication I think that it is the purpose, I think the way you have done it for us, we are serving a good example. Even now where we are, we are still knowing each other. Our behaviour, all this stuff, we gained a lot about how to communicate with each other.

One student registered confusion about the term “material” while at the same time responding positively to the question. Another felt that while the newspapers were okay, *Master Harold and the Boys* was boring, indicating under Question 3 that he/she hated reading because it was too much work and took too long. Only one student did not find the use of other material valuable at all, since it had no apparent long-term use for his career as an engineer.

*I think it was not good to use other materials which are not relevant to our discipline, we must be used to it because at the end we will be using it.* (22)
Question 2: Comment on the literary text we are using, indicating whether you think it “works” in terms of developing language. Most students felt that reading Master Harold and the Boys in class “worked” for a number of reasons (see also responses quoted in Chapter Six). Their English improved, making them more fluent. It helped develop language just as reading novels and newspapers did. Students’ vocabulary grew and their grammar, pronunciation and speech improved. New terms were learned which could be used in everyday communication.

It does help because at times you come across the word you are unfamiliar with you contact your dictionary and that develop our vocabulary. To read in the class does help to be familiar with pronouncing words you have not seen before. (15)

Yes the literary text we are using is very good because most of the time it developing language. In other words we have learn much and is really amazing. And you work or do something elucidating something. Using artifacts it was a brilliant idea to developing communication. (20)

Yes, it also works. It develops skills on reading, speaking and understanding as well. (23)

Both reading and learning standards were upgraded. The manner in which reading occurred in class (turn-taking) was the best, since everyone shared and this developed their language. This encouraged students (as learners?). They were all given a chance to read, which helped improve reading with understanding. It revealed what people were trying to say even when they said nothing, but their bodies spoke. It provided information about dance. Writing and listening skills were developed as well, and the text was considered educational.

Definitely, because we were all given chances to read. So its did help us to improve our reading with understanding. (3)
I think it works. Because we find that our English is improved. (1)

We use a very nice literary text. It make everybody to encourage learning. (4)

*Master Harold and the Boys* also reminded students how people (blacks) were treated in the past by whites (their masters). They learned that it was important to treat others as equals.

*We learn that it is good to treat every people in an equal way. (1)*

**Connie:** So why you think we chose that book?

**Dudu:** I think the aim of choosing that book was to give us the clear picture of how it was and how it is now, how improved, how improvement shows, how is the racism now, how have the racists improved themselves, and encouraged each other. At time of apartheid blacks and whites were not allowed to be together or to, like be in the same school or doing the same functions, like teamwork. But now as you can see on television and the plays, whatever, now they are interacting, they work hand-in-hand. I think that was the aim of showing how the improvement is.

Literacy learning and exposure to the themes of MHB led students to situate themselves in the world in which they lived, and also to critique it. I tried actively throughout the semester to bring in stimuli which generated dialogue on our socio-political and cultural lives, to show, as Freire (1970) would argue, the critical themes of our times. Student responses to this and other questions on MHB suggested that they were beginning to understand that language, literacy and learning did not occur in a vacuum. We also had an active role to play in shaping our literacies. Pallo and Sandile’s stories (in Chapter Two), for example, reflect an ability to read both the word and world of MHB with an awareness of the power relations underlying, and of their active role in not only...
making meaning, but subverting it. They seemed to register, further, the role of language
and how we use it, in constructing a reality.

There were some important dissenting voices, which make a valuable contribution
to the analysis and evaluation of our curricular experience. A few students reacted
strongly against the use of profanity in the drama, arguing that they did not need those
words to communicate. One student felt that it worked despite being boring, and that the
language used fostered misunderstanding. The text required effort.

\[\text{It works although sometimes it is boring. I mean while you're reading}
\text{“Master Harold” you get lost through the misunderstanding of the language}
\text{that is used. (2)}\]

Another suggested that the timing for the text (the time allocated to reading it) needed to
be reviewed. He would have liked more time. While one student initially considered
reading MHB a waste of time, she found eventually that she gained a lot, including an
improved vocabulary.

Finally, a student observed that while reading the text helped, there was still a
need to explain why we were reading at all, and that it did not help with discipline-
specific work (which took precedence):

\[\text{Yes it help, but there is a need to explain why there is a need to reading texts in}
\text{the first place. Secondly take out the stigma of reading text that are related to}
\text{your discipline (electrical) cause when given a task then it comes back and}
\text{hinders the way you will perform on that task course its on your discipline.}
\text{(13)}\]

My explanation in the beginning for why we were reading a text, and this text in
particular, was that it was a tool to enable performance strategies such as role-playing. It
would inform preparation for the assessments, especially the oral presentation. I also
mentioned in the discussion which ensued over many weeks, that the contents would share with us not just the history of our country, played out in the lives of three characters, but that of education. Why was this important? I felt that we needed to revitalise the curriculum as we changed our methods to that of OBE. We needed to think about our own learning, as active involved participants who sought to make meaning out of our own experiences. As an artifact of the class and the research experience, *Master Harold and the Boys* would, I argued, challenge us on issues surrounding difference, relationships and literacies.

*Question 3: Comment on three things you have learned about yourself or others in the course of the semester, in this class.* Responses included a range of sentiments. Getting to know others in the class and the opportunity to meet others was valued immensely. People, students discovered, were in fact, *quite nice!*

*It was a great opportunity for me to meet other students that I do not know. Our teacher was kind to us during the class. Communicating with other people gave me a chance to get different ideas about certain things...* (9)

One common lesson was the breaking of stereotypes. Students felt strongly that we should not and did not (in this class) undermine others (*as no-one is better than the other*), or stereotype them.

*Connie: Do you think we broke any stereotypes in the class, you know we talked about that in the beginning of the year? Bheki: Ya, why not, we also talked about the electrical engineering looking down at the mechanical engineering. As we touched on that everyone knew, never judge a book by its cover.*
Students recorded that we should remember our similarities as people, accept our lives and do good. Improving communication and the need to communicate with others was acknowledged, as was the management of aggression and the urge to control. They learned practical and useful things such as job application procedures in class. In the response below, as in many others (and in the journals), there is also comment on my role, indicating that it came under scrutiny.

_I learned about writing a application for a job. There were many things I never know about it. I learned that communication cannot only be learned in one form. As we were not like other classes. I learned that a lecturer like ours is not here for being our teacher but also our useful friend._ (24)

Working in groups was a challenge for students. It meant that they had to learn how to work with others and conduct research together. Teamwork, they felt, was instrumental in gaining knowledge, and the advantages of group work over working as an individual were observed. Learning to listen was an important part of communication. It was good to gain other, different views and respect them.

_Firstly I’ve learned how to work with other people, by this I mean as a group. I learned that to work with other people is the best way of improving my knowledge like we’ve been doing the reports as a group and representing our interviews._ (5)

_I learn that it is good to know each and everyone of my classmate. I learn the way of communicating with other students. I learn how good to work in groups. It helps because you find the views of others, therefore you begin to know someone by something he/she said._ (1)

Losing one’s fear of public speaking was also considered a great achievement in more than a few responses.

_I’m somehow shire in front of an audience._
_I can participate great in a group work._ (18)
Mbali spoke of the value of reading *Master Harold and the Boys* in overcoming her shyness:

*Connie:* Mbali, do you remember we read *Master Harold and the Boys* in class?
*Mbali:* *Master Harold and the Boys.*
*Connie:* Did it interest you?
*Mbali:* Yes, it was very nice...
*Connie:* How did you feel about it, reading a text like that in class?
*Mbali:* Well, it’s like, I think it was very encouraging because...that you even let us to read the book and you know, honestly I can’t read in front of the class but I had to read in front of the class, and I got rid of my shyness.

The class experience thus helped students to gain confidence. There was a growing ease and sense of having freedom to be themselves in class. They could always try harder and do better, if they were motivated, as they were in this class.

*From the oral presentation I realised that I can stand in front of more than 30 people and express myself. From group work I realised my potential of contributing my mind to something united and superb. From the whole class I came to see people (fellow students) on their genuine personalities than the way I used to think they are.* (15)

The focus on orality uncovered talents students were quite unaware of, and in the process developed their communicative ability. The challenge of being a second language speaker of English was confronted, with an attendant dislike of reading and oral tasks. However, the importance of reading was also acknowledged, as the varied responses below indicate:

*In this class I find that Communication subject is not for the class period but is for every time (Eg. When we finish at class on evening we always write a journal about we did in class). My lecture do understand that we are learning English language which not our language.* (4)

*I am capable of doing better.*
*I don’t like to read - “I hated Master Herold.”* (8)
Three things: Self esteem.

Give the best performance whenever you are asked to.

Read as much as you can. (13)

Students learned alternate modes for expressing themselves, through the learning activities
and games on presentation (formal and informal), and by seeing the potential of the body
as an instrument for communication.

I've learned a lot. Firstly I've learned about Body Language to use
your body in a certain way. I can use my body too. I've learned to
work with other people and it's fine. (11)

The effect of using artifacts and performance was discovered: as corroborated in
the journals, communication was not confined to the class as a subject. New words and
concepts were learned, and assessments did not hinder one in learning.

I have learn some new words like, artifacts, critirian, letaracy etc.
I have learn how to present something in front of people whether it is formal or
not. One day I have learn the things you must do when you write exams i.e.
how to prepare. (12)

Finally, students also registered a need to notice world events as part of learning.

Connie: Do you remember we talked about border crossing? That wasn't an
Electrical Engineering text, we crossed borders, like crossing borders from
one country to the next. We were reading something that was not related to
Electrical Engineering...

Justina: Yes, anyway, it's cool sometimes because we don't have to focus on
the course, you have to know what is happening at the other side of the world. I
can say it is good, yet it wasn't connected to the course.

Question 4: What activities/experiences have you enjoyed most in class, and why?

Responses indicated that the oral presentation (Assessment 1) and interview
performance (Assessment 4) were by far the activities enjoyed most in class. Students
gave various reasons for their preference. A summary of responses is provided below.
Some listed more than one activity, with overlaps. It must also be borne in mind that role-playing was associated with the interviews (final assessment), and that the oral presentation and final performance required group work.

Table 1
Preference for Classroom Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Enjoyed Most</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oral presentation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The interview (performance piece)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with others/group work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report writing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CV writing on computer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary writing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role-playing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading MHG</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking photographs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All!</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one student rated reading MHB as the most enjoyable activity, possibly because this activity stood out as the most unusual and unexpected, in the light of the existing curriculum and other modules at the technikon. It ran against the grain, and unlike games and performance, which were integrated more easily into the ebb and flow of the class, required substantial individual effort. Other than reflecting and examining, the effort of reading was off-putting.

The responses below capture not only the pleasure but also the significance generated by the activities students rated highly:

*The oral presentation because I was talking about myself.*
*The interview. Now I know how to behave in an interview.*
*It was good to work with the people who are serious with work.*
Presentations. During presentation I learned about other life's that students live under and I also enjoyed it because I helped us to not to be afraid of somebody else. (10)

Presenting and interviews. It takes a lot of preparing and it was marvellous to motivate my classmates. The interview truth stretch my mind and give me the idea of what to expect. (17)

I enjoyed most in class a interview because people were showing their different characters and it was interesting. I enjoyed writing a feasibility report because it stretch our mind, not facing in Electrical Eng. only. (24)

Performing a play of a job interview because it was like a real thing, whereas we were just playing.

Taking pictures of the class, it showed togetherness and friendship.

The presentation because it was funny and I had to laugh at what was said in class. (27)

Bheki was very emphatic about the value of both the oral presentation and the final interview performance:

Connie: We also played games in class and we did performance activities. Which did you like? Was there anything that stood out for you?

Bheki: Of course, all of them. One of them we did firstly was the presentation, I for one presented on myself. I like to tell my fellow students and you as well as a lecturer all about my background, my academic life from SSA up to this far. All the achievements that I have achieved was a good thing. And the other thing I can remember was the interviews, the last block in the literature in engineering. I cannot get any job without having gone to an interview. It was improving my skills of being able to talk before my panel. It was a good thing.

Connie: Do you think those games and activities made you participate more in class?

Bheki: I for one participated more in class, I was always active and ask questions. I do what I am assigned to do and overall I’m happy with that.

Question 5: Which activities/experiences raise questions for you? Explain further.

Students had a number of questions, which we addressed in class. One saw no need to read Master Harold and the Boys, as it was not related to assessment. My rationale for
not assessing the drama specifically was that as a new experience for second language
speakers with a range of competencies, it would possibly intimidate some and privilege
others. I wanted it to be an ongoing, integral classroom activity and experience, and saw
its value in the influence it would have on the formal assessments. In any event,
responses to the text and the final three questions we explored were required in the
journals, which were assessed. In the interviews, students were divided on whether we
should have assessed MHB or not, though further rationale was offered only by Bheki,
Sandile and Pallo:

Connie: Do you think we should have assessed Master Harold and the Boys?
Bheki: I believe everything that is done in this school they have to be
accountable. It should have been assessed and we should have got marks
because we were understanding the book.
Sandile: Give marks on that? I think it depends on you, how did you structure
it.
Pallo: Literally, it depended from person to person. I would not have a
problem with it personally but some other people might not have found it easy,
to actually contribute towards our mark.

One student was uncertain whether reading the text was compulsory but conceded its
value, while another felt that it was a negative experience:

It was that of reading the text, Master Harold. What was the need of reading
this text? I didn’t saw any need coz I didn’t get any marks for that. (2)

Text reading. Did not understand whether it was compulsory to
read/something else but I soon got an answer and I realized it was a very good
idea and I enjoyed it. (12)

For another, Sandile’s reference to the painful recall of past trauma resonated strongly:

Reading Master Harold and the boys. It gave me negative impact and bring
back the healed wounds. (17)

In his journal, Thabani explains why this may be so (see also the page from his journal):
After all, disrespect and apartheid is something that I hate too much. It is something that hurt me and is something that I cannot stand for, so although these was a story but what I noticed now, it went deep to our mind and we were touched as students, the way whites treated our fathers...

A further response expressed some perplexity that we had wrapped up the discussion on Master Harold and the Boys too quickly:

It was only when we ended the text and the conversation seems to have taken only a day. I was amazed whether such along story can take only a day. (15)

The student is actually referring to our final discussion of the three questions about recalling the past. We had in fact read and analysed the text throughout the semester. It is valuable to me that he registers a need for more time to conclude our discussion: the questions raised complex issues which possibly needed more reflection.

Another student questioned why we were role-playing in the interviews as opposed to practising for a real interview. Also, the article they were required to summarise, The Beef against the Beef, was difficult and not related to their discipline. Many responses supported this view.

It puzzles me to this day why we had to do a summary about beef. We are electrical engineering students. It would have been more suited to Agriculture students. (14)

With reference to report writing, one student found it to be difficult and another commented on the need to improve student intake at Mantec, assuming mistakenly that the task was a real-life scenario. One student reflected on his performance, asking why his grades were low when so much effort had been made. Also, why was I, as lecturer, being so nice!
Students also raised personal issues. One questioned whether a student who praised her father was insensitive to those who had no father, and another wondered about the truthfulness and accuracy of the information presented in the orals. They reflected critically on some of their new experiences, asking what they required and what impact and meaning they had:

*Role playing - interviews.* The question I asked myself is that was that really me, acting speaking in front of an audience not being nervous at all. Really this class has been the best ever. (18)

*Oral presentation.* I was first ask myself why we are doing an oral presentation because we are in tertiary level. But eventually I was realised that it is important because some jobs need the society to work together. (20)

One student questioned the need for workshops in the Learning Assistance Centre and another felt that the business communication portfolio, which was not required, would have been useful.

Finally, two student’s questions reflected positively on the class:

*Why doesn’t other classes improve their communication skills like our class.* (19)

*There were no activities that raised questions for me, instead I gain more from all the activities in the class.* (21)

Five students did not comment.

*Question 6: Any other comments?* Responses to this question centered around the fact that students enjoyed the class, which they thought was good. They felt free (a recurrent theme, as noted) and valued the open, friendly, interesting atmosphere in class. They encouraged one another, and found that getting to know others and building relationships was not as daunting as they had thought.
What can I say is that, I enjoyed the communication class. Because we are free; open to each and everyone of our classmate. (1)

Although a few negative responses to other questions on reading *Master Harold and the Boys* were recorded, most students felt that it was a great idea. A recurring explanation was that reading MHB taught us what we had forgotten or did not know about our past, and also improved communication and language use.

*The idea of reading “Master Harold and the boys” was great. It is a very good book to read.* (11)

Reasons for this view are offered in other responses and in the interviews (extracts presented throughout this section).

Connie: *Do you think reading Master Harold and Boys in class aloud, did it change the way you communicated? Did it have an impact on your communication?*

Bheki: *Firstly our reading skills were improved, and then the audibility. When you speak before the class you have to be audible enough...the two qualifications were met: Audibility and good reading skills were met...There are so many things that I have learnt. One of them was a good presentation or good communication...You know, I am a stammerer and I think, I think I have improved in my communicating of others. I think I have learned something, like before I came into this institution, it was one of the best lectures I was attending in that semester.*

Working in groups was also noted as a positive experience:

*Working in groups was very good because its cut-off the work. It helps us to share ideas and knowledge so that we can come up with a good solution.* (26)

Students wished me well, thanked me and hoped that I would continue using the same procedures and style. Some hoped we could continue the following semester with Communication. While one student felt we should continue till Semester 4, others felt the module should be scheduled in Semester 3 or 4, which would be more appropriate. CV

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writing and interviews should also be scheduled later in the semester as they were needed just before students left the technikon.

The timing for interviews and formal report writing need to be reviewed. What if you introduced Comms 2 in S3 or S4 for us to remember what we learned as we were gonna use it. (17)

One student felt that other classes could benefit from the way ours had proceeded.

I think if maybe other classes may do as we did in our class, I think people may progress in communicating skills. (23)

Seven students did not comment.

Video Sessions

We taped ten sessions (lessons) during the semester, of approximately 90 minutes each. I transcribed each session and found the opportunity to re-view our classroom interaction both visually and in print most useful. The sessions have not been edited except for headings, and sometimes capture long periods of students in group work or reading Master Harold and the Boys. Others show me as teacher-facilitator in a variety of activities and modes of communication: telling, using the overhead projector, hinting, reading, repeating, asking questions, modifying, summarizing, concluding, directing and facilitating. I also move around, taking questions from the groups as they prepared and practised for their assessments.

Video clips in this chapter bring a “visual” representation in when it has most direct relevance. I include below selected excerpts from the videotaped sessions, in order to highlight issues directly related to the thrust of this research.
We Want to Talk

C: What do you want to do, if you think you are presenting on a topic. You are referring to the oral presentation. What do you want to do?
S: We want to talk.

Video Session 1(7)

In context, this snippet referred to a query about whether students needed to use an aid or artifact in their oral presentation or whether they could simply talk. The course coordinator had already informed them that it was compulsory. For me, the simple assertion We want to talk, taken out of that context but voiced right at the beginning of the semester, is a leading comment on students' needs and expectations. Wanting to talk in class is hardly unusual in some contexts of learning, and is certainly a welcome intention. Yet in many instances, we have succeeded in silencing our students, partly because our methodology and curriculum tends to equate working and learning with being quiet or exclusively with writing (although being noisy and busy need not signify learning either), and partly because we may not want to hear dissonant voices. We want to talk became a silent mantra I heard throughout the semester, as I planned and prepared for my classes.

In the interviews, Justina comments on talking:

...somehow I learnt some new things. Like other people when you talk about someone, we talk about himself or herself, we talk about her family. I learnt a lot. Like trying to get to know people. Some students, they having that thing, you know, Communication class you have to talk and talk. I think we have to get people to get used to talking to others. They hate it, some of them...but I think the way you were conducting the class, you make us feel that it is not so bad, we are just peers together talking.

In the reflective responses and interviews I found answers to questions about students' pleasure in freedom to speak, to express an opinion, in this class, relating to the
politics of orality in teaching-learning environments. They were reacting to the norm here, even in Communication classes, where rules about when to speak, what to say and how to address the lecturer dominated and intimidated. Their own stories were generally considered insignificant, their names forgotten, and the rich oral history of their indigenous cultures ignored. Our curriculum attempted to change that.

Playing the Building Character Relations Game

Playing Boal's games in class generated interaction and exchange, as well as a new self-conscious awareness of how we communicate. The Building Character Relations Game was a firm favourite, as noted. Tolakele's comments in her journal after the first occasion we had to play the game, affirm this:

_We did something that has got to do with sign language. People talking with their hands. I didn’t understand it at first but when the students were doing it in front I realise it...What made me laugh: when they were projecting. Thabani was like a serious lawyer. Bandla was a father but Connie said “Maybe he is an old family member'. That was funny! I laughed because after Connie had said that I could really think of my grandfather._

I decided to create another opportunity to play this game:

_C: The last time we played this game we didn’t speak at all. This time if you want to speak, you can speak.
Themba, Dudu, Wonderboy and Nomsa need lots of explanation and help with this (although we had some knowledge and experience of the game from the previous week).

Themba: AIDS is the killer. AIDS is caused by the virus. AIDS kills. (This is probably because I have a slide up which has a graphic of AIDS, though there is another one too of a happy family; he probably thought I meant to direct the theme of the game and the relationships portrayed. Then, with the next actor, it gets really complicated!)

Wonderboy: God was creating us with a purpose, so she or he must have a participation from the law of God! (Smiling and preaching).
C, wondering what Boal would do and trying to get things in hand: What is your relationship to him? (Referring to Themba)._
This elicits laughter.

C: Let's start again. I'm going to read this out to you.

I have Boal in class and read from it, hoping this will clarify the rules.

To S: Themba has chosen the role of counsellor, so we will see what you are going to be?

Themba starts again: AIDS is the killer...so it is advisable to use a condom.

Wonderboy appears to be at a loss. He makes gestures showing strong confusion and then his body language suddenly changes as he gestures that he's okay (smiling, thumbs up). He shows us that he is at ease and has gained understanding.

Nomsa comes into the picture crying and asking questions, inaudibly, but with signs and a huddled posture. She then starts talking: I am sick. (Voice not clear). There is first an inappropriate reaction at first from Wonderboy, then he gets serious and listens.

Dudu comes in as friend, reassuring and sympathetic: I understand that you have AIDS. You can be able to get help. You have to eat a balanced diet. You mustn't give up and say you are going to die.

She counsels Nomsa and hugs her. Nomsa smiles at last.

The end.

This episode is quite moving even though it has been funny too; there's a sense of accomplishment.

The class claps.

Video session 3 (8)

This second and initially stilted version of the game, which we modified by allowing speech, offers a snapshot of classroom dynamics. It traces the progress role players made as they grasped the rules of the game and of role-playing, then of the unfolding, improvised situation as verbal and non-verbal communication occurred. The game brought a number of concerns together, linking the world of the classroom with that of home and society through relationships, emotions, crises, AIDS, friendship, exhortation and hope. There was a wrapt audience, despite the initial misunderstandings.

We could have ended the game when it failed, initially, but persisting led to meaningful involvement from both participants and audience.
Reading *Master Harold and the Boys*

*We start reading the text, and everyone is really into it (why does this, which should be the norm, sound so incredible, so unusual?). Pallo is the most proficient. The mention of a love story by Sam on page 5 elicits laughter, as though students identified. The actors-to-be sit with their heads down and concentrate on reading, and there is little projection.*

*Video Session 3 (9)*

*The students read on. Thabani as Sam, reads with panache in his strong voice, as the MC announcing the names of the couples in the dance championship. The class is appreciative! Thabani’s effort spurs Gcina on. She gets more expressive, loud and clear. But neither looks up to make any eye contact; they are glued to the text, perhaps understandably. Nomsa starts to read as Willie.*

*Video Session 9 (10)*

The reading styles of students did change over the semester, as they began to enjoy reading aloud and let themselves into roles, eagerly taking turns. The first video clip was transcribed from an early video session, when we introduced *Master Harold and the Boys*, and the second from the second last session. As we reached the final crisis and denouement in the text, which ran parallel to our thought-provoking discussions about its contents and style, and why we should read it at all, students’ use of voice and intonation, and their capacity to act, to express emotion and to perform, were much stronger and more exciting than before. As described in Chapter Two, Sandle made a daring move one day, upstaging the text by changing the words uttered by Willie. This I consider to be a marker of students’ changing attitudes to reading. They gained confidence, position and power through this activity in class.
Discomfort with Diction

Tolakele, talking about how she bungles things the first time she does them, has another first in class: she uses a four-letter word, which is an odd occurrence here, certainly in the classroom. Someone expresses shock, which doesn’t deter her at all. Is it a sign of how comfortable she is, that she is speaking naturally? During her presentation she has the most catchy tone and watchable recounting style, though she is normally more contained.

Video Session 6 (11)

Students reacted negatively and critically to Tola’s use of a four-letter word, as they did to the use of expletives in Master Harold and the Boys. The reflective responses and journals confirm a grave discomfort with what Thabani describes in his journal as filthy language. It was not acceptable from a religious point of view. This feature of the text made them wonder why we were reading it in class at all (though in secondary schools, it has been a set work prescribed text for matric). In response I had to explain that the use of these words was consistent with a realistic depiction of the dialect spoken by Coloureds in the Western Cape, and should not deter us from engaging with the text and finding value and meaning in it, and indeed, through the diction and register.

Group Work

C: What I want to discuss now is the next assessment which is connected with this letter... and as I said to you this is meant to be a fun exercise... which will make you use all the skills that we’ve developed already. Now some of the skills have to do with voice, projection, speaking... right, we’re trying to practise reading... role-playing, and performance which we say are also literacies...er... because in a sense you have had some written work done already... and we’re trying to develop some of those skills that you’ve started developing already, where you’re working in groups... How do you feel about that? Working in groups, is it a good experience?

SS (general response): Yes.

Then some different reactions: No-o.

C: Give me one reason with NO and one with YES...
Pallo: It definitely cut the work, it did cut the work, but it wasn’t really going, what you say...people were not working...I for one...if I had done it by myself I would have finished last week, now there’s other people joining in...but it certainly did cut the work...

C: You all felt that way? Some of you?

There are nods from some students.

C: Okay, why was it bad? Would you say the same thing, then, in other words, when people don’t carry their weight and you don’t meet the deadlines, then that’s a problem?

Pallo: Ya, you do carry your weight but sometimes other people don’t...like for this assignment...I might have done things differently... (not clear).

C (trying to grasp this): With the different sections...You needed to tie them in, right...okay, tell me something good, why was it good?

Was it good for YOU? Why?

(Some murmurs but nothing clear).

C: You’re working hand-in-hand? Do you generally work in this type of way in other classes? Would you? Why?...You would? You (to someone else) have the same experience? NO?

S says something about sharing ideas.

C: Why is it good to share ideas?

Dumiso says it’s because you can get other ideas you didn’t think of.

C: Ya, because if you worked on your own, Pallo, you would have actually finished it, fair enough...but by working with others you might actually get ideas from others which you wouldn’t have...which is in a way the purpose of what we were doing, not just to write a report.... (not clear). Did you realise from your experience that there are certain group dynamics you have to take into account...I’m not just talking about how you get on, or how you share your response...it also has to do with whether you can meet together, whether you’re talking along the same lines, whether you have to work things out, right, and whether you have the space to explore that, and sometimes...well, I know if you don’t know each other in a group... it can actually be even more difficult...Now, I understand it to be that you half knew each other, that you were getting to know each other more...I mean I didn’t think that you all knew each other extremely well...

Students agree, nodding.

C: Can I ask you another question...did you work in a group which you might have worked in otherwise? I mean, do you think that you were in a group that you would have chosen? I know you chose but could you have worked with other people?

Pallo: Well...Another thing about the group...so I might have chosen the same guys...
C: You were happy with your group?
Pallo: Ye-es...
Video Session 8 (12)

After this exchange we regrouped for the performance piece. Students were overtly dismayed, but reflections in the journals record that they adjusted well to the new groups and in fact appreciated them, since they provided further opportunities to get to know and work with others. Pallo felt that working with others reduced the workload for one person (it cut the work), making it more manageable, but that some participants did not carry their load. We noted his concerns, which he reiterates in his interview (see Chapter Two), as we continued to address the dynamics and responsibilities of working in groups. Overall, this was an approach which was considered important in achieving the goals of the semester.

