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### **“I WAS JUST NEVER EXPOSED TO THIS ARGUMENT THING”**

#### ***Using a Genre Approach to Teach Academic Writing to ESL Students in the Humanities***

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“The school essays were just like retyping, and plagiarising was not the issue, so I didn’t have to read” (Garth).

“[At school] we copied from the textbook . . . you were not expected to have your own point of view” (Andiswa).

“I prefer to say things out loud . . . it’s hard when we have to write about them” (Dudu).

“I have the stuff in my head, but it’s hard to put it down” (Andrew).

“I don’t think I can manage the critical analysis thing. I prefer writing what I think and feel. The kind of writing here does not allow me to write freely” (David).

“I do not enjoy writing because I can’t write what I want here, and sometimes I can’t express myself properly” (Yandisa).

These quotations are typical of remarks made by a group of twenty first-year students whom we interviewed (as part of a case study) three months after their entry into the humanities at the University of Cape Town (UCT). In some ways, the students’ experiences echo those reported in studies about the transition from school to university in many parts of the world. The students find the new discourse constraining and demanding in its many rules, its formality, its requirement to engage in close analysis and to consider the views of others in producing an argument. And yet the quotations also bear the quite specific imprint of the South African legacy of apartheid. Despite the many changes in the political system, the majority of “black”<sup>1</sup> working-class students are still educated in print-impovertised environments, often characterised

by teacher-centred, predominantly oral classroom cultures. In a context where close to 90 percent of students study through the medium of English (their second language), literacy practices take on an instrumental character, functional to the externally set examinations that students have to pass in order to gain a school-leaving (matriculation) certificate (see Kapp 2000 for detailed description). These students are nearly all the first in their families, sometimes the first in their communities, to attend university. Yandisa and David's statements also allude to the fact that like many students who enter the academy from traditionally marginalized communities, these students feel constrained by the cultural and intellectual context of the university, where many of the norms and values are different or at odds with their own experiences.

When they enter into the humanities, students from such backgrounds thus have to negotiate a chasm that is not only cognitive and linguistic in character, but also social and affective: they "navigate not only among ways of using language but, indeed, among worlds" (DiPardo 1993, 7). In the words of new literacy studies theorist Gee they are entering into new discourses (he uses a capital D), a process entailing new ways of using language that are intricately connected to disciplinary processes of knowledge construction. Entering the discourse is a social and affective process because students have to negotiate a sense of self in relation to new ways of "behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking and . . . reading and writing" (1990, xix).

In this chapter we will describe why and how we use a genre approach to help students "navigate" their entry into the disciplines in their first semester in Language in the Humanities, an academic literacy course that is situated alongside a range of disciplinary-focussed introductory courses and is designed to address the needs of students from disadvantaged school backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> We focus on our use of the social science essay as a tool to open up a conversation about the nature of the discourse. Our data are drawn from course material from our teaching in 2002. We also use data from our case study of twenty students who took our course in 2002. These comprise extracts from student essays and interviews (conducted during their first and second semesters), as well as informal discussion. Our chapter illustrates the ways in which we have used genre theory alongside process and academic literacy approaches to suit the specific needs of our context. Through an exploration of its strengths and weaknesses, we argue that while a genre approach is a key resource for providing metaknowledge of the discourse conventions, it does not provide the

necessary exploratory talking and writing space to enable students from outside the dominant discourses to become critical participants.

### GENRE IN OUR CONTEXT

Cope and Kalantzis have been among the leading proponents of an approach to literacy pedagogy that foregrounds genre. They define genres as "conventional structures which have evolved as pragmatic schemes for making certain types of meaning and to achieve distinctive social goals, in specific settings, by particular linguistic means. (1993b, 67)

They emphasize the need to facilitate access to dominant discourses by teaching explicitly the text types that characterise the discourse. In this approach, students are conceptualized as apprentices who are inducted into the discipline through careful scaffolding. They are taught a meta-language ("a language with which to make generalizations about language") that enables them to describe, produce, and critique a range of genres in the context of the discourse (Cope and Kalantzis 1993a, 6). The writers distinguish their approach from that of traditional (transmission) literacy pedagogy by emphasising the socially situated nature of language and literacy learning (see also Johns 1997).

They also argue that "students should be allowed to cross the generic line" (1993a, 10). This position is distinct from that of genre theorists like Martin (1993) who emphasize the need for modeling the genre first, and argue that students first have to know the genre thoroughly before they can attempt critique. It is also distinct from theorists who view genre acquisition purely as a process of acculturation (see, for example, Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995). Like Dias (1994), Luke (1996), Clark and Ivanič (1997), and Herrington and Curtis (2000), Cope and Kalantzis (1993a, 1993b) argue that genre teaching has to go beyond focusing on how texts function to teaching the ideological underpinnings of form (the "why"). This is especially relevant in a world where there is an increasing emphasis on instrumental educational outcomes (Luke 1996), as well as persistent calls for a return to teaching decontextualized grammatical form.

Besides constituting a reaction to traditional transmission approaches to literacy pedagogy, the genre approach, particularly in the form emanating from Australia, has reacted strongly to process pedagogy. Cope and Kalantzis argue that the emphasis on "natural" learning through free writing, on students' generating their own topics, and on affirming student "voice" "favours students whose voice is closest to the literate culture

of power” and simply reproduces power inequalities by failing to teach explicitly the genres that characterize dominant institutions (1993a, 2, 5; see also Delpit 1995). They also critique the “analogy” of orality and literacy in process writing and whole language approaches (5).