Teaching...and Learning

I apologise for the broken overhead projector (OHP) and make reference to the study guide. However, the students seem not to have read ahead and are doing so now, as we talk! I ask a series of questions and they try and define and describe different types of reports.
Bandla tries to define a regulatory report as one done regularly.
Nomusa reads out a paragraph from the study guide.
I refer to the Throb tragedy (a discotheque in Chatsworth, an Indian residential area in which many children died as they stampeded the exits when a smoke bomb was thrown) and the need for a safety report there: regulatory requirements are important, and there are many stipulated for buildings etc.
C, moving on to the feasibility report (the next assessment): What do you understand by this word "feasible"? Is it feasible for us to meet tomorrow as a class at 6 in the evening? Is it possible? What else does it mean? Is it only “possible”? If I said to you “I can’t see you at 9.15 tomorrow, could we meet at 6”, is it feasible? What are you thinking of? It can be feasible, but is it suitable, is it practical, what are the problems...is it affordable? It is something that we really want to do...do we prefer it as an option? So when we ask is it feasible, we ask what are the logistics, is it practical etc. Can we do it?
We refer to the study guide again. We are relying on it heavily now and necessarily so, as this is a complicated task.

Video Session 7 (13)

The video sessions made transparent to me my own blind spots: as mentioned, I seemed to shift into transmission mode every now and then, especially when teaching a unit in the existing curriculum that relied on more discipline-related material and practice, as found in the study guide. I became aware of this early on and subsequently tried very hard not to allow my biases against the existing curriculum dictate mood, involvement and interest in class, even while I acknowledged them. Other variables included our frustration with the OHP, the timing of a learning activity and students’ first encounter with a new task. I found myself thinking about the problems of implementing OBE much more frequently. I discovered too that my use of questioning as a technique could be improved, as I sometimes rushed, pressured students or answered my own question, especially when introducing a new concept.

Written assessments such as the report, which we discuss in the video clip above, and the summary, demanded more from me, both in terms of teaching and marking (or grading). I suspect that my attempts in grading the written assessments to focus on ideas, meaning and medium rather than grammatical errors in writing, were not entirely successful, but also know that students did learn from my comments, since many queried the correct use of certain forms thereafter. Possibly the acknowledgement of students’ first language as valid, and as part of their cultural and cognitive make-up, in conjunction with these corrective comments and other more positive ones, made a difference to the development of their communicative competence. Other members of staff have also
found the report and summary fairly difficult to teach and assess, and we have already
decided that the feasibility report is too theoretical. It also relied too much on the study
guide, although it was considered more accessible and interesting than the article selected
for summarizing.

Concluding Comments

Our classroom experience in 2001 brought us into a new place of knowing and
caring. We unveiled our differences, social, cultural, religious and otherwise and looked at
one another. We got to know one another as people. We learned about others’ prejudices
and perceptions. We enjoyed meeting again after the holidays and picking up where we
had left off. We enjoyed being who we are. We let texts speak to us and take us down
paths we did not want to travel. When we looked down that path, of others, we learned
about ourselves. Our classroom was not a cold place devoid of emotion. We did not
polarize learning and feeling. We found we could stand and speak, and laugh with those
who laughed with and at us. We shared our lives, not just a classroom.

The images, intuitions and insights discussed in this chapter, which were gained
across data sets, over time, can generate conclusions which lead to other insights. I
present these, with implications, in the final chapter of this dissertation. First, I cross
over to the Literature Review and Research Methodology chapters, in which I make more
substantiated arguments for the theories and practices which directed this research.
...we are living in a postcolonial world where cultures are colliding, interfering with each other, and energetically hybridizing...In fact academic disciplines are most active at their ever changing interfaces... (Schechner, in Phelan & Lane, 1998, p. 360)

**Introduction**

Various ideas, questions, theories, practices, preconceptions and assumptions surround the research question in this study. This literature review confines itself to the issues considered central to the study: the impact of segregation on relationships, which connects this chapter with earlier sections; an analysis of the unfolding debate on OBE in South Africa, and its troubled practice at Mangosuthu Technikon, with specific reference to the Department of Communication and this study; our national literacy history and the status of the literacy arts in South Africa, beginning with a growing recognition of alternate literacies; the debate on approaches to literature and language teaching in South Africa; performance as an alternate literacy which acts as a catalyst in teaching and learning, and the emphasis on social and cultural contexts in language and cognition theory, which underpins the assumptions and goals of this study. I conclude with a focused discussion on themes of relevance in *Master Harold and the Boys*. The pedagogic implications of bringing the arguments made in the literature about performance into teaching-learning practice are infused throughout the chapter. While I attempt to give this
review, which includes historical data, both coherence and clarity, some of the issues inevitably intersect and overlap.

Transforming Relationships through Education

It is difficult to transform relationships which for generations have been conditioned by apartheid. This teachers and students are discovering, as after years of separate development, their daily interaction exposes very different cultural and social norms and expectations. Widely differing home and lifestyle experiences provide fodder for conflict, often left unresolved or exacerbated by violence in schools (Khan, 2002: 4). Yet, the higher education classroom, with its mix of cultural and social contexts and adult learners, could be a meaningful site for the transformation of relationships, as new policy from the Department of Education anticipates.

Emerging policy in higher education sees transformation beginning with the individual. The emphasis is now on acknowledging shared and different cultural heritages and valuing the individual, through initiatives such as OBE and Curriculum 21. One of the prerequisites for transforming relationships is that we begin unlearning the past, which does not mean forgetting its lessons. This is no simple matter. Social, cultural and racial stereotypes have to be undone somehow: the master-servant syndrome, the teacher as god, the white man as baas, and the black worker as boy or servant, to name a few. Today, eight years after democracy, whites are still known mainly as employers, managers, supervisors and teachers, and blacks as maids, nannies and garden boys. While affirmative action, fast tracking and social redress policies are some measures which are
helping eradicate the labelling and stigmatising of racial groups, they are not without flaws.

OBE, intended to redress the inequities of the past, takes the perspective that culture is a way of living, dynamic and fluid, subject to change as circumstances, conditions and ideologies change, without an overt or narrow emphasis on difference that is linguistic, racial or ethnic. Educational contexts thus have a role to play in making change meaningful and real. The school as a microcosm of society, and a developing multicultural one, can help uncover and defuse racial intolerance and discrimination, which are often insidious and subconscious. It should also situate learners' social, cultural and historical contexts in a curriculum which is constantly evolving, enabling us to draw on what students already know unconsciously.

Multiculturalism in curriculum offers multiple perspectives and different ways of seeing, promoting dialogue among those with different views, and thereby transforming relationships. If it is viewed as a process designed to foster understanding, acceptance and constructive relations among people of many different cultures, it should encourage learners to see different cultures as a source of learning and to respect diversity, rather than distance the "other." Dewey (1938) argues, in contrast, for identification with the other. The Communication in English curriculum, using OBE, could effectively engage the social and cultural contexts of others if the teacher-facilitator is more acutely aware of the value of learners’ past experiences, needs and capacities. The past could be a means of understanding the present.
According to Greenstein (in Kallaway et al, 1997), our social origins and culturally specific background affect all educational decisions, norms, and analytical perspectives. It is generally acknowledged in South Africa, that a European model for the production of knowledge, assumed to have universal validity, has persisted. The learning environment and core curricula in, for example, Communication in English, have been viewed historically through a colonial, Eurocentric lens. Given the measures of transformation already in progress, we need on the one hand to begin to conceptualise other perspectives, including those in our own country. On the other hand, moving blindly towards an Afrocentric perspective in curriculum development for Communication, presents the danger that we may exclude other national, international and global traditions and cultures. Sociopolitical change at all levels has produced schisms and dissonances between which we are continually caught: who we were as victims and perpetrators of apartheid, and as free citizens of a new democracy, socialised into one life and asked to live another. Lee (1997) finds some value in this, pedagogically:

Learners who are forced to learn through the cultural constructs of other peoples can benefit from improved understanding of key philosophical differences between the worldview in which they were socialized and one in which they must now operate (p. 461).

The effects of rapid social change and diverse living conditions and lifestyles, reflect a need to engage difference itself more constructively. This is most acute when we consider building relationships across social, racial, physical and cultural divides. Problematising how we can achieve this through the curriculum, the materials we design, the texts we read, the forms of assessment we use, and the classroom talk and interaction
we generate, is crucial. These are political issues which during apartheid, were tools to achieve a larger political purpose. Post-apartheid, they need urgent consideration in our classrooms if the struggle for educational transformation is to become legitimate and meaningful.

The Outcomes-based Education Model

The OBE model in South Africa is described as transitional and transformational, remoulding educational systems in tandem with broader social change (Olivier, 1998). It raises the question: what sort of qualities, both as workers and as human beings, do we want our graduates, and hence our citizens, to have? OBE is not content-based, nor is it teacher-centered. Its goals are to make learning strategies explicit, to assess specific goals and to render pedagogic practice and administration more accountable. This it will do by creating learner-centred classrooms, in which learners participate actively. The teacher as facilitator in OBE takes on many roles in guiding learners through learning procedures which connect with lived experience and situations.

The key focus of OBE is on outcomes (goals) rather than inputs (content), which conditioned the previous educational model. The learner’s ability at the end of a period of training to do something successfully, rather than reflect a mere understanding of it, is central. Applied competence, encompassing the understanding of how to do something, its practical application, and that application across contexts, is sought. OBE identifies eight learning areas within which all academic programmes can be categorised. Broad outcomes and effects outlined for Language, Literacy and Communication were introduced.
in Chapter One, in my focus on the curricula for Communication at Mangosuthu Technikon.

OBE defines specific outcomes and critical outcomes (Olivier, 1998), which, it is argued, other countries such as the United States and Australia have successfully transmitted through consistent application of its principles within a given context. Specific outcomes refer to clearly defined aspects of learning, which are linked to context. Critical outcomes refer to the macro-generic development of learners who may effectively take up their role within the socio-economic context, through education. Critical cross-field outcomes, which comprise overall knowledge, skills and attitudes, require a curriculum which promotes the learner as communicator and enquirer, as active, creative participant, and as one who is developing as an individual within a social context. In contrast to the specific outcomes for a learning activity which can vary across institutions and qualifications, generic critical cross-field outcomes or culminating outcomes of significance (in Spady's terms), apply across all learning areas and NQF levels. Olivier's (1998) list, which I have summarized, includes the following:

1. To work in a team
2. To organize and manage oneself
3. To collect, analyse and evaluate information
4. To communicate effectively
5. To use science and technology effectively and critically
6. To demonstrate an understanding of the world
7. To recognize problem solving contexts (p. 17).

A graduate leaving an institution should have demonstrated these outcomes successfully. I see in this emphasis the importance of the themes of transforming relationships and developing literacy, which I consider to be central to this study.
OBE has been presented in official policy as a reform which would lead to greater accountability in terms of funding and to new approaches to teaching, curriculum and the education system. It would challenge the system of calendar, content and time, around which schools and technikons have traditionally operated (regardless of results or developmental stages in learning). In so doing it was intended to drastically change teachers’ and students’ roles and responsibilities in the classroom, as well as their methodology (from transmission to facilitation), and assessment (from norm to criterion-based). The goal, as noted, is to demonstrate outcomes of significance or exit level outcomes, which combine to produce a graduate ready to take up her civic role in the economy and society. The focus on outcomes, it can be argued, is not only on the measure of successful demonstration of discrete skills or competences. As Kraak argues (in Jansen & Christie, 1999), “It is about recognizing the indivisible link between competence and the conceptual, problem-solving, interactive and context-bound abilities which underpin (but which are invisible in) the performance of ‘competence’” (p. 52).

The Unfolding Debate on OBE in South Africa

In this section I summarise the debate on OBE (introduced in Chapter One), by presenting first a rationale for OBE from its proponents, notably government, then detractors’ criticisms. My own position is that OBE as a methodology should be practised with caution, but practised nonetheless in this stage of our development as an emerging democracy, in a tertiary institution such as Mantec. I urge caution but also creativity and critical application of its tenets, because of the potential pitfalls of a model that focuses almost exclusively on outward show of behaviour and demonstration, and of
the ease with which we can slip back into outdated, transmissive methodologies in the
contexts in which we teach. This study infuses performance into the Communication
curriculum for engineers in an attempt to avoid such pitfalls.

In the unfolding debate on OBE, critics observe a disturbing pattern that is echoed
in other social contexts, as we mimic the culture and norms of the west: we argue against
western ideologies which colonize, then appropriate them and make them our own. There
is ample evidence of this at all levels. For instance, the idea of the Business School, which
offered quick access to understandings of the American economy, has been exported to
the rest of the world, leading to an influx of institutions offering business qualifications in
South Africa. Though initially resisted and considered inappropriate for our economy, we
have in recent years adapted such curricula and made them our own. Today, these
qualifications are highly sought after here. Likewise, our educational systems have
semesterised and modularized programmes and curricula, and started preaching the
practice of continuous assessment, in tandem with OBE.

Spady, in a responsive essay on the many contentious issues implicated in the
introduction of OBE in South Africa, concedes that it is not an entirely new instructional
approach (I elaborate on this later with reference to Malan, 2000). Taking cognizance of
its application in South Africa and the confusion generated, Spady (not dated) does argue
that OBE works very well in instruction outside formal education, and that its principles
are often misunderstood. He describes OBE as “a comprehensive approach to focusing,
defining, and organizing all aspects of the instructional and credentialing systems of
schools” (p. 2). It offers an alternative to the traditional industrial approach to school and
schooling, with its focus on outcomes (observable demonstrations) as opposed to inputs. It is premised on the belief that all students can learn and succeed, that they need successful learning for further success in the future, and that schools govern and direct the conditions which make for successful learning. Spady’s conceptualisation of OBE unfolds more practically through the systematic and consistent application of four principles: clarity of focus on culminating outcomes of significance; expanded opportunity and support for success; high expectations for all to succeed and designing down from ultimate outcomes. There is no one model of OBE, he argues, since we may understand and apply these principles flexibly for different settings (given different institutional needs, for example). However, their application cannot be inappropriate or incomplete: consistency is essential for success.

In South Africa, policy documents on the NQF project OBE as a mechanism for both systemic and curricular transformation. According to a SAQA position paper on the NQF and Curriculum 2005 (2000), it would be inaccurate to conflate curriculum and systems transformation. Curriculum change is part of systemic change, and it is systems change which is foregrounded in South Africa’s application of OBE. However, from my experience at Mangosuthu Technikon, I would venture to say that curricular change is widely considered to be its primary focus, with educators’ efforts at such change often thwarted by the slow pace of systemic transformation of the institution as a whole.

A Broader Rationale for OBE

One of my first concerns when researching OBE is that it is described and defined in many different ways in the literature which proliferates in South Africa: it is a
curriculum theory, an organizing principle, an epistemology, a philosophy and a model of pedagogic practice. Its introduction here, along with the establishment of the NQF, arose from national needs to open access to life-long learning to all; to make service providers accountable and transparent, and to develop human resources. OBE is the organizing principle around which standards and qualifications registered with the NQF are described. This description delineates the outcomes for a programme or learning area, which the student must successfully demonstrate through appropriate assessment. The NQF and its application are overseen by SAQA, which is supported by National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs), as well as other education and training quality assurers. These structures are provided for by statute, namely the SAQA Act No. 58 of 1995. Government Gazettes as well as other literature (such as the Curriculum 2005 document from the Department of Education, 1997), explain both these structures and their purpose in great detail.

While the rationale for OBE as educational reform pertains, proponents view it against the broader outcomes for South Africa as a whole: democracy education and democratic education, national development, including human resource development and international recognition and status. Education is a driving force in achieving these outcomes, and OBE is considered an appropriate vehicle because it compels a greater awareness of inputs, throughput and outputs, and of our role as educators in a global economy (see the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation, 1996).

Global trends are cited in the SAQA position paper (2000) to justify the focus of the NQF on outcomes. OBE has been the educational model of choice internationally, in
Canada, the US, New Zealand, countries in Europe, Australasia and the Pacific Rim.

Referring to Barnett (1994), the SAQA paper argues that the notion of knowledge along with its vocabulary is changing: knowledge-in-action, the outcomes of a learning transaction and transdisciplinary forms of skill are the new globalspeak. The goals of OBE, according to critics, have been transported from the application of this model in other (very different) contexts. To compete globally, it is argued, we need to jump onto the applied competence bandwagon.

More significantly, OBE is proffered, in the rationale for its adoption, as the best philosophy/model for our context as a developing democracy. It would also meet the demand for a stronger foundation of general education which encourages holistic, personal development. The national urgency to effect mass education would be addressed through a model which produced demonstrable results, namely, change in behaviour. In individual contexts of learning, it would formalize and consolidate pedagogic change. Since sites of learning vary and life-long learning is preferable in order to meet the needs of society, technology, the market and economy, its consistent application as an organizing principle through the NQF, is intended to make the educational system navigable and coherent, and to maintain standards. Only in this way will our qualifications and our professionals compete with international standards. With OBE, according to SAQA (2000), “articulation and portability within the education and training system are possible in ways that looking at the content of the learning programmes alone i.e., inputs, does not allow” (p. 2).
The NQF is ostensibly also a social construct which brings people from different walks of life and socio-economic backgrounds together, to direct educational endeavour and governance. Participants who establish and register as well as monitor standards, policy-makers, service providers and all other stakeholders can now take control in education. This level of involvement was denied and prohibited in the previous system. Engaging with the process prescribed also encourages responsibility and ensures quality, as we make education relevant to society. The new quality assurance mechanisms thus apply to both public and private structures, and require rigorous self-evaluation and external moderation. Proponents of OBE (SAQA position paper, 2000) argue that in the light of the enormous benefits of this model for the country at large, we should not throw the baby out with the bath water: problems with implementation do not mean we should reject the philosophy. In any event, critics seem unable to proffer an alternative to OBE, and many practitioners are successfully implementing it (see Van der Horst & McDonald, 1997).

Criticism of OBE

I draw attention to the basic problems of infrastructure to demonstrate the futility of sophisticated education reforms which have recently been introduced in several SADC countries, with South Africa being perhaps the most ambitious. A highly complex curriculum reform was recently introduced modeled on “outcomes based education.” An equally complex assessment system was attached to this curriculum reform, and linked to a very sophisticated national qualifications framework – with dazzling language, ambitious outcomes and confusing implementation pathways (Jansen, 2001, p. 2).

Since 1994, the struggles in education have taken over the momentum and force of old struggles for education. This is not necessarily undesirable. Education, as a barometer
of our times, is inextricably bound with political, cultural and historical developments, and should be a site for contestation and criticism. I will pick up this thread with specific reference to OBE and Mantec as a site of struggle with OBE.

Voices of resistance to OBE have been heard over the past few years, though I would argue, less volubly (though certainly more vociferously) at a formal, institutional or public level than at a private, informal level. The media have periodically sustained the debate on OBE, as personal experiences in schools and official proclamations and defences continue to hit the headlines.

In South Africa and elsewhere, it is argued that there is no evidence that OBE is a more effective educational model, or that educational research has proven the widespread value of its methods, only that it is the choice of many democracies and the arena of much debate, educational, religious and social. Malan (2000) asserts that OBE has its roots in various educational movements, such as the educational objectives movement, the competency-based movement and the mastery-learning movement. He concludes that OBE is not a paradigm shift, as generally assumed. Integrated educational approaches also entrench the principles of OBE: they are needs and outcomes-driven; they require designing-down and the specification of outcomes and levels of outcomes; they are learning-centred and propose a holistic framework. He (2000) says:

There is as yet no collection of mutually accepted achievements in terms of new theories on OBE, there are no exemplary solutions to the challenge of total intellectual and potential development of learners, predictions of value of OBE have not been proven, and laws validating OBE as an acceptable practice and construct are not apparent. In other words, no research base to verify the claims of OBE has yet been established and the claim of a major paradigm shift can therefore not be substantiated...At best OBE may be described as an
eclectic philosophy which takes the best from several past educational approaches and incorporates them in a new system that is appropriate to the needs and demands of a new, democratic South Africa (p. 24).

It is argued that OBE practitioners present a biased critique of the previous educational model, ignoring existing progressive measures taken by many educators, such as learner-centred and problem-based approaches. Most writers acknowledge that the previous transmission model has its benefits, and offers a framework which is easier to manage for both teacher and learner (Claassen in Malan, 2000), although I question whether we should be pitting the transmission model against OBE, which itself has the potential to be transmissive. Malan (2000) does recognise that “the broader educational context” (p. 26) has compelled transformational OBE, though I would contend that this context goes beyond education.

The corporatization of education in the trend towards globalisation has also come under fire. Privatization is power, but it simultaneously erodes the quality of caring, of democracy and security, of solidarity and co-operation. It has started to erode education too. As Chomsky says (2001), the privatization of institutions of higher learning means that they are not benevolent societies. Bertelsen (2000) traces the meaning of the word transformation in South Africa firstly to the political struggle for democracy and secondly to the corporate world, with its neo-liberal push towards privatization. We are in transit between “the struggle culture” and the “culture of the market” (Bertelsen, 2001, p. 4), even in our transformation of curricula. As Brannigan (1996) explains, “the common good is equated with the exercise of private interests” in the new global age, which is characterised by technotopia and in fact supplants rather than supports the idea of
democracy. Skinner (in Jansen & Christie, 1999) also concurs that market-place thinking has dictated the shape of education, which from a socio-economic perspective, has been rationalized simply and shortsightedly to produce workers to support the economy. However, there is no evidence that this actually occurs, since it is cultural capital that often secures employment. Jansen (2001) makes the observation that third world countries such as South Africa have learned to comply with global giants in order to obtain aid. They have not only learned to play by the neo-liberal rules of the globalisation game but must make it clear that they are knowledgeable competitors, via corporatization, technology, commercialisation and education. Trying to technologize in rural areas where there is no running water thus signals our global status.

In an emerging democracy, there is even more cause for concern when a new educational approach is adopted by government with little public consultation. The process of reform itself has come under criticism, since “...the framework has been designed in isolation from the concrete context of teaching, learning and training, under state-driven rather than education-driven imperatives...” (Curriculum 2005, 1997, p. 2). The lack of fit of systems, and of policy and practice, is attacked in various articles. Jansen argues that the promulgation of policy and law served to mark the move away from an apartheid ideology, but that practice remains unchanged, as there has been no or inadequate resource commitment by government. He (2001) contends, with chilling accuracy, that “the form of change is often mistaken for the substance of change” (p. 7). Critics like Wood (2001) condemn OBE in South Africa as government propaganda, a
dumbing down of the curriculum. We have seemingly no qualms about producing matriculants who are neither literate nor numerate, as long as they have good self-esteem!

According to Boughey (not dated), one of the main criticisms of the OBE plan initially was that the reduction of learning to small units for which outcomes had to be written, in order to build a qualification, was "antithetical to the goals and ethos of universities in particular" (p. 8). Consequently, whole programmes or qualifications are now registered with the NQF. OBE is also criticized for not having a built-in method of accountability, and for a serious lack of public input, despite claims to the contrary. Only cosmetic changes have been made to some syllabuses and "current SA realities such as racism, and sexism, the challenges of democracy and of Africanism, are not dealt with – the outcomes are phrased in a bland and decontextualised manner without taking the specificity of the society into consideration" (Curriculum 2005, 1997, p. 3). The option of language choice in terms of medium of instruction, is not possible. The speed (haste) with which the OBE change process has been introduced and (mis)managed, is a recipe for disaster. The quality of learning materials produced is not the best, emanating as they have from an ethos of crisis management in the Department of Education since 1994. A review of Curriculum 2005 (1997) decries "the absence of appropriate learning materials, textbooks, poor preparation of teachers, unclear and untested assessment methods, lack of international compatibility, and the undermining of content for the sake of vague and difficult to measure outcomes" (p. 2).

Changes introduced by C2005 could also divide historically segregated schools further and privilege historically advantaged (white) schools even more. For Jansen
(1998), the accumulative effect of change may even threaten and undermine schooling and the learning environment. There is the fear, which I share, that despite our history and the reforms of OBE, education will revert to its former character. The focus on outward behaviour is not unlike the segregationist practices propagated by apartheid education. Democratic country, democratic education: in reality and in practice, these signify the unfolding of very complex processes.

The Question of Values

In common with countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, South Africa is experiencing a backlash of criticism on OBE. Without doubt, the chief criticism from parent and teacher groups in South Africa has centred around values. These so-called stakeholders in education argue that the OBE model teaches values which may be in conflict with parental ideologies and philosophies. Parents are now on school governing bodies, and thus ostensibly have more say in how their children are educated. This democratic participation and responsibility should theoretically give schools and parents more control to decide on outcomes. However, I argue, with others, that timing is everything: if the process had been designed already, it seems that parents were actually denied the opportunity to have their democratic say. I wonder then what evidence exists of the social constructivist model in practice, and who in fact decided what the specific outcomes or the exit outcomes should be in the designing down process OBE advocates. I do not think that adequate conversation was generated in schools or institutions of higher learning which analysed critically the prevailing teaching-learning paradigm or motivated for OBE. Like the curriculum of old, it was handed down to us.
Parental bodies level a range of objections to OBE. It erodes parental authority
and traditional morals and beliefs, and has become an agenda for secular humanism. My
understanding of OBE’s behaviourism is that if a child does not demonstrate a “correct,”
required, appropriate or politically correct response, he may not be achieving the
outcomes successfully. This limits the scope of this model as educational reform, and
compels me to examine the approach I take to using it, lest it become an even worse
manifestation of transmission.

Parental choice when it comes to lifestyle, sexual orientation or practice, and
religious convictions, is also sidelined. By waiting for all students to demonstrate an
outcome, OBE may be holding some back and dumbing down classrooms, a common
criticism. Furthermore, how would teachers measure outcomes that are actually incomes,
and more psychic in nature? I think there ought to be room for exploring theory, showing
understanding and reading between the lines. Critics argue that assessment practices
which are not objective and standardized but subjective and varied, in fact support a
social ideology which pushes for a culture of globalisation and global citizenship at the
expense of individual values, knowledge of facts and academic excellence.

This flood of criticism questions the extent to which government, which is not to
be trusted usually, should prescribe in education. While we can only learn from and with
other countries, such as the UK, with its new national curriculum which aims to develop
values, citizenship and understanding, with the participation of all partners, we need to
acknowledge fully the particularities of our context and its cultural mix and history.
Chisolm (2002) and Glenn (1998) make reference to perceptions in both the US and SA,
that the state or government is not considered synonymous with integrity and morality. Hence education in its true sense cannot be aligned with government. This argument that education is too important and too sensitive to leave to the state, was made in the 1790s by Marquis Condorcet (in Glenn, 1998). In contrast, South Africa’s Minister of Education has argued (in Nolan, 1999): “For many of us who come from the tradition of resistance and struggle, the rebuilding of our society through the state is of enormous importance” (p. 7). Closson (1993) contrasts the Christian worldview with that promoted by OBE in the United States, which he describes as “an ideologically neutral tool for curricular construction” (p. 4). I argue that our worldviews hold considerable influence on the outcomes we decide are important for our students. In classroom practice nothing is neutral. How can we then conceive of education as neutral or ahistorical?

According to Bennett (1993), the problem in the US is that OBE has tended to become more a tool for social engineering than for cognitive development. He argues that we must distinguish between cognitive outcomes, which shape intellectual abilities and skills, and social and behavioral outcomes, which shape values, attitudes and relationships. Furthermore, parents may not be preventing schools from teaching values; instead, they find the imposition of the form this teaching should take objectionable. It seems similar outcomes were noted across regions and contexts in the US and in South Africa, despite input from diverse communities and institutional needs such as a dominant second language cohort of students. However, for Malan (2000), the problem is more complex: “Uncertainty about the desired learning outcomes and failure to assess outcomes
properly could end in a situation where learners only attained pseudo-knowledge, pseudo-skills, pseudo-attitudes and pseudo-values” (p. 22).

In response to the values debate in South Africa, Spady maintains that outcomes are not values, but performances which reveal what a learner knows, what he can do with what he knows, and his level of confidence and motivation in doing so. In any event, we may question today whether we have any consensus at all on values and the moral content of curricula. Yet it is critical, detractors argue, that we teach values. Education projects such as Living Values (2001), which feel that the teaching fraternity and OBE neglect such values, have devised alternative school programmes infused with values such as co-operation, love and respect. In South Africa, Wood (2001) cautions, however, against mythologizing our values as unique, a tendency which has been observed, for example, when we talk of ubuntu (human dignity) or traditional African values.

The strongest reaction to the new OBE curriculum for schools, is arguably that from conservative Christian and Hindu constituencies. The former object, for example, to the inclusion of the issues surrounding evolution, which is regarded as unbiblical and an encroachment on family values. Chisolm (2002) attributes this reaction to the loss of an old order (Western colonialism, and apartheid, in our case) and the sense of victimhood and persecution felt by Christian conservatives:

Behind it lies a sense of loss — loss of faith, of imagined communities, of a vision of like-minded people who shared norms and values in which the Western tradition reigned supreme. Behind it is also an intense fear of the Other and of freedom. The world feels out of control. There is a horror of mixing. On the one side is purity. On the other is danger. The danger lies in public institutions, non-believers in Christ, women, people of colour, gays,
lesbians, the poor, the dispossessed. There is a strong racial subtext as well as an intense anxiety about equality...What conservative Christians want, both in the USA and SA...is more educational apartheid rather than less (p. 6).

In the light of this very real possibility, given the rise of right wing groups in the country and new manifestations of racism, it is not surprising that parental values could be considered "barriers to the new and unified consciousness" (Glenn, 1998, p. 3) to which our emerging democracy aspires.

Mangosuthu Technikon and OBE: A Site of Struggle

My own position on OBE is that it is a methodology which is useful, at the present moment, in challenging and transforming ingrained systems and modes of teaching and learning. While I too have felt the stresses of sudden change, through the policy directives on the practice of OBE (discussed here with specific reference to my department at Mantec), I feel that it can provide the impetus for further, necessary scrutiny of what we do as teachers, in the classroom, at this band of the NQF. Despite its obsession with outcomes, its strong behavioural bias, the danger that we are appropriating yet another colonial system, the problematics surrounding values, and other criticisms leveled against it, I believe like other practitioners, that it cannot at this stage, at this level of education, be summarily dismissed. As mentioned, I attempt to show why in this research, as an experiment in the practice of OBE while cognizant of its limitations.

The tensions generated over the past few years by new demands coupled with declining morale and resources, as well as larger institutional crises, are acutely felt at Mangosuthu Technikon. At a recent meeting (September 2002) to grapple with the problems dogging the functioning of the Institutional Forum, a statutory body which
advises Council, the dispirited mood of academics was almost tangible. Part of the overall crisis surrounds the pending merger, but also the imperative to transform our teaching-learning climate, and to shift over to OBE.

The notion of what should happen in the classroom or lecture has altered dramatically. A plethora of NQF and SAQA policy documents and guidelines have jammed our emails and demolished our paper supplies. Directives on OBE and changing policies are issued in a steady stream from the Department of Education, national quality committees, regional structures, internal management and national working groups for each diploma or programme. Faculties and departments then sit down and interpret, increasingly with more frustration than enthusiasm. We are clearly suffering from “innovation overload” (Shepherd & Hoosain, 2001, p. 7).

The experience in the Department of Communication as it seeks to adopt and apply the OBE methodology is a good example, and one I know best. To begin with, we needed to reconceptualise our study guides or course packs. A concrete sign of change, this would hopefully stimulate and necessitate transformation of our methods of delivery and behaviour in the classroom, keeping in mind the specific needs of our students. One of the bold steps forward was to decide on a template identifying the NQF level of modules we offer, and outlining the assumed existing learning, exit and specific outcomes, critical cross-field outcomes and assessment criteria for each module (there are thirteen). SAQA guidelines (see Olivier, 1998) in addition specify the need for a unit standard title and registration number, an approved logo, the credit attached to a unit standard, the field and sub-field of the unit standard, the purpose of the unit standard, the issue and review
date, range statements and accreditation process. Since the terminology at national level changed too frequently for comfort, we decided on our own definitions of concepts so that we could make progress.

Over a period of three years, we have produced draft OBE-compliant versions of our learning material, reviewed our work collaboratively with the departments in which we teach, and shifted our thinking considerably, though sometimes in ways not easily discernable to the outside. It has been and is still a painstaking process. Divergent views in terms of education, worldview, past and present experiences, language difficulties, change management, implementation, development of materials, use of texts, and interpretations of policy, were inevitable. Individuals have understood and applied the template differently, leading to some heated exchanges. Progress has been patchy. Timeframes and deadlines were almost never met. The practical side of designing material and compiling packs, then editing and printing, was also difficult, since all members of staff were not computer literate.

Responses by staff to the transition have varied, from initial resistance ("you can't teach an old dog new tricks") to recognizing that we had to engage with OBE as a methodology in order to stay within the loop, regionally and nationally. Some simply followed suit when an example of how we would change a module using OBE was presented; others ignored it, for a time. Most felt that we needed specialist assistance with curriculum and materials development. One person forged ahead with sophisticated computer-based instruction. My own argument has always been that we cannot simply chop up the existing curriculum into units of learning: we had to understand why we were
doing what we were doing, find paths we could tread with a degree of comfort and integrity, even if we were skeptical about a new approach, and remember our responsibilities to students.

The strain of abandoning the old and familiar to embrace the new and incomprehensible, echoed the difficult negotiation between people teaching there for many years (who also understood the technikon system) and very recent appointees: the not unusual dynamics of staff turnover. The pressure of sustaining this process while still teaching an outdated curriculum (which, even without the advent of OBE would have compelled transformation), has been enormous. It is still in progress, and signifies our progress as a department across the campus. However, reconceptualising the curriculum in theory is only part of the battle. Praxis is another. Whether OBE has genuinely impacted our teaching, is untested.

We are, across the campus, using OBE while struggling to engage with it pedagogically. Not all the conditions exist for its successful implementation: the lack of existing capacity, of trained educators, of adequate material and technical resources (texts, a budget for consumables, training and learning materials, computers), and time, are exacerbated by an administrative system which begs improvement. In response last year (2001) to a call to identify skills we need to develop, academics felt that although many understood the philosophy of OBE, we simply did not know what to do with our curricula and in our classrooms. There was still immense hesitance and resistance, even if there was no real objection to OBE. The language of OBE (see Curriculum 2005, 1997) made its methods inaccessible. It still needs to be demystified. The practicalities of
matching the timing and method of instruction to learner needs, or what a student can
demonstrate with success and when, are complicated by large student numbers. Time­
tables are not flexible enough for us to achieve outlined goals and we are governed by rigid
programmes and calendars. How, for instance, do we discover levels of previous
knowledge? There are problems with addressing critical cross-field (generic) outcomes
which are supposed to cut across all learning areas. How do we successfully accomplish
this in Communication modules which are taught only in the first semester or year?

While there is inadequate access to media and computers, we are urged to access
Web CT programmes for student instruction. The compulsion to compete globally is felt
acutely, with repeated calls for more computers so our students can have access to the
world. Yet we should be asking what constitutes the most beneficial purpose of this first
world investment in technology. Zinn (2001), researching Information and
Communication Technology offerings, finds that

the majority of teachers and learners in SA are not ensconced in an ICT
culture. Schools have other more urgent, basic needs to attend to like a lack of
running water, too few classrooms, no ablution facilities, a lack of safety and
electricity (p. 3).

At Mangosuthu Technikon, we need to compete on the same terms first with our local
neighbours, then the world. We feel these stresses particularly now that our proposed
merger with the new Durban Institute of Technology (the merged ML Sultan and Natal
Technikons) is looming, in what is yet another form of colonisation. A real and frightening
implication for us in Communication is that the department will cease to exist as modules
are infused into programmes. Compliance with national trends in programme mix,
formulation and curriculum thus conflicts with critical local needs, despite the apparent flexibility of OBE.

The ideals of continuous assessment and of creating more opportunities for students to improve performance over the semester or year, seem beyond our reach. Training programmes on "how to do OBE" often create even more pressure. Essentially short-term measures which are not sustained, they remain unhinged and still leave a huge gap between the workshop experience and classroom contexts. In terms of the distinction made in the SAQA position paper between curricular and systemic change (which incorporates the former), I believe that at Mantec we are too focused on curriculum change without the enabling environment, policy and support of systemic change. I have often felt that we are being asked to reduce education to a formula, and that we are glossing over the institutional differences which conditioned our development in South Africa. We cannot expect the same ethos and application of OBE across institutions. However, we can make one generalization, I think, and that is that teaching as a profession has become synonymous with insecurity and frustration; people feel discontented and unrewarded, and are not coping. The AIDS epidemic deepens this state of despair.

Student confusion compounds the struggle with OBE. Expecting to be spoon-fed, they are bewildered at an approach which invites their participation in decision-making, independent study and active, critical learning (see Lockyear, 2000). This in turn can encourage the application of OBE methods in a more traditional, transmissive form (hence my argument for performance as a mechanism which subverts). Explicit discussions on
learning and OBE from a few educators hardly help, nor do appeals from industry that engineers, for example, acquire and demonstrate not only technical competence, but competence in communication, problem-solving, ethics, and workplace skills. If concerted efforts were made by all academics in the institution to take this line, perhaps they would have the desired effect of making students take more responsibility for their own learning. Currently, those few who do so may be considered odd and disinterested in fulfilling their (traditional) roles. A fear of the annual examination persists, and the OBE mode is considered an obstacle to "real" work and learning.

Finally, the claim of OBE to greater accountability of administration and pedagogy can be contested. There currently exists no avenue by which to negotiate the meaning of "what we did," or reflective space to examine whether our intentions were realized in the classroom. As mentioned, the chief measure is the production of the new study guide. Previously, technikon programmes were audited by an external agency, which has disbanded with the advent of the NQF. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is putting in place new mechanisms for evaluation, which will include self-evaluation. At Mangosuthu Technikon, there is no quality unit. Nor is there a collective faculty stance on OBE, whether we are referring to understanding the template or devising a timeframe for the process of recasting our curricula (though nationally we need to be OBE-ready by 2006). Thus the evaluation of the effects of OBE in the classroom or the lecture is almost non-existent, except for a self-evaluation exercise which departments recently (August 2002) conducted as an interim measure, and which related only obliquely to OBE. On the one hand there is the national imperative, with its ideological
demands for transformation; on the other, the reality of the locus of activity and evaluation remaining at departmental level. The gap is too big. There is as yet no collective institutional response or responsibility.

Practising and Problematising OBE

Many practitioners acknowledge the instability caused by the introduction of OBE, despite its laudable aims. A few case studies exemplify this (see Zinn, 2000; Chisolm, 2002; Lockyear, 2000). The Zikhulise Project is funded by USAID. According to Franchett (2000), the US Education Officer in SA at the time, it seeks to offer local ownership for a process that will produce positive achievement in teaching and learning, address needs in the classroom and have a broad impact on the educational system. The project simultaneously acknowledges the difficulty of achieving the goals of interactive learner-centred methods with large numbers and without material resources, and that OBE requires teachers to have the tools to teach.

Lockyear’s (2000) academic skills acquisition project at Border Technikon in East London (SA), makes an argument for bridging programmes and foundation courses. In a contextual analysis which hooks into the models of Supplemental Instruction and OBE, she emphasizes that the experience of academic success is crucial to students’ positive self-concept, which in turn bears directly on the achievement of learning outcomes. Metacognition and reflective learning were also a central force in the project (which bears some similarity to my own). Lockyear (2000) asserts that we need to attack the culture of failure in our institutions: success breeds success, and expectation and experience of academic success is a stimulant.
Shepherd and Hoosain (2001) affirm what we know at Mantec, that

“...implementing educational change is not a simplistic and mechanistic task. Effective implementation involves using new materials, using new teaching behaviours, and developing new beliefs and understandings about teaching and learning” (p 10).

Implicit here are the new challenges facing teachers, and the lack of appropriate teacher education programmes. Thus Shepherd & Hoosain’s Institute for Curriculum and Assessment Training for Schools is a project which seeks to offer assistance to educators in OBE, “to transform educators at an ideological level as well as providing extensive capacity building in curriculum and assessment training” (2001). It takes cognizance of the conditions in a developing country: new curriculum initiatives, larger classes, more complex classes which are multi-lingual and multicultural, and human rights issues which ensure culture-fair and anti-bias principles. There is a need to examine educators’ skills, values and attitudes in OBE and assessment, while sharing knowledge on tools and techniques and establishing structures. The project addresses the ideological, technical and practical aspects of OBE, taking into account the concerns of the educator in the classroom and the site of learning (school) as a whole. It also emphasises reflective and reflexive practice and the need to make the leap from our old culture of testing to that of assessment. The ultimate goal is to empower educators to implement OBE curriculum guidelines.

Towards Resolution

The dilemmas of balancing inputs and outputs, of addressing the pedagogic perplexities we have, and seeking ways to circumvent transmission methodologies, while
using OBE, remain. The dangerous polarization of inputs and outputs in practice and in the discourse it promotes, could produce a generation in conflict. How do we redesign and reengineer the whole education system? How do we enact change? The SAQA position paper (2000) admits that conflict is to be expected on who decides outcomes and what they should be, and that some educators are willing to engage in the process while others still resist it. It argues, however, that finding the balance between inputs and outputs has always been a consideration for effective educators. Bellis (in Jansen & Christie, 1999) asserts that the competence-performance dichotomy in OBE is problematic since performance is a key component of competence, and advocates an integrative approach to competence in problem-centred learning programmes.

The need to take both parental and governmental involvement into account, to give each their say, is critical. Manno (1994), tracing the OBE debate in the US, suggests a two-fold policy strategy for OBE there: firstly, devising uniform academic standards and a realistic system of accountability, and secondly, creating opportunities for more diversity in schools as well as freedom of choice of school. According to Glenn (1998), we must ensure quality, which in South Africa, requires the effective functioning of the NQF and its NSBs, SGBs and quality committees. We must set clear standards for both skills and knowledge and assess appropriately, reviewing in particular the strategies for criterion-referenced assessment. Other critics urge that the quality of the system must be monitored by parents as well, especially with regard to valid forms of assessment, and whether graduates exit with the capacity to handle the demands of life as well as further study. Chisolm (2002) calls for an OBE approach which is broad enough to incorporate
new developments in knowledge and specific enough to give teachers a guideline, while allowing flexibility and creativity in devising context-driven learning experiences. She argues that the draft new curriculum in SA for Grades R-9 was in fact open to the public for comment; that the contributors represented a range of worldviews, philosophies and approaches, including those of progressive Christian and other religious groups; that the curriculum was a social construction intended to fulfill national constitutional and socio-economic ideals, and finally, that value conflicts which arose were indeed addressed in revisions.

The new democracy in South Africa certainly has inherited the culture of crisis in education. Has OBE helped resolve or exacerbate this? And will OBE, ostensibly more democratic than apartheid education, in fact teach and entrench democracy? According to Willinsky (1998), imperialist Western education contained within it both the domination of culture and the seeds and resources for resisting that domination. Perhaps, then, we need a view of history and experience which accepts that the struggles spawned by apartheid and its model of Christian National Education, have brought us not only to OBE but to a critique of OBE which can lead us to something better. Can we accept the capacity of education to free us, to teach us, even while we acknowledge its complicity in oppression? The paradox of having to work with what we may not approve of in education is not new to us as a nation, though our degree of self-awareness about the implications of what we are doing, has indeed heightened. Moreover, the paradoxical relationship between freedom and oppression, freedom fighter and oppressor, in fact permeate arenas other than education, such as the law and government. Perhaps, I argue,
we can agree that a critical application of OBE can be valuable in a developing or emerging democracy, with valid participation from all interested groups, within a social constructivist paradigm. OBE has succeeded in putting education under the spotlight, nationally. It also compels strategic educational planning and the active participation of teachers and learners, as well as parents.

However, while OBE is acknowledged as an alternative to the fundamental pedagogics of the past regime, we must still ask if it is the best alternative, and what the other alternatives are. Even SAQA (2000: 6) concedes that it is not a panacea for all ills, that the scale and complexity of problems in SA preclude one solution. Malan (2000) asserts that only time will reveal its value (and also its flaws) for the new generation, as its effects in the workplace will become evident. Research-driven examination of what relationship really exists between education and economic development or social performance, is imperative (Curriculum 2005). Lastly, we need to be informed of the limitations of educational systems, and to research both their contributions and shortcomings, in order to improve.

There is no knowledge without preconceptions and prejudices. The task is not to remove all such preconceptions, but to test them critically in the course of inquiry. (Bernstein, in McWilliam, 1994, p. 25)

A National Literacy History

A generation of adult blacks in South Africa has lost access to the printed word. Even today, children in schools may not be exposed to as many written texts as they need for literacy development. There is a shortage of books in African languages, and teachers are struggling to handle large multicultural classrooms. Drilling from flashcards, repetition,
memorisation and reading material devoid of meaning for the child, are still seen and heard, in spite of the introduction of OBE.

Deeply felt resentments about denial of access to literacy and inequality in education, are evident in the reactions of parents and teachers to claims in the 1980s that all children in fact shared the same syllabus and texts:

It's all very well to talk about African schools having the same syllabus as white schools. But no account is taken of the tremendous difficulties with the language switch from vernacular to English. In deep Soweto - Meadowlands and Phiri - some children in Standard Three can hardly speak a word of English. And it's supposed to become the medium of instruction! There they are, in Biology, learning about 'carnivores', when they don't even know the words for 'cup' and 'saucer'. It's just not as simple as saying 'they all have the same syllabus'. These children are educationally disadvantaged.

The reading books are all about white middle class children in England. This bears no relation to the culture of black children in Soweto - never mind the rural areas. It has nothing to do with the world they experience outside of school. These kind of books do nothing to instill a love of reading in black children. (English Teachers in Soweto, 1983, in Christie, 1990, p. 148)

Today, mother tongue instruction in any of South Africa's eleven official languages is entrenched in the language policy for higher education institutions (Department of Arts, Culture, Science Policy Document on Languages in the Public Sector, 1998). The rationale is that it promotes access, equity, redress and multilingualism and creates optimal conditions for learning. However, in effect this does not occur (see Barkhuizen and Gough, 1996). For one thing, qualified teachers in all official languages are not available. English, for blacks and whites alike, is the preferred language in education, international communication, the economy and the job market, despite its "oppressive" nature. We may enshrine the equality of languages in our constitution, but in reality, as Ogle (1999) says, "...we are overseeing the death of African languages" (p. 6). It is
widely acknowledged and has been in theories of learning, that second language learning and learning in general are enhanced when the learner's own world, prior knowledge and sociocultural experience, are engaged. There are numerous pedagogic benefits to bringing the literacies of home and family into the classroom (see Taylor, 1997). However, the majority of children are still learning and being assessed in a language that is not their mother tongue, exacerbating poor performance. Low academic achievement is thus being institutionalised, causing further disadvantage to those already disadvantaged historically, and privileging those historically privileged.

South Africa's Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, has taken a stand for full literacy in the mother tongue, asserting that we cannot impose English on everyone even if it is the *lingua franca* of the country. He urges creative child-centred learning, away from rote learning which is “a colonisation of the mind” (Nolan, 1999, p. 7). The struggle against illiteracy is a global one, especially in third world countries. Foster (1990) stresses the importance of literacy in anti-racist education, and calls for a comprehensive programme of social and political education in the United Kingdom:

Its major aim would be to provide students with a broad knowledge of social and political issues and relationships, and the skills and qualities which would enable them to analyse, understand, participate in, and possibly change the society in which they live. Well-developed literacy skills are clearly important, as are oral, listening, research, organizational and co-operative skills. Also important is the development of commitments to democratic values, such as the importance of free debate and discussion, rational argument, the use of evidence, and respect for the opinions of others. Such aims involve a commitment to a particular curriculum content and pedagogy (p. 12).

Despite efforts to make language development in higher education the responsibility of all who teach, in a language-in-curriculum approach, the tendency to
view only language teachers as literacy brokers prevails in South Africa. Simply raising awareness of language in the disciplines would be valuable, for a start. Given second language learning needs (Ellis, 1985; Raimes, 1983), and the fact that most staff at institutions of higher learning are not qualified as teachers, let alone teachers with some experience in second language learning, language awareness programmes are necessary. For example, we tend to regard mother-tongue as interference and language variety as baggage (rather than capital). The prohibition of mother tongue conversation in classrooms is common, when this exchange could assist understanding, and many of us are still driven, in assessment and teaching, by error analysis. Although aware of communicative language teaching strategies and the idea of communicative competence (the ability to use language not only in linguistically correct ways but in socially appropriate ways as well, according to Hymes, 1971), we may fail to translate these into effective pedagogic practice for our own unique contexts.

With regard to literacy development, how can classroom practice at a technikon actively recognise and develop alternate literacies as communication? The Communication curriculum provides, in my opinion, an ideal space for the recognition of alternate literacies, a notion supported by OBE and national educational policy. Moreover, as the South African Government Gazette on Language, Literacy and Communication (1997) asserts,

"Literacies" stresses the issue of access to the world and to knowledge through development of multiple capacities within all of us to make sense of our worlds through whatever means we have, not only texts and books (p. 26).
It recognises as 'text' any spoken, visual or written communication. Alternate and other literacies include reading between the metaphorical lines, reading bodies and gestures, and reading social development and change, as Salvio (1994, 1996) argues. This supports Freire's (1970) notion of literacy as personal empowerment over oppression, which transforms the concept from reading the word to reading the world. Being literate is also a matter of understanding social, cultural and political contexts, in order to make meaning. Kutz and Roskelly (1991) therefore urge an awareness of the learner’s life and of historical contexts in the classroom. Hence the notion of multiple literacies and the reconceptualisation of literacy as being more than print, gains agency.

New Conceptualisations: From Literacy to Literacies

This study foregrounds the concept 'literacies,' with performance as a critical alternate literacy in the classroom. In researching 'literacies,' the concept 'literacy' must first be problematised. Hence this section analyses traditional and alternate conceptualisations of literacy, showing the development and significance of various kinds of literacies in a post-apartheid South Africa. It offers a view of the several kinds of literacies referred to in national policy documents, reflecting on their status and purpose in the educational landscape of KwaZulu-Natal, and arguing for their recognition.

The literature records traditional conceptualisations of literacy as the ability to read and write in a given language, but also opens the doors to new visions (see Stuckey, 1991; Chall & Indrisano, 1995; Gee, 1987; Voss, 1996). Basic literacy and functional literacy have emphasised the adult’s ability to communicate adequately via reading and writing, in order to participate in professional and social contexts (see Brodkey, 1986).
Crossing the borders of reading-writing (see Chall & Indrisano, 1995), subsequent understandings of literacy include the ability to speak, write, read, think and interpret written text. Venezsky's conceptualisation (in Chall & Indrisano, 1995) captures, in 1995, the need to push the limits of the traditional definition even further:

Literacy is a minimal ability to read and write in a designated language, as well as a mind set or way of thinking about the use of reading and writing in everyday life. It differs from simple reading and writing in its assumption of an understanding of the appropriate uses of these abilities within a print-based society. Literacy, therefore, requires active, autonomous engagement with print and stresses the role of the individual in generating as well as receiving and assigning independent interpretations to messages (p. 64).

There is recognition today of literacy as speaking, listening, thinking, problem-solving, numeracy and comprehension, which includes thought and behaviour. More recently, knowledge of or experience with technology (whether practical, theoretical or both, and to what degree, are arguable), is recognised as a literacy. Literacies which embody the technologies of global communication, the media, and linguistic and cultural diversity are fast overtaking a rigid understanding of the concept. Literacies, the plurality of literacy, multiple literacies and literacy practices are acknowledged by various authors, indicating the range and complexity of this notion. The New London Group (1996) concluded their discussions on literacy in New Hampshire (USA) by advocating a pedagogy of multiliteracies. This pedagogy, they argue (1996), would enable learners to gain access to the language of power and economics (the pragmatics of the work-world), while recognising linguistic and cultural differences as well as other modes of meaning-making such as the visual, spatial and behavioural: "When the proximity of cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the key facts of our time, the very nature of language learning..."
has changed" (p. 64). Perez (1998) likewise emphasises context and culture in her conceptualisation of literacy:

...literacy is a technology or a tool that is culturally determined and used for specific purposes. As the specific purposes and contexts for literacy use change...a person’s ability to perform literacy tasks or to learn at optimal levels also changes...Literacy practices are culture-specific ways of knowing (pp. 23-24).

De Castell (1996) in her argument for literacy as a technology of self-formation, calls for a return to the book in instructional (and other) contexts. She observes that we are now in “a post-literate culture...in which new technologies and practices of representation and communication have largely superseded writing and the written word” (p. 27).

The Literacy Crisis in South Africa

In South Africa, the literacy crisis has far-reaching consequences, as observed in documentation from Project Literacy (1997):

Illiteracy is one of apartheid’s cruellest legacies as it ensures that the vast majority of South Africans remain passive players in determining what they do with their own lives. It is a major stumbling block to foreign investment, job creation and the strengthening of an enduring democratic order (p. 7).

Many mechanisms are in place to address the literacy crisis in the country. Post-apartheid, we need to give people the opportunities to learn to read and write in both their mother tongue and English. Some literacy projects have social change as their goal. The English Resource Unit, a non-governmental organisation, won an international Reading Association Literacy Award for the development of a literacy programme for adults (Bisetty, 1999). This programme offers learners a forum for reading and writing,
linking literacy to income generation and community self-help schemes. The Khanyisa Education Centre offers reading classes to township and rural people, focusing on literacy development, the environment, helping oneself and sharing. It includes African languages, computer literacy and integrated life skills in its curriculum. Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) initiatives, which design generic and context-specific programmes, can be found in most institutions of higher education and business concerns. Universities such as Stellenbosch use satellite technology to transmit lessons to learners in the rural areas from learning centres. The Leadership and Language Improvement Programme was based on the Each One Teach One strategy, which, though criticised for its bias towards a Christian ideology, challenged all South Africans to help fight illiteracy. Unisa (the University of South Africa) has embarked on a literacy campaign through its Adult Basic Education and Training Programme, which intends by the year 2004 to reduce national illiteracy levels by 35% (Mokoka, 2002).

The use of technology in computer-assisted education and computer assisted language learning is an emerging development intended to address the literacy crisis. However, while English Second Language instruction and development could benefit immensely from technology, access to computers in historically disadvantaged institutions is limited and software contextualised for African languages and culture is scarce. In writing programmes and language courses in higher education today, the cultural studies model, which foregrounds meaning through readings related to the learner’s sociocultural influences (Gee, 1987), offers an alternative to the apartheid deficit model. Students’ experiences are cultural capital which they contribute to the learning context,
and which can be integrated into academic literacy courses. Finally, other literacies such as the visual, kinesic, the literacy arts, indigenous arts, cultural literacy, media literacy and critical literacy, have slowly gained some recognition as legitimate and important forms of communication.

Recognition of Alternate Literacies

Emerging policies from government departments of Education, Arts and Culture in South Africa assert that there is a need for change in our understanding of literacy. Expanding the concept of literacy, itself an inclusive act, contrasts with the exclusionary politics characteristic of apartheid South Africa. New conceptualisations of literacy, as revealed in the following extract from the Government Gazette on Language, Literacy and Communication (1997, imply the recognition of other, alternate literacies which represent and communicate, sometimes in conjunction with a level of proficiency in reading and writing but often in the absence of such proficiency.

- Cultural literacy - Cultural, social and ideological values that shape our “reading” of texts.
- Critical literacy - The ability to respond critically to the intentions, content and possible effects of messages and texts on the reader.
- Visual literacy - The interpretation of images, signs, pictures and non-verbal (body) language, etc.
- Media literacy - The “reading” of TV and film as cultural messages.
- Computer literacy - The ability to use and access information from computers.
By extending the concept of literacy to include creative activities, the visual arts, the language arts and the performing arts, we are compelled as educators to consciously recognise the arts as lenses through which we see, learn, experience and communicate. Government and the ministry emphasise that these alternate literacies provide a means of acting and interacting in the world to forge and maintain relationships, engage with others reciprocally, integrate new and old knowledge (the recognition of prior learning in formal education contexts), and to share ideas and information.

Pushing the barriers of literacy beyond traditional conceptualisations is not a novel idea: what constitutes communication, what counts as knowledge, what ways of knowing, understanding and composing we seek and create, take a myriad forms. Including the various arts of literacy as lenses through which we see, is tantamount to asking (again and again): How do we see? How do we experience? How do we express what we see and know? How do we explore the world of ideas and physical space? How do we make sense of things? Can we? How do we shift and align fragments of reality to compose some meaning, albeit fleeting? How do we represent?

While conceptualisations of literacy have evolved in South Africa and elsewhere, the notion of literacy as a "litany of print" (Stuckey, 1991), dominates still, particularly in historically disadvantaged institutions. "Text," for example, is most often understood to mean "book" or written material. It may thus be premature to conclude that we are in fact beyond the book. With an estimated 20 million people labelled "illiterate," and despite a more modernist outlook on literacy, we are arguably not a post-literate culture (p. 46).
Depending on what position one adopts, one could argue either that the arts are dying in South Africa or that they are awakening to the dawn of a new African renaissance. Running parallel to the observation of the dominance of print literacy especially in education, is the emergence of diverse forms of other literacies which constitute the ability to communicate, including the visual, performing and language arts. As a whole these literacies currently offer a vision, whether satirical, critical, humorous or spiritual, of a new order. Recognising the arts of literacy thus also invites a survey of the wider landscape. In response to sociopolitical change in South Africa, signalled officially by the elections in 1994 and the ANC government, they suggest new beginnings which nonetheless are inextricably rooted in the past.

While the thrust in schools, non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations is to develop print literacy in first and second languages, there is an interest in other literacies, other arts which communicate. This state of the arts represents often the attitudes, feelings and fears of people as they express their response to change and to composing a new world. They can be construed as a positive way to record responses to long-awaited change. The transition from repression to freedom, fraught with overlapping historical tensions, is expressed metaphorically through dance, drama, music, oral poetry and other arts and crafts. They tell a new story, a new history, as they reach into the wells of experience of older generations and the heritage, culture and traditions of Africa, and more specifically, South Africa. They validate and share ways of knowing and understanding. Further, they record what has happened, bringing a history denied into the present, as testimony to suffering and survival. The Truth and Reconciliation
Commission, which has convened since 1997, is one such testimony. It has been construed as a space or mechanism for the recovery of a nation, but also, in contrast, as a hopeless spectacle, a judicial court gone wrong. Despite the criticisms, it is recognised as a retelling of history which confronts us, making us witness to a past which many South Africans have never seen.

Cultural literacy, conceptualised as the information a competent reader already has, is criticised by Willis (1995) for validating language forms in some cultures while ignoring others. McLaren (in Willis, 1995) argues that the different language standards and cultural information which students bring into the classroom are legitimate and valuable parts of learning. Critical literacy, aligned with social constructivist epistemologies, calls up the political, social and historical dimensions of literacy (Willis, 1995). Shor and Pari (1999) refer to critical literacy as “learning to read and write as part of the process of becoming conscious of one’s experience as historically constructed within specific power relationships” (p. 1).

Critical literacy together with cultural literacy, assumes a process of conscientisation and self-consciousness which has relevance for the South African classroom. We are constantly reflecting on and re-evaluating where we are politically, as a democracy. In schools and in society, this has informed both written expression and other modes of communication such as music, art, mime and dance. However, in technikon education, the exploration of alternate literacies as mechanisms for conscientisation is not necessarily part of the agenda, except where teachers are on strike and protest as performance is a literacy behaviour to be learnt. The experiences which face teachers and...
pupils in schools and higher education institutions are challenging on the one hand (how to devise a curriculum for large multicultural and multilingual classes, with limited resources, according to OBE), and disturbing on the other (living with violence within an anomic school culture). Consequently, not enough attention is given to critical and cultural literacies. There is no time to speak of the tremendous sense of change in the country, and many classrooms are still environments which perpetuate the old order. Teachers are too frustrated and overwhelmed by the conditions under which they work, to care about questioning and analysing power relations in society or the nature of social practices, through classroom discourse. So-called “cultural topics” which raise concerns about diversity, political identity or current crises in education, are avoided or addressed with caution. Dewey (1938) argues that such education, separate from experience, is not likely to teach one democracy, or about learning in a democracy. It seems we have multicultural classrooms but mono-cultural teachers (Dean's observation in Shor & Pari, 1999).

I argue that in the South African classroom, cultural and critical literacies need to be acknowledged and drawn upon. Our classrooms increasingly include older second language students who may not be able to read and write, but whose level of cultural and critical literacy is extremely powerful. There is therefore a critical awareness of socio-political developments both provincially and nationally, despite the lack of access to the media, which is dominated by the English language anyway. However, to reiterate, we may not be accessing our students’ cultural and critical literacies, for example through the texts we choose to introduce. The inclusion of critical literacy in language development would constitute a way to not only understand the relationship between language, power...
and identity, but also to challenge and subvert it. A central underlying assumption in
critical literacy theory is that the dynamics of power and position are rooted in ideologies
and sociocultural norms, which are not static (see Chapter One). Insights into our own
culture help to develop identity, values, ways of being and the ability to engage positively
with the other. Language developers need to become more aware of critical literacies in the
classroom, and should take cognisance of the unique concerns of second language speakers
and their encounters with the second language, according to Harris and Silva (1993). This
is a priority in South Africa, or should be.

The vision of South Africa’s Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology
encourages the literacy arts as an expression of the diverse range and mix of South African
arts, culture and history, through creativity in making, performing and presenting.
Aspects of its White Paper (1996) intersect with various policy documents on Teacher
Education, emphasising the relationship between learning and culture. The surge of
interest in the literacy arts despite limited resources and the struggle against narrow
conceptualisations, suggests that they can be regarded as communication per se, as
communication which reflects on change, and as a reflection of change itself. They
moreover present unique opportunities for teaching and learning, for making meaning and
composing reality in a rapidly changing world. Contextualised within a sociopolitical
milieu through which representation is mediated and transmediated, they make learners of
both performer and participant observer, and draw on real-life experiences that are
contemporary and relevant to the majority.
While the quest to write and record text of international repute is ever present, democracy in South Africa has meant seeing value and meaning in what we have, in the heritage which captures our uniqueness: the languages, cultures, customs and beliefs which make us who we are, right here and now. The current trend in South Africa to explore other literacies offers recognition to local expression particularly in the performance arts, local television and film. The Faculty of Arts and Design at the former Natal Technikon, which has two campuses (in Durban and Pietermaritzburg), offers qualifications in a range of arts which communicate: Drama, Fine Art, Journalism, Light Music, Performing Arts Technology, Photography and Video Technology. This last programme offers modules in Editing, Script-writing, Communication, Computers and Graphics, Direction, and Film and Television Appreciation and Development. In fact, since 1988 it has been the only educational institution offering training for the television and film industry, showing some foresight, given the popularity of these arts today. Despite this, Peterson (1997) finds that local productions are valued more internationally than within the country. There are many reasons. Thomaselli (1999) critiques the role of the media, including film, for fostering white intragroup communication and effecting only cosmetic changes by casting blacks in stereotyped roles, in the name of intercultural communication. Yet another writer (Bell, 1999) observes the dearth of documentation and criticism on South Africa theatre by South Africans.
Performance as an Alternate Literacy in the Classroom

I prefer to be a live performer, not a reader, not to look at the book, but to look at the people and communicate so that even my hands are expressive; it is my whole being which becomes involved. (Mzwakhe Mbuli, in Petersen & Rutherford, 1991, p. 68)

Theatre and performance can be recognised in the Communication classroom as alternate literacies which allow the body to speak through movement. Referring to theatre and performance as a way to develop literacy, Salvio (1996) asserts: “Words are not the only means we use to communicate. There are often times when we need to be given other forms of expression which may bring us into words, reading and writing” (p. 1). Grumet (1988) refers to bodyreading (p. 149), arguing that through gesture, intonation and movement in performance, the body of the actor speaks more eloquently than words. Thus performance using the social, cultural and historical experiences of our students can mediate the reading and writing foregrounded in the Communication curriculum, making it more accessible and meaningful. Currently, the absence of any print text other than one which takes a very traditional approach to Business English and Communication Theory, and of literary genres in a time when South Africa is in the throes of a complete renaissance, African, artistic and political, makes a telling statement about the curriculum.

The OBE model proposes activities such as listening to verse, narrative and songs, along with dialogue and discussion, to effect its stated outcomes. It takes a multigenre approach, crossing between sign systems to make meaning. Voss (1996) similarly finds inter-relationships amongst literacies, and literacy and culture. Literacies, she argues, means
those understandings that allow an individual to make meaning in a symbol system - spoken or written words, art or music or wood or media...No literacy exists in and of itself. No literacy can be totally extracted and separated from other literacies or from the complex web of cultural practices that surround and accompany it (p. 14).

Literacies are thus ways of seeing and understanding. This supports Siegel’s (1995) transmediation theory, which explores how meaning is translated between sign systems. Siegel argues that we have tended to privilege language over other literacies and arts in the range of our teaching practices, and that we in fact require more than words in order to learn.

The curricular goals of OBE for Communication could be effectively addressed through performance and dramatisation for a particular audience; the use of painting and drawing to illustrate an idea; discussion of a range of interpretations, and reflective writing. Stories or narratives in the traditions enjoyed by the students’ community and culture, to engage their social and cultural contexts, could make the exploration of the Communication curriculum less “business-oriented” and impersonal. Performance, a literacy we activated in our classroom in this study, can thus be a stimulus which mediates reading, writing and other literacies. Actors and storytellers like Greig Coetzee and Gcina Mhlope affirm today that people want to talk more about their lives in South Africa, that the country is “bursting with stories and images that are begging to be put on stage” (Coetzee in Sherriffs, 1998, p. 54). The Communication class could cross disciplinary and other borders through the topics it raises for discussion. Kutz and Roskelley (1991) assert that pedagogic practice can integrate binaries such as the emotional and rational, subjective and objective, individual and collaborative, making the classroom
more informal, and encouraging the use of colloquial expression. This may enhance second
language development by opening up opportunities for students to speak and
communicate. Orality, a key outcome for Communication, could help connect home and
school discourse. Especially if the use of the mother tongue is not restricted, dialogue
among students can clarify concepts, develop abstract thinking and ultimately build
learning communities. It would also move curricula and programmes away from labels
which categorise them as remedial.

Educational theatre, which is related directly to prescribed texts, is alive but a
relatively small-scale endeavour in KwaZulu-Natal. A few companies, private schools and
university drama departments dramatise prescribed texts for schools, in order to
problematise issues of social relevance, such as voting procedure, discrimination and
gender differences. Community theatre has widened access to the majority: it not only
brings theatre to the people, but people to the theatre. This counters the problems of
literal access especially in rural areas, where theatres are few and far-between or non-
existent, and the lack of public transport, poor security, the high cost of tickets for
performances and the historically racial dimensions of attendance, have kept theatres
empty.

Criticism has, however, been levelled at playwrights who do little more than
exploit the contemporary lifestyles and practices of cultural groups. The standard of
these productions, their commercial exploitation of a public that is generally a non-
theatre-going one, and the reinforcement of racial and gender stereotypes, have mitigated
somewhat against theatre-going. In response, playwrights argue that community theatre
delivers serious social messages on violence, relationships and political change, and attribute some of the misunderstanding of its value to the fact that white critics who review theatre through “white eyes,” do not understand Indian or black cultural values or humour (Naidoo, 1998). This may reflect the segregationist socialisation of all South Africans; unfortunately, social and educational contexts still do not encourage dialogue and sharing of cultural values. However, resorting to ethnic reviewing is equally problematic. The question we must raise, as history is being rewritten, and texts representing it are being transformed, is whether critics have recourse to more current, accurate and relevant material, or if the old history of apartheid ideology is being perpetuated by colonial practice yet again. The issue of recognition and development of alternative literacies, it can be argued, must also address the representation and critique of these literacies.

In the process of government-decreed rationalisation that is dogging our educational institutions, universities and schools target first their departments of drama, music and fine art, despite the growth in the performing arts industry and the recognition of these arts as alternative literacies. As I write in March 2002, Durban’s Playhouse Theatre Company is facing closure. The Faculty of Education at the University of Durban-Westville, before the closure of the university’s arts departments, sought to develop teacher competencies in an integrated arts programme. The programme required teachers to have some basic knowledge in dance, drama, art and music, such as the ability to use the environment, to be creative and innovative, to improvise, to tell a story, to choose and use appropriate media (music, masks, mobiles, etc.), to move and act, to
dramatise, to reflect and communicate. It echoed Ellsworth’s (1997) conviction that “Pedagogy is a performance” (p. 17): being a good teacher means being a good actor.

How can pedagogic contexts acknowledge, exploit and offer access to alternate literacies? Teaching should encourage meta-awareness of alternate literacies and how they may be acquired, developed and used, especially as the numbers of non-traditional students increase. These are older students, females, with children and families to support, who may be holding down a job, and who bring with them significant life experience and prior learning. Access to education may not have been possible before for these students. Given their presence, access to alternate literacies can occur through dialogue on literacy and literacy dialogues, which should emanate from curriculum, as Brodkey (1986) suggests. Together with alternative forms of assessment through journals and portfolios, they constitute ways to engage students positively and actively.

McKenna, Stahl, and Reinking (1994) assert that where schools provide ineffective literacy development, specifically reading, home life will compensate as parents teach, employ tutors and monitor progress. This is sometimes not possible in third world countries like South Africa, where even the most basic amenities are lacking. Here the historically disadvantaged may not come from homes which emphasise literacy. It is even more crucial therefore, that schools and in my view, institutions at other levels as well, offer strong literacy programmes. We cannot afford to overlook the role of educational systems in developing literacies if we expect our graduates to take their places in society and to contribute meaningfully to its progress.
A recognition of alternate literacies also supports a recognition of alternative forms of data representation such as film and demonstration, which Eisner (1997) identifies as a strength of qualitative research methods. He (1997) argues that they foreground an experiential conception of understanding and knowing. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), among others, see qualitative approaches as vehicles which accord forms of representation other than word and number the status they deserve, and that these forms of representation manifest appropriately the value of qualitative studies.

The Role of Literature in the Language Curriculum

Mphahlele bemoans the suppression of black writing in apartheid South Africa, which closed one avenue through which we could know one another as people. “No part of African literature in South Africa,” he observes, “invokes the gods of separatism” (in Malan, 1987, p. 49)

I begin by contextualising the debate on language and literature within classroom contexts in schools, specifically secondary schools, in South Africa. In the early nineties, and some would argue well before that, in a more tacit form, some recognition of the value of literature relevant to particular contexts, and its role in negotiating and expressing experience, particularly for second language English teaching, filtered through the system of South African schools. Yet at other levels, literature and language remained “separate,” although Kilfoil’s findings (overleaf) are interesting. With reference to language proficiency and communicative competence, and the importance of context in meaning-making, Cummins (in Starfield, 1990) contrasts context-embedded or context-reduced approaches. These polarities still dominate the debate today. Should we at Mantec
choose the discipline-specific or generic route? Should we adopt the infusion model, the
adjunct or stand alone model for language development?

Another influence, the language arts approach, emphasised in the eighties and nineties the use of the arts to teach content and to foster transfer of skills across subjects. In 1994, the government’s Reconstruction and Development Programme argued for the central role of the arts and drama in education at all levels, including tertiary level. The goal of such approaches, according to Morrow and Pressley (1997), is to make meaningful the development of literacy, by contextualising it in real, relevant events. For the technikon curriculum, including lesson planning and assessment practices, literature and language have regardless remained separate entities. It is rare to offer literature as a subject or a diploma in a technikon, since it is not career-oriented. Language development courses, even within academic development programmes at universities, have tended to leave literature out, except as comprehension or reading texts. In contrast to my own schooling, in which literature in first language contexts was prioritised, the curriculum in the mid-nineties for second language speakers has started to place more emphasis on language and literacy, specifically competence in reading, writing, speaking and listening (see Kilfoil, 1993, p. 255).

However, the literature on South African education offers a rationale for bringing literature in, in what is an ongoing debate about how to develop language competence in English. According to Kilfoil (1993), the omission of literature in basic language modules and its inclusion in more advanced modules (though not everywhere), indicates that research and theory on the relationship between the two, indeed “on the place of:
literature within the language curriculum” (p. 256), are being ignored. Literature not only brings diverse experiences and culture into the classroom, it also fosters a tolerance for difference, a quality much needed in South Africa. As Kilfoil (1993) argues, literature has a role to play in

- providing experience through the medium of words;
- developing the affective and cognitive dimensions of the learner;
- promoting interaction in the classroom;
- expanding pupils’ knowledge of the conventions, history and rhetorical strategies of texts;
- developing pupils’ ability to respond with greater complexity and subtlety to literacy and other texts. (p. 257).

Henning (in Shanahan, 1997) argues that “Through literature...students can develop a full range of linguistic and cognitive skills, cultural knowledge and sensitivity” (p. 165). Shanahan (1997 contends that we need “a clearly identifiable set of functional goals” in language teaching and “to recognize the added value that the study of literature - any literature - brings with it” (p. 165). Though he is referring to Foreign Language Teaching, this intrigues me. What added value can be ascertained by introducing *Master Harold and the Boys* to a Communication classroom for Engineering students at Mantec, a technikon with large classes? How would I understand and explain this added value? How would others, and in this case, students, see and express this value? Are we relying on intuition when we argue that literature is useful for language learners, and is that valid? Is it too narrow and parochial to conceptualise what literature brings to our lives as “added value”? Are we simplifying the issue when we should be complicating it further?
One of my concerns, as mentioned in the introductory section of this dissertation, is that the Communication curriculum appeared too mechanistic and impersonal, producing a decontextualised classroom in which personal experiences and emotions are suppressed. How strange it is, I thought, that in a land where both the emergent and suppressed literature of its peoples literally shout pain and protest and liberation, we should leave literature out. Are we guilty of silencing voices which disturb? Freire (1970) argues that ‘the ‘culture of silence’ of the dispossessed” (p. 12) is maintained by our educational systems. Salvio, referring to studies by Goodman and herself (in Carson & Sumara, 1997), finds that while educational experiences are deeply connected to emotional life, as teachers we may leave emotion outside the classroom. She supports Lutz’s argument (in Carson & Sumara, 1997) that “emotion is a cultural and interpersonal process of naming, justifying, and persuading people in relationship to one another...[and] that emotional meaning is a social achievement, an emergent product of social life” (p. 251). A classroom, curriculum and pedagogy which includes literature could provide the space and means not only for exploring emotion, but also for fostering conversation and critical reflection about the social, cultural and political dimensions of our lives.

Literature, it is argued, evokes not only the affective dimension, but also the imagination and intuition (see Greene, 2001). According to Bruner (1986), intuitive ways of knowing, through narrative, are as important for learning as paradigmatic (rational and logical) ways of knowing. It is narrative knowing which intersects with and shapes most closely our everyday experiences of the world and the meaning we ascribe to them.
Despite these arguments, research in second language acquisition and learning has tended to overlook the affective impact of language use. Yet writers like Shanahan (1997) document that language teachers who studied literature feel that "literature represents a means of powerfully energizing the learning of language" (p. 167). Morrow and Pressley (1997) argue that engaging with children's literature leads learners to discuss, tell and retell stories and role-play in a way that triggers the emotional and evokes the real. One of our goals, according to Shanahan (1997), should be to discover how we can best use the affective, represented by literature, to develop language and communication, taking into account also the learner's culture and character. A systematic, interpretive framework which will allow us to address these issues is needed.

Literature and the Cognitive Dimension

Hennings (1997) examines four beliefs about language learning and teaching the language arts through literature. Though she makes reference to children, these beliefs resonate with the arguments informing this study:

- Children become more effective language users through social interaction in which they create and communicate meanings and use language in all its forms.
- Children become more effective language users by listening to, reading, and responding to literature.
- Children become more effective language users when they function in classroom communities in which they interact and collaborate naturally with one another as well as work independently.
- Children become more effective language users when their teachers plan ongoing, cohesive blocks of instruction — integrated literature-based units — that enable them to function at their own level and pace, communicate with one another, make connections, and think critically and creatively (pp. 11-13).

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Burroughs (1993) argues, with others, for literature as a tool to develop critical thinking. Teachers, he finds, tend to think literature is something students engage with after they have learned to read, as opposed to that which could influence their ongoing learning, comprehension and critical thinking. While he makes reference to schools in the US, this may be the case even at higher levels of education in South Africa. The effective use of literature in his study incorporates techniques such as focusing, so that students refine their responses; modifying or shaping students’ responses in different languages; hinting, where students are encouraged to reconsider their responses; telling, and summarizing.

A range of studies asserts the value of literature in developing reflectivity and metacognition (Case, 2001; Malcolm, 2001; Tama & Peterson, 1991; Morrow & Pressley, 1997). Garner (1987), noting that metacognition is “a fuzzy concept” (pp. 15-16) recommends Flavell’s (1976) definition: “Metacognition refers to one’s knowledge concerning one’s own cognitive processes and products or anything related to them, e.g., the learning-relevant properties of information or data.” Wells (1999) talks about metaknowing, as reflecting on understandings gained from other modes of knowing, but also as “knowing about one’s knowing” (p. 66). This conceptualisation dates back to Piaget’s theories of cognitive development, foregrounding a theory of mind (ours and others’). Bruner’s (1996, in Wells, 1999) more accessible definition refers to an awareness of our own thought processes in our learning and thinking.

The literary text in this study along with the journal, a research tool, were intended to stimulate the learner (myself included) to self-consciously see and see again,
metacognitively, in dialogue with self. According to Kutz and Roskelly (1991), rereading literature or one's own writing at different times and contexts can lead to different understandings of self, context and text. Mandlebaum and Vandenbroek (1994) discuss the many advantages of using literature for learners with special needs, asserting that it can optimize student learning. All this implies reflective practice on the part of the teacher (Schoenbach, 1994).

**Literature and the Personal Dimension**

The role of literature in revealing and recalling culture and history is an inimitable experience shared by generations of readers worldwide. In South Africa, this has a peculiarly poignant significance (as experienced in our classroom when Fugard's text was read). My own sense of the way we were ourselves estranged from black writing in this country, is echoed in an article by Govinden, an academic and mentor I have known for many years at UDW. Coming upon her words was serendipitous (1995):

As I look back now, I realise that there was a curious collusion between apartheid and colonialism and that this came to bear especially in the literature that we studied at school. Literature was immediately synonymous with Literature with a capital L...Literature was confined to English Literature or that which was written a 'long time ago'. Oral and popular literatures as well as local and contemporary writing of black South African peoples were not even considered as being marginal or secondary. It simply did not exist (p. 173).

Literature, and our own narratives, do not merely record but recapture and reawaken in us the need to reconstitute our individual and collective histories (Shanahan, 1997). Williams (1961), who argues for literature to be located within the context of the wider culture, sees it as a way of redeeming culture.
Given the critical skills shortages in South Africa, the deteriorating economy and job market, and emphasis on the student as a multi-skilled product of the institution, how can we justify an approach to education which through literature brings the personal and subjective dimensions of social interaction into our classrooms? I believe that if OBE is to be operationalised, our conceptualisation of curriculum and teaching today cannot ignore attitudes, feelings, intuitions and relationships as well as facts, methods and strategies. They are in any event inter-related. Goffman (in Lemert, 1998) argues that what a person “protects and defends and invests his feelings in is an idea about himself, and ideas are vulnerable not to facts and things but to communications” (p. 362). Clarifying the concept of education against the broader conceptual framework of change in South Africa, Letseka (in Higgs et al, 2000) asks:

- Should the aim of education in traditional African life be both botho and ubuntu (Sotho and Nguni for humanness or the philosophy which values human needs, interests and dignity)?
- Should it be interpersonal and co-operative skills?
- Should it encompass personal well-being or human flourishing? (pp. 279-293).

His response is yes, yes and yes! The use of literature to achieve these aims, becomes in effect a means of humanizing and personalising the classroom.

Socio-cultural Contexts in Theories of Language and Cognition

Theorists in language and cognition have emphasised the role of social interaction and sociocultural contexts in development. According to Dewey (1938), the goal of education is the development of the whole individual, including the ongoing intellectual and moral development of the child, and the attitudes, skills and values required to succeed in a democratic society. Dewey’s approach is experiential, stressing learning
through the exploration of the environment and the development of understandings which have personal meaning. Experience and education are intertwined, with the positive qualities of experience making them educative, depending on their effect and continuity.

Dewey focuses on child-centred teaching and curricula, and the nurturing of individual learner differences (cultural and personal) in a shared co-operative learning community (Levin, 1991). His (1938) emphasis is on the individual and individual experience within a small group collaborative setting, via “contact and communication” and interdisciplinary problem based project work, in curricula informed closely by the outside social context. This approach was intended to prepare students for rewarding membership in society, and for that purpose to develop cognitive skills and language.

For Dewey, schools should be places of inquiry in a self-renewing sense: here teachers can self-reflexively determine what is best practice with students. Embedded in this idea of school is the development of democratic procedures and scientific methods of inquiry, through collaborative learning which cuts across intelligence quotient streaming and cultural backgrounds. The school is thus a miniature democracy. In South Africa, proponents of OBE indicate a desire to further the goals of democracy entrenched in new educational policies and the constitution. Curriculum 21, for instance, is student-centred and prepares the learner for life in a democratic society by developing critical thinking. However, critics argue that these goals are in fact thwarted and subverted. In Dewey's conceptualisation, cognitive development and social development are interdependent in this context, as knowledge is constructed and reconstructed by the individual and groups. It is widely acknowledged that democracy does indeed begin in the classroom: the
involvement of parents, pupils, teachers, managers and community representatives in school governance reflects this process today. However, since it is a very new approach to managing school education in South Africa, it is sometimes little understood by the role-players, many of whom shy away from the responsibilities of involvement.

Dewey’s pragmatic approach recommends hands-on experience, exploratory practice and problem-solving methods in the classroom. Thus manual work, artistic expression and domestic work are conceived as channels for the learning of subject matter in the disciplines. As noted, South African schools now prioritise life skills, which are integrated into all subjects taught at school. The means that learning becomes more applicable to daily life contexts, since the classroom extends into the outside world and the outside world informs the classroom.

Dewey (in Mosher, 1995) observes that the pedagogy of education for development requires the teacher to be concerned with identifying situations which offer opportunities for interaction. Further, he recommends subject matter which is rich, varied, flexible and definite, presented in planned order for developmental education. Dewey’s sense of the relationship between the school and the workplace may be the forerunner of co-operative learning at technikons in South Africa, as institutions which have always integrated the work environment with that of study. In-service training, placements and internships are co-operative education models, exposing the student to the world of work.

In contrast to Dewey who has been criticised for focusing too much on the big picture, sometimes smudging the detail affecting the individual and how individuals interact, Vygotsky’s theories on the development of language and thought centralise the
close interaction of individuals. Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory of human development offers a social constructivist model of teaching and learning. He argues that language both as communication with others (intersubjective) and as thinking (intrasubjective), is a social phenomenon which shapes learning. There are, of course, similarities in Dewey and Vygotsky's views. For both, the social world, rather than individual characteristics or secondary social influences, is central to children's learning and cognitive development. We grow within a social medium, within society, and our mental faculties develop in that society and community, or in contexts of sharing. There is an emphasis on joint activity and collaboration in the development of thinking and language. Dewey (1938) and Vygotsky (1978) both emphasise the "sociocultural context of thinking" (Rogoff, 1993, p. 122). Further, they show how the individual and environment are inherently connected and not separate entities. Rogoff (1993) refers to this as the "mutuality of organism and environment in development" (p. 123).

Dewey and Vygotsky also both see social interaction as critical to children's cognitive development, stressing the influence of more skilled partners in a sociocultural milieu. Thus language, according to Vygotsky, is a sociocultural tool for thinking, which is developed through participation and communication with others more skilled, in a sociocultural context. As a tool it mediates cognitive development and intellectual activity that occurs through interaction with others. It is this interaction with more informed others that makes available the social and cultural history of a given context to an individual, jointly with the zone of proximal development. The latter, in Vygotsky's words (1978), is
the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by
independent problem solving and the level of potential development as
determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration
with more capable peers” (p. 86).

Thus Vygostsky proposes human interdependence and learning from and with others.

According to Wells (in Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), his social constructivism

...calls for an approach to learning and teaching that is both exploratory and
collaborative...for a reconceptualisation of curriculum in terms of the
negotiated selection of activities that challenge students to go beyond
themselves toward goals that have personal significance for them (p. 61).

Engaging Sociocultural Contexts in the Classroom

The pedagogic import of Vygotskian theory is emphasised by Erickson (1999) in
reference to how we draw on social and cultural contexts: “...in school learning
environments, people use cultural tools in uniquely adaptive ways as they engage one
another in the work of learning at the zone of proximal development” (p. 129). Cultural
tools here refer to language, number and semiotic systems but also to other systems, to
artifacts, and the mode and purpose of engagement, which are all constructed by culture
and history. Rockwell (1999) extends our understanding of the zone of proximal
development by arguing that its use in effecting reform in education tends to overlook
Vygotsky’s emphasis on history in a sociohistorical or cultural-historical theory of
learning and teaching. This is in fact central to Vygotskian theory, she asserts.

Erickson in turn observes a limitation in Rockwell’s view of history, which
influences pedagogic practice, as permanent and in stasis. He (1999) argues that
history can also be considered as a story of change, just as tradition can be conceived dynamically as always in the process of being updated, a snapshot of what at a given historical moment we think the past WAS and recognize from it, but a snapshot that is continually being revised hermeneutically across moments of time, as our experience changes in the present (p. 132).

Development occurs through multiple relationships between the individual, others and changing sociocultural and historical contexts. As argued in the background to this study, the transformation of our classrooms in South Africa to include a range of social and cultural values and experiences, should reflexively transform us as teachers and learners as well. Our learning culture cannot be seen in isolation from the larger contexts which shape our post-apartheid lives.

Sociocultural contexts impact directly on the learner, and it is difficult to grasp that for decades in South Africa, they have been left out of the narrative. Engelbrecht et al (1999) argue for an inclusive education system which acknowledges that context shapes the learner as it does the teacher:

A context is a prerequisite for the understanding of experience, behaviour, problems and phenomena. By taking the context into consideration information is seen in a new light; it becomes understandable (p. 5).

They contend that understanding of context (the wider social system in South Africa and beyond) is the first step in understanding new developments in education and the move towards inclusive education.

What is the role of the school, the technikon or the Communication curriculum in developing learning, language and thought? How are social and cultural contexts engaged, and how do they transform us? As I have already suggested, Freire’s (1973) critical pedagogy could be seen not only as a way of effecting Vygotskian theory, but also OBE,
in a way which erodes its potential dangers. He argues for education which locates us within our communities and the crises, controversies and changes of our times. Again, this requires a curriculum which problematises real-life themes drawn from social experience, through a process of generating critical dialogue with others in the classroom.

With respect to literacy, sociologists and anthropologists argue that it is not only an individual achievement but also a social one: "Literacy is a part of the social order that is passed on from generation to generation through the process of socialization, particularly through literacy activities in the home and in school" (Mercer, 1998, p. 221).

In the context of the classroom, students and teachers may experience a mismatch in a variety of ways in the teaching-learning exchange. In the South African classroom, diverse cultural and social experiences make this a reality: a white or Indian teacher facing a class of mixed cultural backgrounds, who have never lived together, must handle seriously and sensitively a black student's explanation that her inability to complete her homework one night was because of faction fights in the township, which necessitated putting out all the lights. Differing situational definitions between teacher and student referring to tasks set (see Wertsch, 1984), may mean that the student has to make the effort to bridge the gap. If the teacher does not acknowledge and understand the student's situational definition, the student may have to change her definition to match that of the teacher. According to Rockwell (1999), there exists a "complex relationship between teaching practices and learning processes, in which both are embedded in cultural-historical contexts" (p. 114). We have not yet explored these contexts adequately, in order to use pedagogical strategies which bring teaching closer to the zone of proximal development.
In advocating a social constructivist pedagogy, Vygotsky asserts that some (not all) teaching practices can create the conditions for certain cognitive processes to develop (Rockwell, 1999). That is, teaching can create a zone of proximal development, and leads via social interaction beyond individual ability (intrapsychological level), to functioning on an interpsychological level. Vygotsky’s theory is that cultural development occurs first on the social plane (interpsychological), then is internalized on the psychological plane (intrapsychological). This process of transformation is long and comprises a series of developmental events (Vygotsky, 1978). Through joint activity, communication, interaction, assistance and involvement with others (speaking and acting), the child develops independent speech and action and higher order mental functions. Inner speech is the internalisation of conversation with others, or social speech. Assistance needed for the child to bridge the gap between assisted and unassisted performance (zone of proximal development) is provided by the adult, teacher or more skilled peer.

Teaching thus is assisting performance through the zone of proximal development, and school and the classroom are interactional contexts with potential for fostering development. Vygotsky’s (1978) views on thought and language make the role of the teacher a prominent one. Like Dewey (1938), he argues that the teacher must seek out and create situations for the learner to reach beyond his current capacity. The teacher provides a scaffold through dialogue with the learner, which furthers the development of both language and thought. One way is through writing.

Vygotsky’s assertion that we write to learn gives writing meaning across the curriculum. He urges the process approach to writing, showing that development occurs
through drafts which clarify thinking and constitute preparation for what we eventually communicate. Menyuk (1995) asserts that exposure to written text and development of language awareness are ways in which schooling influences language development. Student interaction, and verbal and written modes such as narratives, offer models from which they develop both language and cognition. Literacy in use, Smith and Alcock (1990) assert, means that literacy experiences must engage the learner and be connected to events and people they know and care for. The classroom should create such experiences, along with the space for learners to take risks as they make literacy decisions.

Vygotsky’s approach to language and cognition finds application in the learning context in a way that is user-friendly: classroom methodology is transformed by using interactive strategies and group work, with student and teacher interacting on a range of levels continuously. The role of the teacher is thus reconceptualised to that of facilitator, from transmitter to transformer of knowledge (Wells, in Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Group interaction stimulates more sophisticated and complex language use (sentences, vocabulary, logical argument etc.). As a progression from didactic lecturing practice, the use of teaching aids such as computers, TV, video, film and other texts, in a way that is integrated into the learning exchange and relevant to the learner, and which holds her interest, is always an option. However, they do not replace the teacher.

One important consequence of the development of language and thought through assisted performance by the teacher-facilitator, Vygotsky (1978) argues, is introspection and reflection on the part of teachers and learners. How does one shape the thinking of the child about herself within the classroom environment? Barnes (1985) urges us to
remember that students are not passive receivers of knowledge, of training and socialization. As teacher-facilitators we have to continually ask, what does the learner think? What does she contribute? What impact does her purposes, values, and interests have on her schooling? Learners, just like the teacher, take positions. They have their own objectives and perceive the course in their own way (see Ramsden, 1984; Ellsworth, 1997). In Bruner’s model of hypothetical teaching, both teacher and student co-operate actively in decision-making (in Barnes, 1985), in contrast to expository teaching where the teacher is in charge with the student as listener, each with different decisions to make.

The role of the learner in the enactment and formulation of knowledge, through speech, is acknowledged in Vygotskian theory. According to Vygotsky, the inner monologue (which adults draw on all the time) is like the child’s egocentric speech. This is a commentary on himself as he plays, and is operationalised later to plan what he may do, to recall some experience or to reinterpret something. Barnes (1985) argues like Vygotsky, that language in the classroom is not only for communication but also for learning, reflection and introspection. He (1985) asserts that curriculum is a form of communication. It is more than the intention of what is planned for the classroom. To be meaningful it has to be enacted by students, which means coming together in meaningful communication. This includes talking, writing, reading, collaborating, expressing emotions, learning and interpreting. According to Barnes (1985), language should enter the classroom both as the communication system of the classroom and school, and as a means of learning. Speech therefore functions as communication and as reflection, an assertion
which is supported by language and cognition theorists such as Sapir, Vygotsky and Bruner. As Barnes (1985) observes,

...they all see language as both a means by which we learn to take part in the life of the communities we belong to, and a means by which we can actively reinterpret the world about us, including that life itself. Through language we both receive a meaningful world from others, and at the same time make meanings by reinterpreting that world to our own ends (p. 101).

Learners should be involved in the decision-making about the most effective strategies for language use in classrooms, in order to make meaning and achieve their goals in communicating. According to Smith and Alcock (1990), we need to share and demonstrate our "mental journeys" (p. 8) or chosen strategies with students, through language. (This proved important for both students and myself during my research journey, as we kept talking about our plans and progress.) Smith and Alcock (1990) assert that students observe others closely and try and work out the most successful strategies in given situations. They (1990) argue further:

It is critical therefore that we identify very carefully the social situations that are relevant and important to learners and their culture, as the basis for language learning in the classroom. People learn language and literacy as they are involved in the situations which arise in their lives. They learn the appropriate ways of using language in such situations as they learn about the situations. Language is learned because it is purposeful and meaningful to the learner. The relevance of the situation to the learner is therefore the paramount consideration in planning and teaching inexperienced and reluctant readers and writers (p. 4).

Linking Theory with OBE

Some of these ideas from language and cognition theorists resonate with the goals of OBE as a transformational methodology in South Africa. Its main aim is for all learners to succeed, and for school experiences to prepare one for life and for further study. OBE
acknowledges diversity and unique individual needs; it requires the adaptation of the curriculum to the learner and casts the teacher in the role of mediator/facilitator rather than transmitter.

Based on the derivation of OBE from the field of Cognitive Education, Engelbrecht et al (1999) paint an interesting, modern picture of a classroom, echoing Vygotsky:

Can you imagine a classroom where cognitive education is being put into practice? The learners would be active and a constant chatter would be heard. There would be a hive of activity among the learners as they work and communicate either individually or in small groups, or engage in larger group work. They might be doing experiments and surveys and recording the results in simple ways. They might be trying to solve problems either collectively or in small groups, using written language and discussion. The learners would be encouraged to explore and discover and the classroom atmosphere would allow for experimentation, innovation and problem-solving. These learners and teachers would be reflective thinkers who engage in logical thinking, critical thinking, creative thinking, lateral thinking and metacognition (pp. 77-78).

Waghid (2000) in his work with South African Engineering students is positive that opportunities for this kind of engagement could be created within an eclectic approach which enacts OBE. These opportunities must be contextualised, he argues, within real life scenarios. Vygotsky’s emphasis on language as the linguistic tool of thought, which jointly with sociocultural experience shapes learning and development, thus makes the world of everyday experience critical in the classroom exchange. It is not something that the teacher can afford to overlook in a context characterised by diversity. Formal instruction should work towards enlarging daily experiences in the world.

OBE and the cognitive education approach argue strongly for self-assessment and assessment methods which are not limiting or intimidating. Assessment should also be conceptualised as part of the teaching-learning continuum and not as a separate activity.
imposed on the student. The year-long experience of the child in the classroom may reveal more about her development and learning, as continuous interaction and learning generate thought processes and concept formation, than the traditional year-end exam. How do we assess growth and learning with students of diverse backgrounds and abilities? Policies governing continuous assessment and the actual experiences of teachers implementing it in South Africa often do not coincide (see Ramsuran, 1999), although it is the new form of assessment for matriculation (Grade 12). Vygotsky asserts that since students differ in their development such that they cannot be assessed on their lone performance, assessment strategies should focus on what they can do in collaboration with others. Hence his use of the interview as a strategy, and of questioning and dialogue to elicit understanding and negotiate meaning. Other strategies are think-aloud protocols (especially for students to articulate problem-solving methods), performance tasks in writing, journals and self-assessment through portfolios (see Greenes, 1995: 101-102). 

Enacting Theory: The Literary Text and Performance in the Communication Classroom

...drama is one of the most social of all art forms... (Williams, 1961, p. 271).

Master Harold and the Boys is a dramatic text which succeeds in evoking the history and culture of discrimination in South Africa, showing why the need for transformation is compelling. The discussion of dramatic text and performance in teaching and learning which follows, furthers the debate on the potential role of literature in contexts of language development.

Reading a literary text such as Master Harold and the Boys is very different from reading a traditional science textbook prescribed for Engineering or a passage on Business
Communication. Grumet (1988) warns that we may displace school bodies with texts: we “touch the text instead of each other and make our marks on it rather than on each other” (p. 144). In her theory of reading, she argues that theatre and performance allow the actor to speak more than words can say through gesture, movement and intonation. Bodyreading is therefore a critical literacy, “strung between the poles of our actual situation, crowded as it is with our own intentions, assumptions, and positions, and the possibilities that texts point to” (Grumet, 1988, pp. 129-149) One of the reasons for my focus on a dramatic text and performance techniques, is that in this learning context, they awaken body and soul, bringing into contact the other and our other selves.

This study proposes the use of a dramatic text in this particular classroom. A rationale for this choice follows, centering around the anticipated outcome that as a catalyst it would alter patterns of classroom interaction. I hoped that the acknowledgement of social and cultural differences in relationships and the development of literacies as well as our capacity to reflect on our learning, would ensue.

**The Role of Performance in Teaching and Learning**

The value of using the body and performance in teaching and learning across different levels, contexts and cultures, is well documented (see Salvio in Carson & Sumara, 1997; Grumet, 1988; O’Neill, 1995; Terry, du Plessis and Malan, 1990; Carklin, 1997; Phelan & Lane, 1998). Performance acknowledges and engages the very rich fabric of students’ everyday lives, their social experiences, cultural heritages and individual, creative imaginations. In this research project, I ask: Could performance through a text such as *Master Harold and the Boys* assist in opening up discussion on how we live and
learn? What would this reveal about reaching outside the discipline for the development of communication? How would reading aloud contribute to our development as learners and social beings?

This study does not refer to the study of drama or performance, but to the use of a dramatic text as a lens through which to encourage performance and to reflect on learning. Hence, it was also intended to develop expression and communicative competence. Games, role-play, exercises, story-telling, movement and the use of voice are all experiences useful in the teaching-learning context, and well-researched. According to Somers (1994), “Drama can be liberating in that it employs communication forms other than writing. Drama provides structured opportunities for language development, physical and social development” (p. 144). Despite the barriers facing performer and audience particularly during apartheid, Mphaphlele (in Malan, 1987) finds that “...theatre was the best medium through which one could directly reach one’s audience. Through economy of language dramatic action goes straight to the heart” (p. 58). Fugard’s play, considered appropriate for these very reasons, depicts the social milieu and political dispensation of apartheid South Africa in the 1950s, particularly through its educational system.

The role of theatre and performance in education, especially when language development is prioritised, is still to be explored fully. Grumet (1988) asserts that theatre in education projects can transform the school culture by infusing ritual (the daily rules, regulations and practices of formal school life) and confrontation (the counter school culture, which subverts authority), with critique. Theatre, according to Hunt (in Grumet,
1988), can give impetus to “the true aim of education, that of giving pupils understanding, control and the power to make decisions about changing their environment” (p. 109). This suggests broadening access to decision-making and meaning-making in the classroom and beyond, and supports Boal’s (1992) argument for the social and political power of theatre.

A dramatic text sets up situations which can be compared to other real experiences and which can be enacted. This leads naturally to improvisation in performance as students transfer from one context to another. Performance impels action, verbal and nonverbal communication through body language, gesture and facial expression. It involves students as emotional and physical beings, as well as thinkers and learners. Its emphasis on affect seems to link directly with life skills development, a (noted) priority in education today. This in turn offers a platform for building self-esteem, encouraging free, creative expression, problem-solving and critical thinking. It is experiential. Language development comes alive as real-life scenarios are played out through dramatisation and dialogue. The focus shifts from written communication only to a range of literacies and competencies. Moreover, it creates a regrouped audience which offers commentary and response to role-play and other strategies, an audience whose members become participants as well. It is an alternate learning context. The result is an acting workshop atmosphere in the classroom, which, as Gasparro and Falletta (1994) argue, can create a “student-participatory language learning experience” (p. 2). This approach brings home literacies, or where we live, into the formal learning context.
Performance also allows one to experience and watch oneself experiencing something: it teaches the practices of reflection and self-reflection (Bolton in Jackson, 1993). Performance and role-play can then be seen as traffic between the fictive and the real. Students or participants are asked to step outside themselves for a moment, or to step outside their stereotyped role into another role or self. This process also helps create a more democratic classroom environment in which social and cultural contexts are resources (Kutz & Roskelley, 1991), and in which the teacher participates sometimes as an equal, sometimes as a facilitator, but always as a connecting voice. While drama in education makes overt use of performance techniques in the classroom, as teacher-facilitators we often use performance subconsciously, when we ourselves role-play, instruct, narrate and demonstrate. This study frames the use of performance in a specific way, anticipating some effects but also looking to discover other effects generated.

Boal’s *Games for Actors And Non-Actors* (1992) as a Pedagogic Tool

The dramatic text may become a vehicle which, I argue, brings together the literacy experiences of both personal sociocultural contexts and the classroom. It makes room for the recognition of alternate literacies more effectively than some of the discipline-specific scientific material prescribed for an Engineering class. The reading of Fugard’s text as a micro-tool for data collection (discussed in Chapter Five), functions alongside specific performance games and strategies selected from Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992).

Boal (translated by Jackson, 1992), sees performance as a vehicle for raising consciousness and uncovering “essential truths about societies and cultures without
resort...to spoken language” (p. xix). His (1992) *Theatre of the Oppressed* defines three categories or forms, Image Theatre, Invisible Theatre and Forum Theatre. These categories describe games and exercises which become ways to identify, challenge and transform systems of oppression. In the South African context, the majority of people have lived under oppression of many kinds and forms. Closing the doors on literacy; barring free association; denying one’s cultural heritage, and tacitly allowing the apartheid classroom of decontextualised knowledge to perpetuate itself, all constitute oppression. Boal’s games, like Freire’s (1970) critical qualitative research, are intended to challenge oppressive systems and to bring about change, reflecting a strong belief that as humans we have the capacity to change.

Boal’s practice of theatre, Jackson (1992) asserts further, is not intended to be didactic to the audience, but “...involves a process of learning together than one-way teaching...” (p. xxi). This I consider appropriate for my purposes as teacher researcher, interested in informing my own practice within the particular context of Mangosuthu Technikon. While I do not presume to offer an in-depth discussion of the evolution of theatre and performance in teaching or of Boal’s practice, I believe that the games and exercises selected functioned very effectively as agents of change.

**Fugard’s *Master Harold and the Boys* (1983) as a Pedagogic Tool**

*Master Harold and the Boys* (1983) is set in the 1950s, in the early years of educational apartheid. It offers itself as a lens through which we may look at past conditions and present developments in education and in the country, through changing
patterns in the classroom. I see the text in my research design as a vehicle for developing language, literacy and performance, hence its application in the classroom.

The journey towards identity for the peoples of South Africa has been an arduous one: Mandela’s long walk to freedom from his cell on Robben Island, Biko’s last convulsive shudder in detention. In the literature and discourse of apartheid and apartheid education, the use of the words native or kaffir is insightful. They are still used today and retain connotations of that which is derogatory. In the history of discriminatory education in South Africa, to choose whether or not to give others education or access to literacy, is to identify them as the unwelcome other, the disempowered, the disenfranchised. It also establishes the identity of the “giver” positioned in this case as politically powerful and superior, having the capacity to give but choosing not to.

Fugard’s work has been described as a response to prevailing social and political conditions of life in South Africa. By uncovering the assumptions and structures underlying racial prejudice, as it is manifest in ordinary, daily interaction, it provokes self-examination and reflection, stirring the conscience of white oppressors. What would it stir, I wondered, in the minds of the oppressed, the descendants of the oppressed, namely, my black students? Gray (in Malan, 1987) observes that the art of Master Harold and the Boys, in particular, is that it communicates and articulates what is unspoken, thereby making transparent “the multiple conditions which define identity” (p. 252).
My choice of *Master Harold and the Boys* as a dramatic text in this study bears scrutiny. Fugard's drama pits an angry young white schoolboy against two older, seasoned-into-the-systern Coloured men who are waiters, ballroom dancers, caretakers and friends. Denied access to formal education, they snatch at the enticing bits of school knowledge dangled by Master Harold (Hally), yet, it becomes obvious to the reader, far surpass his understanding and experience of life.

This text evokes reaction and thought on a number of issues relevant, I think, to the goals of this study: reflection on self and system as integral to life and learning; education in South Africa, past and present; dialogue, movement and performance in learning and developing social relationships; linking the literacy worlds and experiences of students at home and in the classroom; inviting, through this text, other texts and artifacts, which may mediate meaning and encourage expression. Certainly, the play invites participation and response, and opens up possibilities for challenging the stereotyped curriculum for engineers. What follows is a textual analysis highlighting the themes identified in both *Master Harold and the Boys* and prioritised in education today, which I believe are central to the goals of this study.

**Developing Relationships.** *Master Harold and the Boys* is about one white boy privileged to go to school in a discriminatory educational context, transmitting knowledge to two older black men, his servants, who are denied formal education. It questions assumptions about knowing: how does one know what someone knows, how does one measure it, by whose lights? How does one know that someone knows? Hally, the privileged white schoolboy, is outraged that Sam, his black manservant, might consider
making a kite: "...what the hell does a black man know about flying a kite?" (1983, p. 23). His reaction reveals how people can be socialised into discriminatory thinking, since the assumption is that it is normal that Sam has neither education nor experience of kite-making, and certainly no recourse to a pastime that only Englishmen and whites at leisure, may enjoy. Similar racial stereotypes proliferate in the text: no-one explicitly questions the fact that Hally calls Sam and Willie "boys." The "joke" Hally tells, which puns on the word "fair" and through which he and his father bond, implies that blacks are neither light skinned nor just and decent.

The need for a social reformer and for social reform in a country, is a subject of intense discussion in *Master Harold and the Boys*. Hally and Sam toss around options of who they would consider to be a social reformer, citing Napoleon, Jesus, Darwin and Tolstoy. While Sam's motivations reveal insight into the relevance of this discussion for his own experience, for Hally it is an academic exercise. The slice of life presented in the play through the three characters evokes examination of the nature of prejudice, and how racial prejudice is passed on from generation to generation, dividing cultures and distorting relationships. Being white makes Hally superior. It excuses his insensitivity and tactlessness towards Sam and Willie, and their interests. For him, ballroom dancing is a simple pastime, "the release of primitive emotions through movement" (1983, p. 34). He has no understanding of what it means to the black community. Blacks are natives who are simple and inferior.

Various sequences, settings and symbols in *Master Harold and the Boys* reflect the damage to social relationships caused by apartheid: the servants' quarters at the back
of the boarding house, with its own brand of conversation and entertainment;

‘Afternoons in Sam’s Room...’, which reads like a nostalgic story for Hally but is a grim reality; the St. George’s Park Tea Room in Port Elizabeth, old, dingy and like the bench in the park, for whites only; the black white-coated waiter who knows his place but occasionally forgets it; Mr. Elijah Gladman Guzana and his Orchestral Jazzonians; the blacks-only dance floor; the All African Free Zionist Church, holding onto its own territory, and the brandy bottle and comics, the superficial pursuits of a sickly white male. While the kite-flying experience both empowers and humiliates Sam, the kite symbolising some hope of positive change from oppression, other symbols express transition and shifting identities. The silver trophy for which all ballroom dancers long, and which represents their dream of how life could be, is in reality the chamber pot of obstacles and oppression of life under apartheid law. Ironically, the white man whose life is aided and eased by his black servants, is mocked by his own son. The texts referred to and read in the play reflect the education that only the white boy has access to, yet derides. They symbolise the opportunities and options that are denied, but also ask us to acknowledge that we are being offered a skewed perspective. The lens through which we are looking is after all, apartheid itself.

Hally, the white child who befriends the black servants, here older males who look after him, weaves an emotive thread through Master Harold and the Boys. This relationship prefigures the common South African syndrome of the black maid taking over the role of mother for the white madam, who is too busy playing tennis, lunching with her friends and entertaining guests around the pool. It recalls images of little white children...
preferring to ride on their nanny's backs, learning a smattering of isiZulu, but who are
later taught in school that Mategu or Thandiwe is "not like us," and are then forced to
sever the bond and replace it with master-servant transactions. Hally has had an unhappy
childhood, his loneliness and neglect from his parents assuaged by his friendship with
Sam and Willie, despite his mother's warnings that he would be tainted by them.
Eventually, confused about who he is and how he should position himself in his
relationship with them, it is his identity as white male which childishly asserts itself.

For all his education and academic intelligence, Hally cannot see that apartheid has
made slaves not only of blacks, but also of himself. It has appropriated his mind,
distorting concepts of fairness and justice. By the end, when their verbal sparring logically
leads to the undermining of his position, his only recourse is to insist that he wants to be
called "Master Harold," and needs "the boys" to show him more respect. One of the
haves, Hally is bitter and visionless; in contrast, Sam, one of the have-nots, shows himself
to be a wise man with vision and sensitivity. Acutely aware of the factors which have
conditioned his relationship with Hally, which at times has resembled a father-son
interaction, he attempts to protect Hally's relationship with his father and to prevent
Hally from hurting himself by denigrating and mocking his father. Finally, when Hally
says to Sam "...we freed your ancestors here in South Africa long before the Americans"
(1983, p. 16), he identifies himself as the coloniser, but in his estimation, a kind one.
Referring to Sam, he says, "You've never been a slave, you know" (1983, p. 16). His
tirade when Sam and Willie break into a fight affirms his position of power as employer
but also as white: "...But what really makes me bitter is that I allow you chaps a little
freedom in here when business is bad and what do you do with it...” (1983, p. 31). These exchanges reveal how the endeavour to build relationships across social, cultural and linguistic divides is made more complex because, as I have argued, the history of South Africa is one of colonisation not only of land and people, but also of minds.

Developing Literacies

The denial of even the most rudimentary literacy skills helped forge a powerful connection between education and freedom. As historian James Anderson has noted, education for African Americans became “the contradiction of oppression” (Lowe, 1997, p. 12).

This indictment against the oppressive prohibition of the teaching of reading to black slaves in the 1830s in America’s South, could apply equally well in South Africa. Sam’s characterisation in Master Harold and the Boys embodies the connection between education and freedom from oppression.

Hally and Sam, an unlikely duo, have shared texts and understandings over the years. Sam learns new words like “magnitude” from Hally, and Hally corrects Sam’s reading. They have played chess together. Sam, the “uneducated,” is a more than able sparring partner for Hally “the educated.” He offers logical arguments and counter-arguments when, for example, they try to identify a man of magnitude. Hally takes credit for educating Sam from Standards 4 to 9, yet it is Sam who has coached his pupil and helped him study for and pass his exams. Hally is in fact bored with school. He insults his teachers and though intelligent, shows little interest in schoolwork. He shows scant respect for all adults, yet expects Sam to acknowledge him as master. Sam, in contrast, seeks to know; he is a witty and intelligent match for Hally. Their relationship raises
questions about learning: who, by the end, is the pupil and who the teacher? Who is the learner? Who is the master and who the boy? Sam, the narrator who likens the ballroom dancing championships to a more dignified and free life, is an older man with insight into life and compassion for others. Despite having no formal education, he is in fact a mentor to Hally.

Hally is certainly literate, by common definition. He conjures up titles for stories all the time, framing events as he sees them for Sam and Willie. He is set a writing task which generates tension in the play: “Write 500 words describing an annual event of cultural or historical significance.” Hally wonders if writing about the black ballroom championships as a cultural event would be stretching poetic license too much. His conceptualisation (1982) of the event as he, Sam and Willie brainstorm the possibility, is that of a war dance transformed into a (still primitive) waltz, a world without collisions, global politics on the dance floor, ballroom dancing as a political vision. However, embittered and angry by the news of his father’s return home from hospital, he relentlessly destroys not only the dreamworld-dancefloor in which no accidents happen, but also his relationship with his friends. Writing and talking, reading and listening, and exposure to the world and its heroes, have not succeeded in teaching him humility and respect. In Freire’s (1987) terms, Hally knows how to read the word but not the world, the book but not the body.

**Concluding Comments: In Search of the Classroom**

In this review and the arguments presented for the inclusion of literary texts and alternate literacies such as performance in language development curricula, I do not wish
to diminish the value today of business communication, which is the thrust of our curricula in Communication. (Nor do I wish to overlook the problematic implications of globalisation and the peculiarly bland nature of globalspeak, which we tend to glorify).

The social relevance of communicative processes is evident in a post-industrialized, urban society (Mercer, 1988). Successful communication in public life demands many skills and poses many different situations with which to contend. Complex verbal tasks need to be accomplished, as Mercer (1998) observes:

In job selection, for example, replacing a practical demonstration of the applicant’s ability to do a particular job are elaborate procedures involving complex verbal tasks. From the filling out of application forms, the career counselling session, the job interview and the salary negotiation, assumptions about how information is to be conveyed are critical and these are assumptions which may vary widely even within the same socioeconomic group in the same community. Objective tests replace personal discretion. Hence candidates who do well may or may not be as competent to do the job as the non-successful test-taker. Finally, personnel judgements, and many other societal evaluations, are grounded on the individual’s ability to talk well and to make a good presentation of him/herself, as well as the ability to pass tests...the ability to manage or adapt to diverse communicative situations has become essential and the ability to interact with people with whom one has no personal acquaintance is crucial to acquiring even a small measure of personal and social control (p. 132).

English Communication courses which focus on Business Communication, such as ours, cite communicative competence as their goal. This is an assumption which, like all others, can be questioned. Chick (1996) asks whether communicative competence is indeed a suitable goal in South Africa’s multilingual and multicultural context. He asserts that it is, provided it draws on insights into the full range of sociolinguistic diversity, the impact on sociolinguistic conventions, and socio-political change. He argues further that knowledge of the dominant rules of language use are essential, since communicative
competence may also ultimately teach students how to fit into a given social order, rather than to equip them to challenge that order. They could thus become learned in tacitly maintaining it. A new conceptualisation of this notion should recognise the existing linguistic resources of the learner. Since what is considered appropriate in social settings is contested, amid changing multicultural norms, it requires ongoing review.

Pierce (in Chick, 1996) calls for a “pedagogy of possibility” (p. 324) which empowers students to look beyond what is appropriate to what is desirable. I see this study as opening the doors to one such possibility, in one context. Chick (1996), in support of Pierce, prefers the reconceptualisation of language competence by the National Crisis Working Committee (1987), as

...the ability to say and write what one means, to hear what is said and what is hidden, to defend one’s point of view; to argue, to persuade, to negotiate; to create, to reflect, to invent; to explore relationships, personal, structural, political; to speak, read and write with confidence; to make one’s voice heard; to read print and resist it where necessary (p. 324).

To conclude, I believe that in the light of this reconceptualisation, which captures the personal, social and political dimensions of our lives, and the issues explored in the literature, the use of a dramatic text as a lens to mediate and filter more specific competencies deserves some significant attention and visibility in technikon curricula. I argue here that a text such as Fugard’s *Master Harold and the Boys* can be read alongside the prescribed text on Business Communication, as a stimulus for oral assessments, performance, games and group work. I see it as a way of enacting and bringing to life the goals of OBE, without falling into the trap of propagating yet another prescriptive system. It would bring conversation and debate into the classroom, whatever the

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discipline and module interests, and encourage our students to participate as active learners. If facilitated creatively, the layering in of this text would uncover the social, cultural and political lives of students as people, as they examine what is happening in the light of what has happened in the past. The possible uses of this text are explored in this study, not least because as Kilfoil (1993) states “South African literature in English can be a significant force in developing a national consciousness beyond segregation” (p. 6).
CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

Introduction

To what extent is our research "contextualised and shaped by sociopolitical forces around us" What change is effected in context through research? (Purcell-Gates, 1997, p. 280)?

This is a qualitative study in a particular context. As teacher research, it exposes the researcher, myself, in the classroom, offering an insider’s perspective. This study is located against the framework of changing educational policy in South Africa, with special reference to the implications for Communication modules for engineers at technikons. It attempts to understand and explore the use of performance and a dramatic literary text in a Communication Skills classroom as a methodology, given the priorities in our curricula. While it does not seek to make generalisations, it could offer insight into other similar contexts within South Africa and abroad.

My research question in this study is as follows: What impact will the introduction of a literary text and performance have on the curriculum experience of my class of Engineering students? This question, as noted in the introductory discussion, has generated the following specific questions:

- How would students perceive the use of literary material in this class? Would it be an irritating deviation? Something they would enjoy? A vehicle for developing
communication? Would they prefer to engage only with text that is discipline-related?

- How would new experiences such as reading a literary text, participating in performance games and creating performance scenarios alter classroom interactional patterns, in terms of what we say and do, think and write?

- Would breaking the stereotypes surrounding the curriculum for engineers lead to conversation and reflection on how we learn? What implications would this have for the teaching-learning plans and programmes in the Department of Communication at the technikon?

My argument for the introduction of performance, to reiterate, is as an intervention so that the practice of OBE as a methodology will not become so standardized and formulaic that it becomes yet another version of transmission. There is a very real danger of this happening.

In this chapter, I outline the context and status of the technikon as an academic, research-generating organization, with reference to the research policy guidelines at Mangosuthu Technikon. The dominance of positivist modes of inquiry and the need for alternate research routes are discussed. I draw attention to qualitative modes of inquiry and the social constructivist paradigm, the theoretical perspective which underpins this work. The genres of teacher research and action research are briefly explored, as well as issues surrounding the validity and value of qualitative research. The chapter continues with a description of selected data collection tools and the process of data collection. My understanding of research is thus explored, revealing simultaneously what I consider to be...
the products of research: research-writing, refinement of theory and practice, exploration, understanding, insight and shared knowledge as well as knowledge generation. My position and the unique context in which I find myself have impacted on my choice of research design and methodology.

The need for research which takes routes different from those of traditional research designs, has become crucial for educational researchers. In the process of writing both during and post the data collection phase, I found myself constantly comparing my own research and writing plan with the traditional one. The latter can generally be outlined as follows: the statement of a problem; the review of literature; the construction of hypotheses; the collection of data to test the hypotheses, relying on the experimental method; the findings and analysis, and the drawing of conclusions and recommendations. When I superimposed my map onto this traditional version (which has characterized most of the dissertations I have edited, across disciplines), there were certainly similarities. However, the main difference was more fundamental and systemic: the approach, the assumptions and the advancement of argument are subjective (but substantiated), context-driven and autobiographical. This casts my research firmly into the ethnographic mould. It also contrasts with most research generated in the social sciences at the technikon, since recent examples of the latter are scientific, empirical studies which rely on quantitative methods.

Research in the Context of the Technikon: Policy and Practice

The school of positivism is alive and well at Mangosuthu Technikon. It would be fair to generalise that most higher education institutions in South Africa have been
contexts dominated by positivist models of research. Technikons in particular constitute such contexts: traditionally, research that is scientific and experimental, which relies chiefly on quantitative methods, and which assumes an objective reality about which the researcher can hypothesise and conduct an inquiry, has been the norm. This is a result of the very nature of the technikon, with its bias towards the applied sciences and technical career development. In the bigger picture of South African education, the original brief of technikons as post-matric institutions of higher learning was specifically to take the student into a career in industry. According to a recent policy document, Research Philosophy and Strategy for Technikons in South Africa (1998), “Technikons are educational and training institutions that specialise in career-focused education...in close collaboration with commerce, industry, government and the community” (p. 238).

Universities, in contrast, could explore the world of ideas. Yet even at universities here, funding for research, research capacity building, access and opportunity, have generally supported research in the positivist mode, in the fields of Science and Engineering.

Technikons historically have been conditioned to place less emphasis on research, and were in fact “denied the opportunity to develop a research culture and capacity” (Research Policy and Strategy for Technikons in South Africa, 1998, p. 241). Research output was not rewarded, nor was time allocated for fieldwork. Many academics were appointed without postgraduate qualifications. The technikon has always required longer teaching hours throughout the year and heavier workloads, which precluded involvement in research projects. Even today, with a new and urgent focus on research capacity development, teaching staff are interested in research but floundering: the common cry is
that there is simply no time for research. Thus in South Africa, technikons have
historically prioritised practical training and experiential or co-operative learning,
universities teaching and research.

The national policy document reinforces the focus on applied work in Science,
Engineering and Technology-based programmes, to meet specific needs in the economy.
Applied research is favoured: “Technikon research and development should lead to
implementable results and products...the technikon’s task revolves around the practice of
technology” (1998, p. 240). Technology here is projected as technological innovation and
its sustained support through the development of knowledge, skills, abilities and
competencies in the workplace, as well as in social, educational, legal and economic
structures. Mangosuthu Technikon’s Research Policy (1998), which has for many years
guided all funding allocations, understands the concept research to mean

...all attempts to gain insights on the basis of clearly formulated problems and
methodical collecting and systematic processing of information, in order that
the body of basic scientific knowledge may be extended; the possibility of
applying theoretical knowledge may be scientifically exploited; or techniques,
systems, processes or equipment may be developed and improved in a way
that meets the requirements of the scientific method (pp. 1-2).

Earlier drafts make no mention of research other than that of an applied, quantitative
nature.

All fifteen technikons in South Africa support the applied sciences through their
faculties of Engineering and Natural Sciences. These faculties were in most cases
established first. At Mangosuthu Technikon, a third faculty, Management Sciences, was
introduced fairly recently. This faculty has eight fields of study that broadly represent
the humanities and social sciences, all emphasising the applied skills required to succeed in the job market. These are Public Management, Marketing, Human Resource Management, Economics, Accounting, Law and Office Management and Technology. The eighth department, Communication (in English, Zulu and Afrikaans), is a service department to the entire campus. Significantly, the Faculty of Management Sciences has outgrown the faculties of Natural Sciences and Engineering: its enrolment now constitutes over 50% of the student body. In comparison to the other faculties, however, it has historically and not surprisingly, received the least support for research, regardless of the fact that its endeavours have largely met the norms of the known (positivist) research paradigm.

In many contexts of higher learning, the scientific method is sacrosanct, although today our ministry of education seeks to address past inequities and to encourage research at technikons, arguing that it is complementary to teaching. Qualitative research that is described variously as naturalistic, ethnographic, interpretive and constructivist, has been largely ignored. At best, over recent years, a few researchers have acknowledged the use of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in research. I do not wish to dichotomise quantitative and qualitative methods, for some in the US an old debate already (see McWilliam, 1994), since they can be used together and share certain features. However, their differences, in the nature of their assumptions about knowledge, the methods and procedures they employ, or the kind of insights they offer, are foregrounded when viewed in the context of the technikon and the research culture that it promotes.
There are other reasons for the dominance of positivist models at technikons. The system itself has allowed little room for exploration, whether in teaching or research, particularly if this deviated from the norm. Other technikons in the KwaZulu-Natal region observe, as we do at Mantec, that research in the social sciences has not gained momentum, nor (as noted), the financial and administrative support it should receive.

Even though the goal to build capacity in historically disadvantaged technikons is on the research agenda of the government-funded National Research Foundation (NRF), more support for the sciences still persists. At other institutions in Durban, plans for development workshops in research have tended not to focus on qualitative studies.

Moreover, the ethos promoted by key personnel in various highly funded, sophisticated research units, continues to be shaped by the “old school” philosophy, which first asks questions such as the following: How scientific is your study? Can it be replicated? Are its findings valid?

Academics at technikons are, however, beginning to engage in research, whether through higher degrees or funded projects. It is only of late, given the new national education agenda and funding formula, that improving qualifications and building capacity are being prioritised and recognised by the individual and the institution as meaningful and necessary to the teaching-learning environment. The new emphasis on research in technikons in South Africa is attributed partly to the need make the work of the technikon more visible, viable and rewarding as an academic institution, and to consolidate the status of the individual institution provincially, nationally and globally. However, the bias towards conventional research modes does not allow for the expression of the unique
processes and activities which characterise the changing technikon environment. The emphasis in technikons on applied research raises the question of what is meant by “applying” research. According to Borg (1981), in a consumer model of research, teachers are viewed as consumers cast in passive roles as receivers of information (results of research, which they apply). An alternative model is that of research as re-seeing learning and teaching, which implies rethinking, improving and changing practice. This is a feature of qualitative studies.

The Faculty of Management Sciences at Mangosuthu Technikon is currently on a drive to build research capacity. In the twenty odd years of the technikon’s existence, it hosted the institution’s first ever national research conference, in 1999. It is the sector most likely to challenge the dominant positivist mode which has monopolised research, through the genres of Qualitative Research.

**Qualitative Modes of Inquiry**

**Ethnography and Educational Inquiry**

Eisner (1999) maintains, despite arguments about the prevalence of other methods, that ethnography was initially “the dominant methodological orientation for doing qualitative research” (p. 19). Other writers (see Altheide & Johnson, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) tend to use *ethnography* and *qualitative research, method and practice*, interchangeably, focusing rather on their emphasis on reflexivity in research, which gained emphasis in the 1960s and 70s. Ethnography has been the chosen mode of inquiry for sociologists and anthropologists since the turn of the century (Hammersley, 1990; Spindler & Hammond, 2000).
Qualitative modes of inquiry support the interpretivist paradigm of ethnography. In contrast to positivism and postpositivism, they can be located within the paradigms of critical theory and constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Qualitative studies, as many writers and researchers observe, are participatory, biased, evolutionary and dynamic (see Guba & Lincoln, 1988; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995 and Hammersley, 1990, amongst others). They seek and offer multiple perspectives. In a changing sociopolitical context that is multicultural and multilingual, their modus operandi finds suitable and meaningful application. More recently, they have widened the scope of research in educational inquiry. Eisner's (1991; 1997) argument for educational criticism as qualitative inquiry serves as a backdrop to this discussion. He argues that in the quest to 'know,' the methods, content and assumptions in the arts, humanities and social sciences may prove useful, and ultimately improve education and “advance human understanding” (p. 5).

Likewise, the “virtues of subjectivity and multiple perspectives” (Eisner, 1991, p. 46) characteristic of these genres, emphasise that research, like education, is not politically neutral; the researcher is not value-free, and it is her very subjectivity which offers value.

The What, Why and Wherefore of Qualitative Studies

Qualitative research genres cast the researcher as both writer and interpreter, neither hiding nor ignoring the subjectivity of the developing relationship between researcher as participant and the participants. Qualitative researchers argue that writing about a research subject and using your words to represent another’s thoughts, behaviours and feelings, are inherently value-laden activities. Hence the researcher is compelled to examine her relationship with her “subjects” and the inquirer-respondent...
interaction which is planned or which ensues. This requires boundary-crossing of various kinds (see Salvio in Carson & Sumara, 1997). It invokes questions about the ethics of interpersonal relationships under any circumstances, but particularly if the power base differs, when one participant is intent on seeking information from or about another and disclosure is implied. Implicit here is the criticism that the methods of quantitative research do not demand this scrutiny of the ethics of the research relationship, merely of the consequences of findings for those researched. The personal history of the latter is obliterated from the writing up of quantitative studies, thus "sanitising" them from contamination. Qualitative studies in contrast, are intent on revealing the underside of things and the intricacies of involvement and exchange; they insist on this scrutiny and regard it as valuable. Peshkin (1988) therefore urges us as researchers to systematically and transparently identify our subjectivities throughout the research experience.

The literature reveals that qualitative research is valued because it enables the study and understanding of human behaviour in ways more appropriate than quantitative research. The latter is found wanting, according to Hammersley (1990),

because it relies on the study of artificial settings and/or on what people say rather than what they do; because it seeks to reduce meanings to what is ‘observable’; and because it reifies social phenomena by treating them as more clearly defined and static than they are, and as mechanical products of social and psychological factors (p. 8).

Quantitative research is reductionist and statistical. It excludes the human factor, rich contextual information, and the particularities of the individual case. Hammersley (1990) addresses the criticism that precisely this strength of qualitative studies, namely, human involvement, makes their data subjective and prone to bias: “It is true that in
ethnographic research what data are collected depends on the researcher, and to one degree or another reflects her or his personal characteristics. But all knowledge is personal and cultural in some sense." He adds that ethnographers use various techniques such as triangulation to compare data from different sources, to ensure that their research findings are not idiosyncratic.

Erickson (in Kutz & Roskelly, 1991) asserts that ethnographic inquiry offers a deliberate point of view which "informs and empowers the researcher's intuitive understandings" (p. 29) The researcher's awareness, record and examination of her reactions, feelings, and past experiences in a conscious and systematic way, is "disciplined subjectivity," which gives insight into the research site which may otherwise not be gained.

Researchers choosing a qualitative mode of inquiry also seek to offer a vision which values and encourages polyvocality. Thus they use more than one data source, and a number of methods which, while empirical and systematic, are not constrained by the requirements of scientific experiment. The use of artifacts, pictures, film, maps, demonstrations, narrative genres and dramatic presentation to represent data as alternative forms of representation (Eisner, 1997), are rendered legitimate in qualitative studies because they explore experience in its myriad forms, offering an "experiential conception of understanding" rather than "a verificationist conception of knowledge" (p. 7). The dominance of Eurocentric pedagogic approaches referred to in the introduction to this dissertation can be extended to include core activities such as curriculum development,
research and analysis. Watkins (in Pinar et al, 1996) contrasts effectively (for this
discussion) the Eurocentric epistemology with the African:

Eurocentric analysis is viewed as linear. Rooted in empiricism, rationalism,
scientific method and positivism, its aim is prediction and control…African
epistemology, on the other hand, is circular…and seeks interpretation,
expression, and understanding without preoccupation with verification (p. 849).

Qualitative research as a mode of inquiry is continually being challenged, not only
on the issues of validity and value, as discussed later. Page (2000) examines the state of
its development and its response to critical review, observing that ultimately “qualitative
methodology can be portrayed as a work in progress and its practitioners as scribes in
motion” (p. 29).

Social Constructivism

Both ethnography and the qualitative research paradigm favour a social
constructivist epistemology, which asserts that we construct our realities. The role of
language (which is never neutral), in establishing social systems and meanings, is central to
social constructivism (Terre, Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). According to Hammersley (in
Steyn, 1999), constructivist epistemologies seek to describe rather than explain the many
underlying realities of the lives of research participants, presenting their point of view.
Context, in all its richness, messiness and complexity, is foregrounded in its attempt to
ascribe meaning to experience and behaviour. Its emphasis is not on product but on social
process and a socially constructed representation of reality.

Social constructivism holds that knowledge is a social product and human
construct, emerging from shared and individual experiences (see Steyn, 1999), the
meanings of which are negotiated within given contexts. In Vygotsky's conceptualization of the social-constructivist model for teaching and learning, the goal of education is to provide an environment which fosters collaboration despite diversity, through purposeful activities which empower learners cognitively to achieve both their own identity and potential within a larger social and cultural community. Wells (1999: 335-336) elaborates that this may be accomplished by:

1. Creating a classroom community which shares a commitment to caring collaboration, and a dialogic mode of making meaning.
   - Organising the curriculum in terms of broad themes for inquiry that encourage a willingness to wonder, to ask questions and to collaborate with others in building knowledge, both practical and theoretical, to answer them.
2. Negotiating goals that:
   - Challenge students to develop their interests and abilities;
   - Are sufficiently open-ended to elicit alternative possibilities for consideration;
   - Involve the whole person - feelings, interests, personal and cultural values, as well as cognition;
   - Provide multiple opportunities to master the culture's tools and technologies through purposeful use;
   - Encourage both collaborative group work and individual effort;
   - Give equal value to thoughtful processes and excellent products.
3. Ensuring that there are occasions for students to (individually and collectively):
   - Use a variety of modes of representation as tools for achieving joint and individual understanding;
   - Present their work to others and receive critical, constructive feedback;
   - Reflect on what they have learned, both individually and as a community;
   - Receive guidance and assistance in their zones of proximal development (pp. 335-336).

I reproduce Wells' mechanisms for enacting the social constructivist model here acknowledging fully that while they informed the plan and progress of this study, in the space of four months we could only scratch the surface. Regardless, as the rest of this
chapter and others reveal, they reinforce my identity as a researcher and teacher in Communication within the paradigm of social constructivism. Two genres of qualitative research, teacher research and action research, exemplify this model and the methodology in which this study is rooted. They are examined below as a prelude to the discussion of my specific research choices.

Two Genres of Qualitative Research

Teacher Research. Teacher research is a genre of qualitative studies emerging from Action Research and linked to Critical Qualitative Research. It also makes appropriate use of case study.

As a genre of qualitative inquiry, teacher research rejects the traditional positivistic and empirical paradigm for a naturalistic one, which does not rely on artificial settings and methods to record change. It seeks instead to describe, in their day-to-day spontaneity, the experiences of the teacher with her students in the classroom, practising and researching, learning and teaching (Cochrane-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Teacher research provides an emic or insider’s view of the classroom, from all research participants. It frames the experiences of the teacher in order to make visible what actually happens in classrooms. This process not only foregrounds, but also examines the experience of teaching and learning: How do teachers and students interact? What perceptions do teacher researchers have about teaching, learning and researching? What do we choose to see or ignore? What social values direct those who research and those who are researched? In making visible all these dimensions of teaching, learning and researching, teacher
research explores the contradictions, dissonances and discrepancies between constructs such as educational theory and practice, expectation and result, problem and solution.

Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1993) describe two broad categories of teacher research, empirical and conceptual. Empirical research includes the use of the following data collection methods: teachers’ journals, oral inquiries and classroom studies. Conceptual research involves the analysis of teachers’ essays. Teacher research first makes visible classroom experience, then theorizes. It involves purposeful action and reflection, making teachers experiencers, observers, theorizers, and researchers, who test assumptions and articulate their experiences to the community of inquiry. The tools of teacher research attempt to capture experience in all its stages and forms, a process which requires time and effort in the classroom. These tools include field notes, artifacts, audio and video tapes, lesson plans, observation, records from students, interviews, analysis of writing samples, and case study.

In teacher research, the teacher-researcher is alerted to the necessity of critically appraising and acknowledging the bias of her own subjectivity and experience, in relation to what she chooses to research, and those she chooses to research (Johnston, 1982). This does not occur in a social vacuum, but requires an understanding of group dynamics and the capacity to work within a group, in order ultimately to feed information back to a community of inquiry which it is instrumental in creating and sustaining. Research into writing concerns within the disciplines, identified through Communication courses or writing centre work, can, for example, be an important source of information for faculty in devising new outcomes-based curricula.
Like other genres of qualitative study, teacher research seeks to effect social change, not simply to produce research as an end in itself. It gives the teacher as researcher some agency to act to effect change, whether in consciousness or to inform policy-making, with the goal of improving teaching practice. The value of this genre is that it attempts to democratize research. In reaction to claims that research is monopolised by university academics and is elitist, teacher research encourages teachers to construct theory from their own experiences. They thus become initiators of dialogue, of change.

Whether teacher-research is understood in South Africa as it is in the US is not clear. In the former, teacher training is itself under threat (see Lewin, 1999; Modiba, 1999); in the latter, the legitimacy of teacher research as inquiry is still sought (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992). Opinion on the genre in South Africa indicates that at some levels very little teacher research is documented (except for those teachers engaged in postgraduate study). Teachers at schools are not regarded as active researchers, nor are their classrooms sites for valuable observation of how we interact with others and experience curricula. For promotion purposes and professional development in schools, research publications and profiles are not considered critical. There has been, however, growing interest and enrolment in postgraduate programmes in Teacher Education (for example, at the University of Durban-Westville).

In South Africa the argument for modes of research which account for the messiness of human study, are driven in part by acknowledgement of the limitations of both traditional educational research and quantitative methods. It is undeniable that when
we examine social phenomena, we may neglect to supplement our observation of attitude, for example, with that of body language. In South Africa, there are associated problems: a range of literacy levels; rights to privacy; techniques of gathering data through instruments such as questionnaires; legitimate and adequate sampling (given rural-urban conditions of living); resistance on the basis of race, and bias in historically segregated residential areas and schools. One alternative method, written into this dissertation, is that of autobiography. The autobiographical method in education (Grumet, 1988), is increasingly supported by educational researchers in South Africa who have successfully challenged the status quo. Govinden (1995) finds it both valuable and appropriate for research into teaching practice, since it enables us “to explore ways of transforming objective situations through subjective, personal reflection” (p. 170).

**Action Research.** Action research is described as problem-based research which examines a specific, current concern, problem or gap in a specific context, and produces knowledge of immediate and direct relevance. In reconceptualising action research, writers-researchers-educators emphasise people making meaning together, processes which lead to finding meaning in life, and re-seeing and understanding ourselves. Established categories of action research, the technical, practical, critical and post-structuralist, are considered, in contrast, to be restrictive and inappropriate. The development of this genre focuses on its intention to reflectively and reflexively examine the gaps and spaces in community and individual lives. Thus it opens up possibilities for data collection and hence representation, that quantitative modes fail to offer.
Currently the emphasis on curriculum development directed by OBE requires a reseeing, with a critical eye, the traditional curriculum at Mangosuthu Technikon and other institutions of higher education, as well as the practice of OBE itself. While a national approach to modules for Communication in English is necessary in order to maintain standards, recognise prior learning and ensure inter-institutional mobility, individual departments are urged to be as creative as possible in making their learning activities context-specific. Given the very different institutional contexts in South Africa (as a result of racial segregation in education), we need to examine the choices we make about what to teach, how to teach, what to research and how to research. We are compelled to rethink the underlying assumptions of our pedagogic policy and practices.

Sumara and Davis (in Carson & Sumara, 1997) discuss action research as a process which makes complex the relationship between researcher and research situation, to the extent that the boundaries of both are blurred and the research experience itself generates individual and collective identities. This extends beyond the case study approach, showing research itself to be an instance of “culture making” (p. 301) as opposed to merely describing an observed culture. This Sumara and Davis regard as evidence of complicity, a tenet of action research, which in effect is involvement in transformation.

Institutional transformation in South Africa, because it encompasses every aspect of functioning, from managerial strategic plans and policy to teaching-learning within disciplines, in fact compels agents of change (such as researchers) to undergo change themselves. External catalysts have their role to play, but it is transformation from within that is sustained and meaningful. Scott (1998) has consistently argued that systemic
change in the technikon through any development initiative needs to be research-driven to be meaningful. Action research in this context therefore asks: How can the observations and findings, the products of research, transform us?

Traditionally associated with the human sciences, action research in the context of the technikon could find application in various disciplines and activities, including the visual and dramatic arts. Its impetus towards social change could be useful in the technikon structure, which is periodically dogged by crises between management, for example, and union interests. The arena of public management could also be a site for action research which effects change in the culture of the organisation and its functioning.

Validity in Qualitative Studies

Traditional modes of inquiry have canonised the traditional conventions of approval: validity via replication and generalization. Noting the extent of our conditioning into this way of thinking, Wolcott (in Page, 1997) concludes that “validity haunts qualitative researchers as a specter” (p. 148). whereas their concern should rather be whether their work fosters understanding. Given the ethnographer’s reliance on words, and the consequent impact on the reader, Page (1997) examines why ethnographers are collectors of words, and what this signifies: “…why should an ethnographer trust words as evidence, given that people lie, that their knowledge is always partial, or that context influences the words people find it sensible to deploy?” (p. 145). Certainly, interpreters are susceptible to the sway and tone of writing style, the selection of information presented and the intentions of the writer, even when experiences are presented as cold facts.
Conceptualising and Applying Triangulation. It is clear that the positivist paradigm is no longer acceptable as a representation of objective knowledge and truth: the notion of one known reality no longer holds. Realities are socially constructed, context-driven and situational, influenced by social, historical, political and cultural contexts, including those of the researcher. Hence objective knowledge itself is not the goal of research in qualitative studies; rather, the examination of assumptions which underlie any given knowledge. Qualitative researchers ask if any claim to knowledge is objective (and hence valid). Qualitative studies therefore stimulate different responses from different interpretative groups, reflecting multiple realities. Their value is the recognition of our own experiences in those of others, and the acceptance of another’s narrative as a possibility (Hatt, 1993). In a context such as the technikon, the genres of qualitative studies could open up opportunities for research to those previously denied such access and experience, and contribute some understanding not just of the teaching-learning environment but also of the people who live and learn there.

The validity of qualitative methods derives from concepts which inform the rationale for and methodology of qualitative research. Triangulation requires the use of various methods of data collection to allow for multiple checks of validity in representation and analysis (see Denzin, 1970). All data sources are triangulated or cross-checked, and emerging patterns identified for comment and analysis. Since qualitative studies are not intended to be representative, there is no compelling argument that they should allow replication and generalization. In the commonly understood sense, triangulation implies measuring the validity of a finding gained from the use of a range of
data and methods. An alternative view, which addresses the way researchers discipline their biases, is that it is a strategy which offers information and evidence that may be convergent, contradictory and inconsistent, but which the researcher is required to make meaningful. Even while looking for patterns of belief, themes and recurrent ideas in the data, a personal perspective is engaged. Brennan and Noffke (in Carson & Sumara, 1997) suggest that revisiting data in action research requires that it “expose for argumentation the various possible validity claims that might be in operation” (p. 39). Hence the debates around subjectivity as it impacts on validity, and making transparent the issues which surround it, become intentional within the qualitative research experience.

I offer in this study a comprehensive, multi-perspectival view of the research experience shared by my students and myself, through a range of lenses (or data sources): our journals, transcriptions of videotaped sessions, interviews, reflective responses, field notes and observation, and photographs. Making connections through data collected, particularly from the in-depth interviews is, according to Seidman (1991), the qualitative researcher’s alternative to generalisability. Similarly, Eisner (1991) calls for “a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility in qualitative studies” (pp. 110-114). I attempt to effect Lather’s (1986) credibility checks: the cross-checking of methods, data sources and theories; reflexive subjectivity, which documents how my assumptions have been affected by the logic of the data; face validity, which is achieved by recycling categories, emerging analysis and conclusions back through a subsample of respondents (students), and catalytic validity, which documents how the research process leads to insight and, ideally, activism. I further hold the context up to light as a significant factor, revealing the unique
situational conditions at Mangosuthu Technikon. The many social, political and educational intersections of our lives here are deeply rooted within the broader sociopolitical frame of South Africa.

As declared participant-observer-facilitator, I strive for the reflexivity which characterizes ethnography. For Altheide and Johnson (in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), one meaning of reflexivity is that “the scientific observer is part and parcel of the setting, context, and culture he or she is trying to understand and represent” (p. 486). Reflexivity impacts on validity issues, and relate to the researcher, the research design and the interpretive audience. It is subject to and generates multiple understandings of reality. My own thoughts, preconceptions and subjectivities are juxtaposed with students’, in the choreography of journal entries, video clips, analysis of assessments and reflective responses.

Triangulation, as used in this research, is a form of reflexivity. It compels reflection, not only about data sources but every aspect of the research process. It is operationalised when studying human behaviour since it is a multi-pronged approach which attempts to capture the complexity of human behaviour. In terms of validity then, triangulation underpins the methodology of this study, even while I believe that it too is a social construction. For Wolcott (in Page, 1997), validity is “a judgement produced in the relationships established between the author of a text, her subjects, and readers” (p. 151). These inter-relationships come to bear in the discussion which follows on the themes identified in the literary text used in this study, the research plan and the data collection process.
Data Collection

Participant Observation

I went into my classroom as teacher-facilitator and researcher, overtly gathering information from my participants, who were my students. During the semester, I observed students during group work; in classroom activities such as writing, reading and role-playing; during assessments such as performance pieces; when they visited me in my office and as they interacted socially in class. Our hierarchical relationship may have had some impact on the involvement of the students, along with the videotaping and my note-taking. However, students’ continued dialogue and relationship with me, and their frank responses and reflections would suggest that even if they were initially intimidated by my authoritative status, their ease and confidence grew. In fact, they relished the research experience.

According to Geertz (in Hammersly, 1993), the main data document in ethnographic research is the researcher-participant’s diary. It is “a holistic, thick description of the interactive processes of important and recurring variables” (p. 108). My participant observation in class, which was ongoing, led to journal entries. I recorded observations, thoughts, and concerns, focusing on the class and my role as researcher/facilitator but including other facets of life on campus and at home. I observed and recorded events and my perceptions of them after every class (and at other times), and on a weekly basis compiled these into an electronic journal entry. I began writing before the semester of teaching and continued throughout Fall 2001, which at Mantec ran
from 16 July to 7 November. This is approximately thirteen weeks of teaching time. My journal is detailed and narrates the many interweaving stories of my life and work at the technikon.

The narrative in Chapter Two, which relies heavily on my journal, provides a thick description of my Electrical Engineering class and the experiences we shared in the course of the semester. I have also inserted entries from students' journals, photographs, a poster and transcriptions from the videos of the class, to fold in other perceptions and voices. I choose to present our story in this form as a reminder simultaneously of the slice of life our journals reveal and of this writing as a construct, put together and fashioned consciously in a particular way.

**Questionnaires**

In this study two questionnaires, referred to as Reflective Responses I and II, were integrated into the classroom research activity. These were drafted and reviewed by myself and others before they were distributed to students in the class.

The purpose of the questionnaires, like that of the interviews, was to elicit opinion on classroom experiences from students. Direct questions were posed, all open-ended, given the qualitative nature of the study. They were short but allowed room for fairly lengthy comment (though they are surpassed in depth and elaboration by the interviews). The focus of the questions was on classroom experience (since the journals were more personal and general, and assessments more practical and specific). They were confidential and not compulsory. I sought information in the first questionnaire on whether the curricular experience was what students had expected, what new experiences
they had had, which classroom activities were most enjoyed, and which activities raised questions for students and why. The second sought opinion on the use of learning material outside the discipline; the literary text we were using; what they had learned about themselves or others in the course of the semester, and which activities were most enjoyed and which raised questions, with explanation. Both Reflective Responses I and II were intended to link classroom experience with the themes identified in *Master Harold and the Boys* and the research questions.

The first questionnaire, Reflective Responses I, was handed to students with an explanation of its purpose and requirements just before the September break, at the end of the third term. The second was distributed at the end of the semester in November, and students handed them in on the 7th, together with their journals. The time lapse in-between would, I imagined, give them sufficient time to assimilate the new activities and approach in the Coms311 class, and to reflect on, consolidate, alter or critique earlier opinions. Also, the second questionnaire raised issues and activities with which, given the emphases of our coursework, I assumed students would have gained some degree of familiarity (discipline-crossing and the reading of *Master Harold and the Boys*, for example). Thus in a sense it was a way of probing deeper.

This data collection tool was intended to formalize students’ self-reflection about their learning, to encourage them to think critically about what we were doing, to use writing to learn, and to engage in the process of assessing themselves. According to Engelbrecht et al (1999), metacognition, or thinking about one’s own thinking, awakens metacognitive processes which require self-evaluation, self-monitoring, self-recording,
self-goal-setting and self-reinforcement. Thus in my class, the responses gained from the questionnaires (and the interviews) would offer impressions from individual students (an emic perspective) on specific aspects of their classroom experience. Writing would make transparent their thinking, and allow me to gather and triangulate data. Mapped onto other data collected and observed, these responses, after reflection, would enable me to identify trends and concerns, offering some degree of corroboration. They would also bring into focus the relationship of the theoretical underpinnings of this study with the practical experiences in the classroom. Students’ written responses exploring perceptions of their curriculum experience were later reviewed (document analysis).

Document/Writing Analysis

In this study I use my field notes and journal entries, student journals, student writing in class and transcriptions of videotaped sessions, interviews, assessments and responses to questionnaires, as data sources for analysis and interpretation. The process of analysis seeks to identify emerging trends and patterns in the data, how the data problematises specific issues, including the research questions raised, and individual interpretation of experience.

The content analysis of documents and writing by students and myself was intended to complement participant observation as a method of triangulation. Likewise, the Reflective Responses (questionnaires) with open-ended questions provided a further means of identifying trends and elaborating on them.

The autobiographical method in qualitative studies is gaining recognition and legitimacy in educational research, as writers out of necessity strain against the boundaries

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of convention. This dissertation is imbued with a view of my personal journey as a researcher and teacher, and begins with a narrative, my autobiographical essay. Chapter Two, as mentioned, is essentially a narrative fashioned from my journal and data from students. The journal offers my emic perspective as teacher researcher and participant observer in the classroom. In addition it offers a view of my life as an academic at Mantec, of the challenges and conflicts and frustrations we face here, at an historically disadvantaged higher education institution, as well as in the country. Institutions have their own unique context, we have often argued, more so in South Africa because of its long-standing racial divisions. As I have reiterated, we have all literally lived and learned in different worlds.

The journal during the course of the semester was for me a way to remember events on a daily basis in the light of the old and the new; it was a place I could go to regularly, to recall and reflect. Student journals tell their story, as does mine. Together they describe the collective experience of the class. Telling my story and theirs, as I do in this work, is to expose the many personal, social, political and historical knots of our lives as individuals and a community of learners. Govinden (1995) supports the use of the autobiographical method in educational research:

Telling our stories, using the 'self as subject', shows the intersection between the individual and the larger forces of our history. In telling our stories we attempt to understand both intellectually and emotionally. We each have a story to tell, in its uniqueness and commonality, but also in its constructedness. In remembering the present, we begin to realise that parts of our past are waiting to be reclaimed, 're-visioned' and told as we view the past through the lens of the present, weaving an inter-textual narrative (p. 170).
Interviews

For Seidman (1991), the purpose of in-depth phenomenological interviewing is “an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). Informal, unstructured interviews were conducted with students at the beginning of the research semester, to try and gauge their interest and resistance to the research plan itself. These were supplemented by longer, conversational, semi-structured interviews, post the writing-up phase. The intention in the latter form of data collection was to gain a retrospective view from a sample of students (33%) of their curriculum experience in Semester 2, 2001. This would provide more detailed descriptions and in-depth responses than the reflective response questionnaires, to what were discerned to be critical issues. The following open-ended questions guided the conversation:

- Introductory comments and update on research, studies etc.

- How did you feel about reading MHB in class?
  Why do you think we chose to read it?
  Do you think we should have assessed MHB?

- When we discussed the three questions about remembering the past, some students felt that MHB opened up old wounds? Did you feel that way? Why?
  Do you think we should recall the past and its trauma now, and in class? Why?

- Did reading a text that was not related to Electrical Engineering interest you? That is, we did some border-crossing. How do you feel about that in a Communication module?

- What game or performance activity did you like best?
  Did playing games/performance in class make any difference to the class for you?
  Did they change how you got on with others?
  Did they change your level/kind of participation?

- What new ideas and concepts did you learn or experience?
Do you think we broke stereotypes? About what?

Some comments made in the reflective responses were that the class was *nice, easier, enjoyable, interesting*, it made you feel *at home*...what do you mean by this? Students commented on the having freedom in this class. Freedom from what? For what? Please elaborate.

Did our classroom experience lead to reflection for you? On what?

Given your experience of the semester, what do you think we should do in the Communication class? Should we change anything? How do you feel about the whole experience? Did it change your understanding of your self, and the recent past?

Thank you and concluding comments on recycling data (transcripts to be distributed).

The interviews gave the participants an opportunity to reconstruct in rich detail, their experiences during our research semester. The data gathered and analysed from the interviews provided yet another source of information, and also corroborated patterns and trends discovered. This eventually assisted in giving the study its narrative, ethnographic and emic character, providing another window on the experience we shared. Excerpts are inserted throughout.

**Micro-tools**

The data collection tools already discussed were supplemented by new classroom or research activities, which I refer to as micro-tools, and which effected considerable change in the existing curriculum:

- Games from Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992), which employ performance techniques for pedagogic purposes.
- Introduction of a literary text and performance, referring to the reading of Fugard’s *Master Harold and the Boys* in class, and the infusion of performance and body language into classroom interaction and assessments.
- Concept cues, comprising a list of new terms associated with performance that we brainstormed, discussed and enacted.
- Focus questions, which raised specific issues related to coursework and the research goals.
- Modification of assessments, in that three out of the five assessments were adapted to suit the research goals of the study.
- Photographs and other artifacts, which provide further data sources and exemplify the notion of multiple literacies and ways of communicating.

These activities may appear eclectic but focused on the use of performance techniques as a pedagogic tool.

**Games from Boal’s *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992).**

We played three games for actors from Boal’s (1992) Theatre of the Oppressed:

- *Building character relations* and *What am I? What do I want?* in the *Seeing what we look at* category, and ideological warm-up exercises involving *reading newspapers and the evocation of historic events*, in the *The memory of the senses* category.

I anticipated performances in class that revealed a “naturalistic portrayal of character” as well as improvisation involving role changes and transformations (O’Neill, 1995). I also expected to see a development and progression in performance, with more game-playing, as representations of the text intersected with revelations of who students are as people. I anticipated increasing dialogue and a growing sense of how we can use the body to communicate. Boal’s (1992) *Who am I? What do I want?* and *Building Character Relations Games* were used as icebreakers and preparation for assessments and the outcomes anticipated in class (ideological warm-up). The first game is described later in this chapter, when I discuss the modification of assessments. In the second game, which is silent and hence forces participants to use the body to communicate, an actor begins an
action. A second actor joins her and depicts through gesture some relationship to her
(daughter, mother, aunt, etc.). The first actor must then identify the relationship and
respond. They are then joined by a third and fourth actor who continue in the same vein.
Video clips in Chapter Three and the interviews describe our experience of this game and
its significance in the class.

According to Boal (1992), reading newspapers aloud and discussing political and
social events are ways to illustrate the ideological representation and presentation of
events and images. This exercise was intended to function as a pre-text to discussion
about the way we read and the roles we may adopt in different contexts (see the section
below on reading in class). Likewise, Boal (1995) suggests that the evocation of historic
events allows us to draw parallels “between historic events and the current national
situation, by careful choice of material” (p. 210).

We attempted these exercises on numerous occasions during the units of learning,
as we read newspapers and Master Harold and the Boys. Our experiences and how they
were integrated into course work are documented in my journal and students’ writing as
well as the videotaped sessions. The discussion of world events, home life and the impact
of the past eventually became an ongoing conversation in class, integral to its progress,
rather than an exercise in isolation.

Reading of Text in Class: Athol Fugard’s Master Harold and the Boys (1983)

As explained, we read Master Harold and the Boys aloud in class, in tandem with
exploring concepts such as projection, voice and role-play. I introduced it first in
discussion about performance and role-playing, which would feature strongly in our class.
It was also a means to evoke the past, political and educational, which would lead us to examine the present, including ourselves as learners. I continued with a discussion of the role and status of English in the country, students’ second language concerns, and the alarming trend that we no longer read, in class or at home. (This was evident from students’ own experiences). We do not model reading. I also linked the text with the concept cues we were beginning to explore, as an example of an artifact, pretext and performance. More specifically, I related it to the criteria and outcomes for the first assessment, in which students had to present themselves. I suggested that reading the text was good practice for developing verbal competence, and that we would discover how characters were presented, and how they presented themselves. The experience of reading aloud also projected students into the workplace, where they may be interviewed for promotion, make presentations to a board or hone their telephone skills. In essence, it would challenge our thinking.

Students were encouraged to read in another voice or persona, as an actor, a TV presenter or (when appropriate) as a CNN newsreader. The aim was to lift students out of their assumed mode of engineering student/learner. Reading and role-playing in class were intended to stimulate a learning process which would bring in the student’s world, leading to examination of real-life events and gaps in understanding. This particular text would also raise questions for students about how they learn, old and new education systems and the history of discrimination in South Africa. That is, it would recall the past. The experience of performing and of reading drama would evoke the emotional, political and social dimensions of life, as well as provide food for thought. Reactions and
responses to this approach were observed and recorded. Students also commented on their experience of the text and reading aloud in class in their journals.

Observation: Videotaping in Class

We planned to videotape one session per week, and this was on occasion modified to accommodate the cameraman and the class.

I anticipated, in observing the videotaped sessions, that students' interaction and dialogue would reveal their views on their expectations of the class and their thoughts on learning. This would possibly tap into issues such as whether we should explore beyond discipline-specific material; their perceptions of classroom discourse and their views on if and how we recognise difference in the classroom. Sessions were videotaped as they occurred, that is, naturalistically. Whatever was scheduled for the lesson went ahead, so the camera, though intrusive, especially when the cameraman went in for close-ups, eventually became part of the class.

The videotaped sessions proved most useful, as they offered an abstracted, other view of what was a very involved process in class. They also revealed my role in the class and drew attention to my shortcomings and strengths. According to Saville-Troike (1995),

Observation of communicative behaviour which has been videotaped is a potentially useful adjunct to the participant-observation and interview, particularly because of the convenience of replaying for micro-analysis, but it is always limited in focus and scope to the cameraman's perception, and can only be adequately understood in a more holistic context. Furthermore, ethnographers should always remember that the acceptability of taping, photographing, and even note-taking depends on the community and situations being observed. (p. 121).

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Ten sessions were taped in all. These were reviewed and transcribed in order to discern patterns of interaction, to offer a critique and to reflect on communication and learning. Students reviewed the data and were invited to comment or make any amendments they thought necessary, as part of the data recycling process. This they did, and have continued to do. As noted, video clips are found in Chapters Two and Three.

The Introduction of New Concepts: Concept Cues

We discussed new concepts which raised and were raised by activities foregrounded in class through the emphasis on performance. These were introduced at intervals over a period of 10 weeks, in the following order:

- Concept cues 1: artifacts; pretexts; literacies; home literacy practices
- Concept cues 2: performance; voice; body language
- Concept cues 3: role-play; ideological representation; improvisation
- Concept cues 4: role-play (again); dialogue

The focus during explication and discussion was on these concepts as they related to practice, since they were to be enacted not only throughout the semester in all our activities, but also in the final performance/presentation piece, of which students were made aware from the beginning of the semester. Dialogue and role-play as pedagogic tools were manifest in various activities intended to raise awareness of the themes in this study (as advocated by Freire). Concepts were thus linked with the three games from Boal, the reading of Master Harold and the Boys, assessments and preparation for interviews (bursaries and jobs). For instance, students interviewed and dialogued in pairs on an aspect of social/cultural difference during our work on interviews.
Focus Questions

I framed questions for discussion in class linking our reading, performance pieces and conversations with the course work and goals of the research. These were intended to open up opportunities for communication and debate, and were integrated into classroom activity at appropriate times throughout the semester.

- **Focus Question 1**
  Did we stereotype anyone or any role/relationship? Discuss stereotypes and how they become barriers to communication.

- **Focus Question 2**
  How do we perpetuate barriers to communication at home, in class? How are we diverse? Is this good in a learning context?

- **Focus Question 3**
  How do the characters in the text present themselves?

- **Focus Question 4**
  How has our experience of reading the text changed, and how has it changed us?

- **Focus Question 5**
  How does the past impact on the present, in terms of South Africa as a country and the learner as an individual? Should we remember the past (even if it is painful)? What learning took place here, what teaching?

The questions raised last emerged out of my own perceptions (preconceived) about our approach to curriculum, as well as the classroom experience, assessments and reaction to reading *Master Harold and the Boys*. One of my concerns in conceptualizing this research project was whether we as teachers were avoiding the discussion of abhorrent racial practice and perception, and insulating and protecting ourselves in the classroom from anything that would upset us, despite the sociopolitical upheaval in the
country over the past eight years. We might have been instrumental in leaving the real
lives of students on the shelf, while we purported to teach them about life itself. Then, in
my class, I found students questioning the choice of text, and asking why we were reading
something so unpleasant (many found the use of expletives particularly disturbing). I
wondered whether this classroom was a safe or risky place for students, how they
perceived it, and how this impacted on their learning.

Edgerton (YEAR) and Britzman (1999) argue that classrooms should in fact be
"sites of crisis," and that students should encounter terror and trauma here, leading to
crises in meaning and identity. I believe that actual and remembered pain has a place in
classroom experience, and that both literature and performance offer mechanisms to
transform it into something which teaches. Edgerton contends that evoking memory
within the body, including our collective memory, is a valuable part of our communication
and our meaning-making. She stresses too the evocative role of literature and the use of
artifacts in the translation and recreation of the past. I found this applicable in our
classroom responses to the focus questions, the games we played and newspapers we
read. Students, as I show in excerpts from data, made frequent comment about their level
of comfort in the class (they felt free and at home), and reinforced my sense that in this
particular context, safety preceded and made possible some discomfit. The classroom
environment could then hold the pain of confrontation and crisis, themselves sites of
learning. Responses to the focus questions are presented in Chapters Two and Three.
Modification of Assessments

The outcomes for the Communication module are assessed in various ways. At the time of writing up my research proposal in 2000, there were five compulsory assignments or tasks for the Coms311 group:

- Practical demonstration of equipment: Oral
- Summary writing
- Safety report (Schematic report)
- Interview Skills project (Group assignment): Written
- Interview skills discussion (Individual/panel): Oral

Last year (2001), the course coordinator revised this assessment plan, with the five compulsory tasks shaped as follows:

- Practical demonstration of equipment: Oral
- Summary writing
- Feasibility Report
- Interviews: Oral
- Business Communication Portfolio

The rationale for these changes, emerging from the arduous process of curriculum development, was to meet more effectively the goals of OBE and to enable students to achieve the specific outcomes we identified. For instance, writing a feasibility report was required in the workplace, yet we had not included it in our teaching previously. It also incorporated basic research skills. The interview made group collaboration necessary, and the Business Communication Portfolio offered an alternative OBE-recommended form of assessment and grading.

In both these course and assessment plans, there is a 60%: 40% allocation for the written and oral components respectively. Students need an average of 50% to pass the
course, which is repeated every semester. On passing, they do no further course in Communication.

In the light of the principles of social constructivism, Steyn (1999) describes constructivist assessment as process-oriented, interactional, context-related and multi-perspectival. Assessment should be a process of self-awareness which probes ownership of meanings and scrutinizes self-chosen positions. In attempting to achieve the research outcomes, the plan for this study was to introduce performance and the body as an instrument for communication, through text. I hoped to get students to read the text in class; to read and speak in different voices, outside their role as Engineering students; to demonstrate something about themselves, rather than a piece of equipment, with the aid of artifacts, and to role-play as we read and in their interviews, which they would structure and create. Thus the focus was on oral communication, although I required written feedback as well (journals and Reflective Responses).

Assessments 1, 4 and 5 were modified, with consent from the course coordinator and Head of Department of Electrical Engineering. Assessments 2 and 3 were the same as for the other Engineering groups, except that reports were not individual but group projects, in line with the focus in this class and that of OBE. Summaries and reports (Assessments 2 and 3) have been a part of the core curriculum for engineers since the inception of these programmes at technikons. They are considered vital by representatives from industry as they require staff to summarise information and write and review reports regularly, often for presentation and dissemination. They then become key performance areas by which to measure competence on the job.
Assessment 1. In Assessment 1, students were required to present themselves. They were not required to demonstrate a piece of electrical equipment but to share something about themselves and their lives. We discussed the reasons for this, though they welcomed the suggestion, which came from me. I wanted them to be recognized as people with lives outside the classroom, not as learners who left the contexts of their lives outside. I wanted to explore a curriculum experience which would engage their cultures and prior learning more directly, which I consider important given the transition to OBE. They in turn saw an opportunity to get to know one another, and to do something different from the other groups.

Though I use the terms ‘present’ and ‘share’ loosely in my discussion of this assessment, and they do overlap, they are contrasted by Watson and Potter (in Barnes, 1985) in a way which becomes apparent in students’ reflections on this assessment. Watson and Potter derive the notion of presenting oneself from Goffman’s use of a dramatic metaphor for communication: “Each of us presents to others a view of himself as he wants to be seen, but this on-stage presentation conceals behind itself a back-stage world which may be revealed only to intimates or not at all” (pp. 109-110). While presenting maintains the self-boundaries of the presenter as a separate entity, sharing means that “each participant abandons his façade and allows the other behind the scenes: this implies collaboration, and the willingness to take in the other’s point of view, rather than holding it at arm’s length.” Thus sharing is associated with a willingness to change by entering into the lives and experiences of others.
Students were to read/speak/present in other voices, using performance and any visual art/literacy in these oral demonstrations, linking the literacy worlds of home and school. An artifact was essential. The presentation was to take approximately 8 minutes. The orals were to be conducted over three days, with dates allocated to students. A moderator would be present for four presentations on one of the days suitable to him.

We introduced this task (as part of our preparation) by asking *How do the characters in Master Harold and the Boys present themselves?* Students then attempted such a presentation of the characters (Hally, Sam, Willie, Hally’s mother, father and teacher, Hilda etc.), through gesture and performance. As a further connecting exercise, we played Boal’s (1992) game *What am I? What do I want?* Here participants anonymously write down on a piece of paper three self-definitions in response to the first question and what they want in response to the second. The joker, in Boal’s terminology (myself), then reveals and analyses the contents to all. My journal records that this ice breaker was not only thoroughly enjoyed but very effective.

The exercise was also aimed at achieving a degree of self-reflection as students can ask themselves what it means to be themselves, rather than to be stereotyped as engineering students. This was also linked with the discussion of stereotypes in Communication Theory.

**Assessment 4.** In Assessment 4, students were required to prepare for and present a performance piece related to job interviews. They were put into six groups and given a scenario. They then had to select a job advertisement and research the issues raised (e.g., how to prepare for an interview, what an advertisement requires, etc.). This
was followed by the delegation of roles (such as interviewee, interviewer in managerial or administrative position, peer, parent, and careers counsellor). Groups had to devise a script and create appropriate scenes, rehearse and finally present, with the use of props. As an approach to group strategies, this task could at first glance be described in Barnes’s (1985) terms as closed, since the activities were limited to what was specifically required. For Barnes, open strategies foster consensus and closed ritualization. However, in this task both closed and open group strategies were required: students had complete freedom in fleshing out their roles and script but also had to fit their individual contributions into the larger scenario, so that consensus could be achieved.

This assessment, it was repeatedly stressed, would be the culmination of all the different aspects of the curricular experience during the semester. Students were thus required to devise their own group performances around the interview, and to create different contexts for performance. It meant that they had to draw on their cumulative experiences of text and performance in class.

Assessment 5. In Assessment 5, students were required to hand in the journals which they had compiled throughout the semester. The intention was that they record their thoughts, observations and criticisms about their classroom experience, their home lives, their roles not only as learners but as people with varied interests, and any issue which concerned or interested them. They were not required to hand in for assessment a business portfolio with a memorandum, business letter, job application and Curriculum Vitae. These aspects were addressed both in class and in sessions in the Learning Assistance Centre.
The journals also prompted students to examine their own learning and to make recommendations about the course. These were analysed in detail, noting the recurrent themes in students’ reflections, with a view to establishing how they linked with the aims of the research and its critical questions. Extracts from students’ journals bring a colourful, indescribable depth to this dissertation.

Photographs. Photographs of the class were taken when we began the semester, during the group interview presentations (Assessment 4) and at the end of the semester. These were intended to capture in a form other than that of writing and speaking, the spirit of the class. As artifacts, they convey something of the experience of the class, with its emphasis on performance. The photographs (see Chapter Two for a selection) are a valuable record of the students who participated, and complement the data gathered. Copies were made for each student at the end of the semester, an unprecedented move which they deeply appreciated.

Concluding Comments: In Search of the Classroom

To conclude this chapter, I turn the lens to the last focus question we asked in class: What learning took place here, what teaching? This question echoed another we asked in class, namely, where is the classroom?

Master Harold and the Boys is set in a St George’s Park Tea room. Other rooms are called up like black and white images on its drab walls: Sam’s room in the servants’ quarters, the hospital room in which Hally’s father lies, the boarding house rooms, the ball room. Where, one wonders, is the classroom? Despite so much dialogue on learning and Hally’s school experiences, it is difficult to picture the actual classroom and school he

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attends. The impressions we are given are those of a roomful of rowdy boys in Standard Nine at Port Elizabeth Technical College, all uniform in their thinking, led by Doc Bromely, Hally’s English teacher who hates “natives.” Hally also shows real contempt for Mr. Prentice, who he asserts thinks he’s a teacher. In reality, Fugard shows us through this text, the classroom is everywhere. It is the tea room, the servant’s room and the ballroom. Sam knows this (1983):

Hally: ...I don’t know anything anymore.
Sam: You sure of that, Hally? Because it would be pretty hopeless if that was true. It would mean nothing has been learnt in here this afternoon, and there was a hell of a lot teaching going on...You know what that bench means now, and you can leave it any time you choose. All you’ve got to do is stand up and walk away from it. (p. 48).

Sam urges Hally to walk away from the “White’s only” bench from which he had to walk away years before. This reference captures not only his suffering as a victim of apartheid, but also at Hally’s rejection. The possibility of friendship overcoming racial prejudice and stereotype has faded. Is Hally conscious of the choice he is making to sit on the same bench? As a teacher I struggle with whether we are still doing so in our classrooms, by replacing racial with class and cultural differences. As a Communication class we struggled with the question of whether South Africans today are still sitting on the bench. We have started to see that teaching and learning are interdependent, that we were teaching one another and learning from each other, together, and that just as we needed to bring the world into the classroom, we should also take the classroom into the world.
EPILOGUE: ENDING WHERE WE CAN BEGIN
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The end of this dissertation signals a beginning of many things, in both my teaching and home life. In this conclusion, which I see as taking me back to the beginning of a circular continuum of development, I first share my thoughts on what students wanted and liked: the most compelling outcome of my research.

- Students wanted to bring their selves into the classroom.
- They enjoyed bringing in their home lives and the world. This showed more of who they are.
- They moved from presenting to sharing, both formally and informally.
- They wanted to talk.
- They enjoyed group work, games and role-play.
- They appreciated the attention they were given: they felt different, special and free; free enough to be themselves, to reveal their personalities, to experiment, to change the course of events, to use their own voices in their first language and to listen to their own resistances as they read and talked.
- They generally met the outcomes of assessments and units, despite difficulties.
- They engaged more actively with material that interested and challenged them, whether it was discipline-related or not.
They adapted to something new.

They applied themselves into the task of journal writing, revealing various levels of self-awareness and metacognition.

They reflected, critically, and were able to make recommendations and judgements about the timing of learning units, the continuation of the module and the value of our curriculum experience.

Do these observations signal change, shifts in thinking and learning patterns? The difficulty of describing and measuring change in behaviour and higher level outcomes such as "whether a student has internalised ethical norms or a commitment to lifelong learning" is noted by Greene (2001). He argues that objective tests and operational interventions may only reduce the "intuitive insight and skill" (p. 2), which make teaching an art.

Given my analysis of the intuitions, images and insights which constitute findings, and the substantiation from data, I attempt here to draw conclusions and outline implications of the study. I conclude that as a group we not only challenged stereotypical views of the learner, the engineering student, the lecturer, the curriculum and the classroom, but also began to address successfully the outcomes determined by the National Working Group: Languages, as well as those of the Language, Literacy and Communication segment of OBE. That is, in reading a literary text and infusing performance into our methodology, we created the environment needed to develop aesthetic awareness, respect for difference, communicative competence and the outcomes required for the module. I feel certain that this study reinforced the argument made by the Government Gazette (1997) on Language, Literacy and Communication:
The outcomes in this learning area emphasise that language is not an end in itself. Language is a means to acting in the world in order to establish relationships, to engage with others in reciprocal exchange, to integrate new knowledge into existing knowledge, to obtain and convey ideas and information (p. 26).

Some of the methods used in the class resonated with those of other researchers and practitioners of OBE: participation from students; group work and discussion; journaling to encourage reflection on self and learning; reflective questions; cues to stimulate thinking on new concepts; games; talking about learning and ourselves as learners; giving the individual and her response space to be; linking the curriculum experience with real-life events; evoking school and home literacies together; referring to students as individuals and people with lives outside the classroom, as learners and joint knowledge makers with the teacher-facilitator, and lastly, attempting to share my own background and history, to personalize and include rather than depersonalize and exclude; to be accessible as a person, as someone students could connect with and talk to without hesitation or fear.

Assessments

Students successfully performed the outcomes of Assessment 1, the oral presentation of themselves, which involved sharing. Although a few failed to use an artifact or visual aid, most saw the potential for the use of an artifact as an alternate literacy and mode of communication, which said what words could not say. Their choice of artifact and the interest it generated, along with the fact that many brought in more than one, were clear indicators of the value of this approach in oral presentations. Similarly, I saw in their presentations the beginnings of understanding relating to the use of
performance techniques and body language, despite the strong need for eye contact and voice projection. This task paved the way for the final assessment, the performance piece, and both were rated most valuable and memorable.

With respect to Assessment 2, the summary, gaps and shortcomings were noted in the understanding and extrapolation of key points as well as graphical material, the logical shaping of these into a comprehensive whole, and the language and format of the final presentation. The specific outcome was met overall, but more trends against the achievement of the outcomes were noted, and students' performance in terms of scores was least successful. Although they were aware of the need to develop the skill of summarizing, they also articulated their problems with the task: summarizing was difficult and complicated and the text used scientific language which they did not understand. The contents bored them and had no meaning in their lives, academic or personal. While this might suggest a preference for staying within the discipline (not crossing borders), I believe that their interest in other material, including topical newspaper articles for practice, suggests rather that they found this particular text uninteresting and opaque.

Students successfully fulfilled the outcomes for Assessment 3, by writing a feasibility report, in the correct style, structure and format, and applying the five criteria of desirability, preferability, affordability, technical feasibility and effectiveness. The contextual aspects of the task, namely, of converting our own Pixie Seme Hall into an indoor sports center to address the problem of poor enrolment at the technikon, was a critical factor in their level of involvement, as it was something they could examine,
research and relate to directly. This contrasted with previous versions of this assessment, where students had to examine one of their laboratories to check if adequate safety measures were being taken. It also contrasted with the summary text, supporting my understanding that their resistance to the latter did not indicate a resistance to border-crossing between disciplines and different understandings of curriculum and instruction. On the contrary, they enthusiastically embraced, partly through their engagement with different texts, a different approach to teaching and learning. The report taught the need to write for a specific audience with a particular style and purpose in mind. In general, the task also showed students to be capable of handling group dynamics and collaboration.

The outcomes for Assessment 4, the performance piece, were definitely achieved by students. They showed a good overall knowledge of job interviews, and employed suitable communication strategies, including performance techniques, most effectively. Students’ detailed scripting and dynamic role-play brought to life the world outside the classroom, including the world at home, the workplace and other settings (cafeteria, counsellor’s office, neighbour’s house). Their use of artifacts and props, and enactment of the concept cues, attested to a cumulative understanding of performance as communication, which was introduced and experienced throughout the semester. This assessment previously required students to research interviews, after which they were interviewed in a panel on their newfound knowledge by the lecturer. My experience of these two forms of the same assessment, is that the performance piece succeeded in invoking both a theoretical understanding of the issues surrounding interviews, and a practical application. It compelled students as individual, emotional, social beings, to
draw on a range of competencies and modes of communicating, in a collaborative effort with others.

The journals, Assessment 5, were a revelation. Students compiled records of the semester in the most individual forms, bringing their personal, social and political selves more closely and clearly into the picture. I saw developing relationships, literacies, worldviews and perceptions of self emerging. A review of their academic performance and their classroom experience in all the journals, revealed a growing sense of self-reflection as learners. The journals together with the video clips also indicate that interaction with others led to greater confidence in self and in building relationships. Tracking the stories of students such as Pallo and Sandile, reveals a fascinating development of plot, character and psyche through these different lenses. Both proved to be astute, politically aware and critical, people who made their voices heard.

.Language and Learning

One of the questions I have asked is whether the existing Communication curriculum was successful in addressing the language and learning needs of second language speakers of English. Since my involvement in this study, I have to ask, in all fairness, the same question about our new, modified curriculum. Student responses and comments suggest that the latter did succeed in developing awareness of language, of their capacity to speak, read and write, and more importantly, communicate using alternate literacies such as performance. Moreover, the majority of students observed that the class impacted on their second language learning and motivated them, by giving them opportunities to communicate. The journals especially showed how the relationships
they built in the Coms311 class led to encouragement, assistance and support outside the class, especially with regard to applying one’s energies to studying at the technikon.

Other observations and developments, corroborated in students’ reflective responses, journals and interviews, confirm my sense that some development in second language proficiency and learning did occur. Students’ growing ease with the use of new concepts and performance strategies as the semester progressed was evident, to the extent that they shone in the final performance piece. Their freedom to share information in isiZulu or other first languages (code-switching), while maintaining the use of English in class, enhanced comprehension and learning. Our open discussion of issues surrounding language, body language, the benefits of learning through instruction in the first language, politically correct language and terminology, and multicultural education, made students more conscious of their own language use in context. The inclusion in our class of interesting personal details such as the derivation of our names and histories, which helped define identity and revealed social and cultural differences, was an integral factor, as it transformed students from anonymous names on a register to friends who had nicknames. They also valued the impact of reading Master Harold and the Boys on their language and learning.

Master Harold and the Boys

The majority of students found the introduction of this literary text both interesting and challenging, a mechanism to develop language and communication. Despite disapproval from a few of the language used in Master Harold and the Boys, they felt that
in comparison to some of their science texts and the article they were required to summarise, this drama was written in a style that was accessible.

Yes of course it works. My learning/reading was upgraded it was very valuable to me. (12)

Yes, the literary text we are using is very good because most of the time its developing language. In other words we have learn much and its really amazing. And you work or do something, elucidating something. Using artifacts it was also a brilliant idea to develop communication. (20)

From evidence presented in Chapters Two and Three, I felt that MHB exposed concerns and events pertinent to students’ own lives, enhancing their cultural and critical literacies. They learned about learning from this text, and how we could learn from one another, by working together. Texts which were not discipline-specific but which raised issues relevant to students’ social, cultural, political and personal lives, were considered interesting. Recollections in the questionnaires (as well as journals and interviews) support these conclusions:

Yes it did work for me, because it taught me a lot, like about the way people were treated in the past. According in developing language it did develop mine, because it is more understandable and as the way we were reading it, was best to me, because we share I mean everyone was able to read as the one way of developing language. (3)

We read Master Harold and the Boys, an old African book, which we learn’t about why the old black men were called “boys” and the small white boy “Master.” (19)

Master Harold and the Boys also conjured up past struggles and forced us look at our own education and learning contexts, as well as ourselves as learners. The experience of reading the text heightened participation and competence in reading, comprehending and conversing. It evoked emotions and an examination of our selves and our histories. We
found we could not ignore that which disturbed us. We talked about the past increasingly, as we read more. There was, admittedly, an initial resistance to reading itself and to this particular text, which called up a painful history, from a few students. Sandile and Thabani, for example, record that they preferred to forget the trauma which their fathers and forefathers had faced directly. However, the text found its place in class, and resistance underwent subtle changes as the semester continued and as we too changed (see Bule and Thabani’s journal entries, for example). The text urged us not to forget and to dismiss the past but to hold trauma and pain to examination, to look and feel again, in order to reclaim ourselves and to understand others. We came to see that there is good reason to remember the past and its people. Even Justina and Dudu, who later argued that we should focus more on the future, valued the text’s recall of our apartheid past. Bandla related it to lessons on how we handle crisis and pain in general:

Connie: One of things that came up in reading of Master Harold and the Boys was those three questions we asked at the end about remembering the past even if it was painful, about where learning was occurring and about opening up old wounds. How did you feel about that? Did you think that we brought in too much trauma?

Bandla: It helps to go back so that you know when you got pain inside and it is still inside, it will haunt you for the rest of your life, but if you explore it and talk about it, it will take the pain away.

Connie: So you didn’t think that this was misplaced in class?

Bandla: Not exactly, yes it helps. But it helps.

Connie: Do you think that the reading of Master Harold and the Boys impacted on your communication with other people?

Bandla: I think it did because we’ve had problems and challenges that happened a long time ago, we have to remember even if it pains you. Then this text made you go and read it again.
Performance

The introduction of performance techniques such as role-play, interviews and games, encouraged contribution and participation. This was made possible in an appropriate setting (a flat, more private space, in contrast to the lecture theatres we normally use). The games were icebreakers. They introduced in a more concrete way, like the physical presence of the cameraman, the different approach taken in the class and its focus on performance. Simply getting students to get up from their chairs or seating them in groups and not in rows, meant that they were immediately interacting differently. They were less guarded and hemmed in. This freed them thereafter to sit in different places, change the seating plan, move around and relax. Certainly the games we played revealed more about ourselves and provoked thought on a number of issues, such as our relationships, AIDS and modes of communicating. Though some students were naturally more active contributors than others, everyone in the class participated, especially in the groups for Assessments 3 and 4.

Connie: Okay, we also played games and performance activities in class. Did anything stand out for you?
Justina: I like them! I can remember the interview; there was that thing when we were preparing what I’m going to do, what I’m going to put together to do this. But in the class it became sort of a game, it became so nice. Connie: And did it change how you got on with other people, did it affect you?
Justina: Very much, very much. I learnt some other skills of communication from other people, I can say that almost 95% of the class, they are just friends right now.
Connie: Did they make you participate more, those games?
Justina: Yes, it helped me participate more (nodding).
Participation in classroom activity was thus facilitated through performance and games, which in turn enabled a revised and more critical form of OBE. There was little room for rote learning in this class, as its interactive methodology unfolded. Through concept cues and focus questions, we invited questioning, critique, discussion and conversation, and a range of views. We met others, like us and unlike us, and built on that foundation in the class.

Connie: How would you say, how would you describe your whole experience? What do you think of the class when you think about it now? Does it make you think of anything in particular? Bandla: Eh, it makes me want to recommend to some people. You have to make friends in the class, then only can you enjoy that class. They can be eager to go to class because if you make it tough and you are angry, people would say that they wouldn’t go to this class. If the place is user-friendly it helps, people can come to class.
Connie: Do you think that the class changed the understanding of yourself or of your past? Or your sense of the class?
Bandla(emphatically): I made new friends!

It was crucial for students to participate throughout the semester, given the dominance of group work. I found that group work generated independent study and vice versa, as individuals were assigned tasks which they had to report on to the whole class and to their group. On one occasion when I was late going to class, students made effective use of their time by getting into groups and tackling their next task, which indicates their level of responsibility. Although some disappointment was registered when I changed the groups, and some students were purportedly not active contributors, the class adapted to these challenges. The majority began to see the value in dialoguing with others and sharing tasks as group work became a norm in classroom practice. A continuous, critical dialogue was generated in the class especially during the second term.
of the semester, when we were all more comfortable with one another and with performance as an integral part of our learning experience.

**Developing Negotiators of Meaning**

In all our classroom interaction, the assessments, the reflective responses, video clips, journals and interviews, students showed themselves to be developing negotiators of meaning. Researching and gathering information from a range of sources, and using it appropriately, depending on context and purpose, became skills we had to master. Part of this capacity to negotiate meaning has to do with building self-esteem and confidence, thereby acknowledging one's own identity and celebrating it, without having to seek approval or validity from others. This was striking in our discussions on *Master Harold and the Boys*: I saw in students the strength that comes from resistance, which allows one to take action, as they read the text differently. Seeing, reading and understanding with one's own words and eyes, in one instance meant literally changing the text (Sandile).

In our encounters with MHB, other texts (newspapers) and the outside world, as well as with alternate modes of expression and communication, we started to appreciate the aesthetic, emotive, cultural, political and social values in texts. Students' cultural and critical literacies were thus roused, leading to further questions about our history, our education systems and socialization during and post-apartheid. Learning about our different backgrounds yet similar desires and hopes, created an increasingly positive and stimulating classroom atmosphere. It was a safe place for students, and I say this acknowledging the limits of safety in teaching contexts. However, I believe that given our
historical traumas, our relationships have been characterized and dominated by notions of difference as demeaning and exclusionary. Establishing trust and consistency in such contexts is an essential step towards risk-taking for our students. To this end, my own role underwent transformation, from figure of authority and researcher-examiner, to facilitator and friend.

This does not imply that no dissonant voices were heard. The safe base we created made it possible simultaneously for us to voice our fears and criticisms, for example about why we were reading Master Harold and the Boys, or our personal shortcomings and perplexities. It is also from a position of confidence in identity and recognition of diversity within the classroom dynamic that we can run the risk of questioning and confronting others and ourselves more freely. For example, merely articulating the negative force of stereotyping made us all aware of this barrier in our lives, and led to further self-reflection: were students also seeing themselves as Engineering students only? We also considered what we were learning, where and through what means, and whether the whole curricular experience was influencing a more critical use of language and communication. This experience became intertwined with our developing capacity to build relationships and broaden our understandings of literacy, as students’ journals, reflective responses and interviews revealed. I found that the defining edges around curricular outcomes, our roles and our research activities, our public and personal, objective and subjective selves, began to blur by the end of the semester. We seemed to be assimilating the “different” classroom experience, making it our own. I began to feel that we had created patterns of interaction which were not dictated by my role as teacher-
facilitator, with students as learners: we had a different, evolving relationship now. In the interview with Mbali, she gave considered responses to my questions which examined these patterns:

Connie: Do you think the class itself, do you think that it made you change in any way?
Mbali: Ja, in a way coz we are free.
Connie: It's interesting that you mentioned that because other people wrote in their journals that there was freedom in the class. I want to know freedom from what, free to do what?
Mbali: To say whatever you feel coz they never look at you when you say anything stupid that you say. You could say anything you wanted without anyone laughing at you.
Connie: Other people described the class as “easy”. What does that mean? Was the class easy?
Mbali (shaking her head): It wasn't really easy...
Connie: What do they mean when they say that or what did you mean?
Mbali: Because everything that we did in class was... was all about us. Even when we did the orals it was anything about us, in that way we could tell anything about us.
Connie: Why did that make you feel nice?
Mbali: Why...
Connie: To talk about something that is to do with us?
Mbali: Coz it's been too long since we have done something like that, coz we used to do that in high school so getting to do that again in technikon was okay. It was... I don't how to explain it.
Connie: Would you like to do more of that?
Mbali: I wouldn't mind (smiling and nodding vigorously).
Connie: When you think about the whole class experience now, what do you think about, what comes to mind?
Mbali: Hmmm... It was just like a family, it was like my brothers and my sisters coz even now we are still in the class. Even the other communication class like they were okay, but in us, even after class we even planned to go the beach together, with that communication class, that's how close we were. Like now we help each other with our work and everything.
Connie: That's a good feeling?
Mbali: Yes, we're always there for each other...
Connie: Any final comments that you want to make about the class? Anything that you wanted to talk about the class that you can think of? She mulls over this question for a long time.
Mbali: Just that I have so many things I don’t know where to start. Our communication class...That class...Well, the reason why, I just wish it could stay, it is just that right now with that class - even with other groups it’s not even the same - right now, we’re experiencing problems with studies, so I was talking to Tola, so we could do something about that, like friends.

Connie: You have a sense of knowing each other.

Mbali: Yes...(smiling broadly)...thank you so much for that.

Limitations and Opportunities...

I believe that in this class we did succeed in opening up opportunities to communicate. The genres of literature and alternate literacies created new avenues for us to develop language and communication, and simply to get to know one another as students and facilitator, as people. In essence we created in this class a different culture of learning and classroom interaction, through the research process and experience. This would not have been possible without the genuine interest and participation of students. By bringing students’ individual worlds and the larger sociopolitical and cultural context which shapes our lives into the classroom, we began to move away from the decontextualised setting which had persisted for many years. In other words, we did not shun the subjective, the personal and the emotive. We made room for intuitive and narrative ways of knowing, through the assessments and conversation which was sustained. My own anticipations were exceeded in many ways. I refer to teaching, learning and researching. At this stage, I know more fully that nothing teaches quite like experience.

However, we did not do enough. We did not achieve the outcomes and intentions anticipated in this research to the extent that I would have liked. While I conclude that our
curricular experience opened up possibilities for language use, thinking and learning, I acknowledge, for example, that we did not explore and experience fully the reconceptualisation of language competence by the National Crisis Working Committee (see the end of Chapter Four). One of the recommendations from students was that we include more debate (or talk shows, in Tola's word) in class, which would possibly have developed the skills of negotiation, persuasion and argument, to name a few.

I cannot also underestimate the limitations of time and the pressure to meet the module's assessment requirements. A semester of twelve weeks is entirely inadequate, the Department of Communication has repeatedly argued, to achieve the goals of the module, let alone develop the language proficiency of second language speakers of English. Student recommendations in this study make a similar point. With more time together, I have no doubt that we could have achieved more.

Implications

Throughout this work I have asked how the research experience, OBE and sociopolitical change can first transform us as teacher-facilitators, before we begin to reshape our curricula and methodologies in the classroom. This question (and others) will still be asked. (Why was it so important to students that they felt free? Why was the mere act of doing something different in class so instrumental in making them feel special?). As a form of teacher research, some change should be effected through interaction and observation. I learned, for instance, that we do not know our students, and yet presume to design curricula for them. This is no longer tenable, if we want to make education in the new South Africa meaningful and relevant for students on a personal
level. Certainly, this research has raised critical questions for me as an individual thinker, language practitioner and researcher. It also compels all of us in the Department of Communication at Mangosuthu Technikon to revisit the many issues surrounding the value, purpose and design of the Coms311 module. As a department we intend to review the structure of the module and our assessment practices, as we are clearly dominated by the requirements of continuous assessment. While continuous assessment is favoured as a suitable evaluative mechanism to achieve the outcomes identified by the OBE model, and is preferable to heavily weighted annual or external exit examinations, it creates considerable pressure to perform in the Coms311 module. That we need more time with students, perhaps a year, or preferably shorter modules across all three years of study, is undeniable. The latter would enable us to integrate more effectively various language components across disciplines, and to schedule units of learning at times most appropriate for students. For example, interviews for bursaries could be scheduled earlier in the first semester, while interviews for jobs could be scheduled in the fifth semester, just before students venture into the world of work.

Looking back on the experience of this class, I see in it the transition from an apartheid curriculum to a post-apartheid curriculum; from a depersonalized, decontextualised classroom, which is not inclusive, denies subjectivities and silences voices, to one which is personalized, context-driven and inclusive, which brings subjectivities back into our history, fosters strength from resistance, and acknowledges both consonances and dissonances. I also feel sure that it is within the ambit of the Communication module to develop aesthetic awareness, cultural sensitivity, interpersonal
skills and communication. I see a role in our Communication curricula for literature which develops reading, listening and comprehending, especially when mediated through performance strategies. I am convinced that the use of literature is an extremely rich resource, which we should not ignore, and support fully the Draft White Paper on Arts and Culture (1997), which urges the study of literature "as a form of art and cultural expression" (p. 143). I would therefore recommend that a text such as *Master Harold and the Boys*, and other selected texts, preferably South African, be introduced. Some structured engagement with faculty would be necessary in order to motivate for such drastic change. In any event, the Department of Communication has already begun to address the "problem" of language competence in English across the campus. We have begun a series of talks in our Speaker's Forum, in which we invite speaker's from political, educational and economic spheres to address faculty and third-year students on topical issues, in order to foster a culture of debate. We have also circulated an electronic "communique" to academics, to encourage other teacher-facilitators across the campus to become active language practitioners, and to infuse language development across disciplines. However, we are best positioned to achieve these goals, in our own classrooms. I hope that we can.

The research experience documented here could provide sufficient motivation to introduce literature and performance into the Coms311 curriculum, as a vehicle to enact a more carefully considered OBE methodology. Internally, that is, within the institution, this could be easily achieved, as the idea was already been tabled with the Department of Electrical Engineering when permission for the research was granted. Furthermore,
discussion with representatives from industry indicates that it would welcome and support whatever considered measures we recommend as the Department of Communication, to improve our students’ communicative competence. On the basis of institutional need and context (our students are not first language speakers of English) and with more defined evaluation and feedback on progress made, I am confident that we could proceed. The experience of teacher-facilitators and students, with increased exposure to the methodology adopted in this study, would identify both the value and shortcomings of this route. However, increasing student enrolment and faculty-student ratios in 2003, as well as unsuitable venues and inadequate resources, may unfortunately mitigate against the critical practice of OBE methodology that is required in our classrooms. I found, in my own experience of OBE with my research group, that performance offered a way to subvert its formulaic imposition, and believe that we need to apply our minds to seeking other ways.

There is currently (in February 2003) silence on the merger with the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) from the Department of Education, though we anticipate merging by 2005. We would need to consult with the DIT to ensure regional collaboration, so that our projected academic programmes are not substantially different. The portability of credits, as a service department, is important. However, we are encouraged institutionally to recognize our unique context and needs in devising specific learning activities. The configurations for individual programmes, departments and faculties in the merger are still under discussion: it may be, for example, that Mangosuthu Technikon becomes the only site for Engineering qualifications or that we may offer only
the first and second years of study. Obtaining national approval would require a submission at that level to the National Qualifications Framework, for a review and validation of the academic programme.

The resources required for implementation of OBE need to be accessed. Human and technical resources are necessary, as well as facilitators with the capacity to apply its principles. Educators need sustained training and support, with follow up, and workloads should be rearranged to prioritise training, as well as materials and curriculum development. Teacher education programmes nationally must explicitly and directly engage OBE at tertiary level, exploring more comprehensively its limitations as well as ideals. In other words, curricula in teacher education should correlate with the demands of OBE.

A collective effort needs to be made at institutional level, at Mangosuthu Technikon, to understand and respond to the calls for systemic and curricular transformation. We need an agreed-upon discourse of OBE, so that we may not only proceed along a common, identifiable path but also measure and maintain standards and evaluate ourselves. At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that different means to ends exist, and that we need to vary the means in order to avoid re-inventing the wheel and standardizing instruction. A viable plan and timeframe for the completion of goals should be established at faculty level, in order to improve accountability. We must acknowledge the arguments which compel us to both accept and examine the tenets of OBE, including its behaviourist slant and transmissive potential. Reflective practice has to be centralized if we are to accomplish our curricular goals.
Finally, this work constitutes in itself a response to the criticism of OBE. It is an attempt to uncover the transition towards a more considered application of this methodology, at technikons. While it is shaped by unique institutional circumstances and conditions, and while it is a conceptual work which explores many subjectivities, it may serve to affirm that OBE can be practised.
POSTSCRIPT

Writing about the lack of opportunities we have had to get to know one another in this country, Mphahlele (in Malan, 1987) says, “We seem to be looking at each other through a small opening in the walls between us” (p. 48).

I think that in the Coms311 “Class of 2001,” we broke through the invisible walls that have separated us. One of the most rewarding products of research for me, one not anticipated, has been the continued relationship I have enjoyed with my student friends, something which has not happened before in any meaningful, long-term way at Mantec. Even during my absence from the technikon, to write, students have remained in touch, visiting, e-mailing and often calling just to tell me that they were praying for me and thinking about me. Their interest in what I am doing has been unprecedented. I feel like the writing of this work is for them.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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October 29, 2002

Professor Neil Vroman
Vice Chair
Institutional Review Board
Hewitt Hall
Campus

Dear Neil:

Thank you for your letter of October 24, 2002 outlining the issues surrounding doctoral student Connie Israel and the use of human subjects in her dissertation research. I have reviewed the Mangosuthu Technikon Letter of Approval for Research, the letter from Professor Paula Salvio regarding this student and the failed attempt to request UNH IRB approval for this research project, and carefully reviewed your letter. I concur with your recommendation that no sanctions be imposed on Ms. Israel.

Sincerely,

Donald C. Sundberg
Vice President for Research
and Public Service

cc: Paula Salvio, Associate Professor, Education
    Todd DeMitchell, Chair, Dept. of Education
    Marilyn Hoskin, Dean, College of Liberal Arts
    Harry Richards, Associate Dean, Graduate School
    Grant Cioffi, Chair, IRB
    Julie Simpson, Regulatory Compliance Manager

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