While we have found the genre approach enormously valuable in its conceptualization of the student-teacher relationship as an apprenticeship that focuses on the explicit teaching of the manner in which texts are structured and on their social purposes, the outright dismissal of process pedagogies, and the denial of the possibility for students to be critical participants (by some genre theorists), seems problematic in our context (see also Coe 1994 for this observation). On the basis of our experience and research, we believe that for literacy teaching to be successful in contexts where students are entering into discourses substantially different from their earlier socialization, students’ identities have to be taken into account because they are entering into new subjectivities (see Johns 1997; Herrington and Curtis 2000). In Gee’s (1990, xviii) terms: “There is no such thing as ‘reading’ or ‘writing,’ only reading and writing something (a text of a certain type) in a certain way with certain values while at least appearing to think and feel in certain ways. We read and write only within a Discourse.” If students are to become critical members of, and contributors to, the discourse, rather than instrumental reproducers, they have to be allowed the time and space to engage with the messy process of exploring (through talking, reading, and writing) who they are (and who they are becoming) in relation to the authoritative voices in the field. In our context, the authoritarian, examination-driven school environment has meant that students have had little opportunity for such exploration. They are accustomed to accepting the answer sanctioned by teacher and textbook.

Cope and Kalantzis (1993a, 18) advocate “a dialogue between the culture of schooling and the cultures of students,” but it is not clear from their work how this dialogue will be facilitated. They seem to underestimate the extent to which individual mastery of genre entails negotiation and (re)construction of identity (as both Clark and Ivanič 1997 and Herrington and Curtis 2000 demonstrate). Cope and Kalantzis interpret a process approach narrowly, as a validation of student voices; whereas the approach can provide a space for students to enter the academic conversation through exploration and dialogue. For us, this is a key point of departure from the genre school. Our goal is to combine genre, process, and academic literacy approaches in such a way that conscious “learning”

of genres through explicit mediation of form, and the development of a shared metalanguage, is placed alongside “acquisition”<sup>3</sup>—a more unconscious process of using writing to clarify one’s own position in an argument. Learning the form of the academic conversation is combined with working out its semantics and one’s own role as a critical participant. Our approach conceptualizes the genre of the academic essay as an instance of discourse. The task is not to romanticize students’ home discourses, nor to reify the authority of academic discourse and the form of the academic essay. To become members of their disciplines, students have to learn how to situate themselves within the academic conversation with critical reflection.

Developing this critical awareness entails metaunderstanding of the culture of the disciplines and their social constructedness, and fluency in the register of the conversation. It entails knowing what subject positions are available to one. Whereas Cope and Kalantzis conceptualize “voice” as personal opinion, Clark and Ivanič (1997, 136) develop a more nuanced view of textual identity in academic writing. They use a poststructuralist understanding of identity as social, multiple, and fluid in order to identify three aspects of writer identity, which they categorize as the “discoursal,” “authorial,” and “autobiographical” self. The discoursal self refers to the discourse choices that the writer draws on in the writing process, which reflect an awareness of the discipline. The authorial self has to do with the writer’s “sense of authority and authorial presence” in the text, which reflects the degree of ownership; and the autobiographical self refers to the extent to which the writer’s life history is represented in the text. These concepts overlap, but the distinctions provide a metalanguage about textual identity, a framework for understanding our students’ writing and for giving feedback that may help them enter the discourse. Clark and Ivanič point out that we need to make writers aware “that their discoursal choices construct an image of themselves and that they need to take control over this as much as they can, *not* so that they can deceive their readers but so that they do not betray themselves” (231).

#### **THE LANGUAGE IN THE HUMANITIES COURSE**

The Language in the Humanities course is taught in small classes by language development specialists over one semester, with a total of fifty-two hours of formal class time. The course is orientated toward the social sciences. It is divided into modules that are centered around key social science concepts with a focus on issues related to identity. This focus enables

us to engage in conceptual and language development work that articulates with students' other courses and helps them to explore the affective dimension of the transition to university. The emphasis on debate and comparing different points of view is important, given the students' background of rote learning and acceptance of authority.

The course is task based. Students work mainly in small groups on worksheets that guide them through processes of analyzing and constructing argument in the social sciences. In line with the genre approach, students are conceptualized as apprentices; and we use the principle of scaffolding, so that by the time they reach the final module, they are required to work at a greater level of complexity (in terms of content and form) with less intervention from us. While the course is fairly general, we try to create an awareness of disciplinary difference through our readings and our tasks.

After an initial introduction, which facilitates a discussion about the school to university transition and its implications, and which orientates students into the discourse of lectures, time management, and general study skills, we spend three weeks on a module called Language and Identity, followed by Culture and Gender. For the purposes of this chapter we will describe the Culture module, because its position midway in the course enables us to illustrate our method of scaffolding students into working out their position in the academic conversation through analysis and engagement with the other participants.

### NEGOTIATING THE TRANSITION

As with all our modules, an essay topic frames the Culture module. Reading and writing skills are taught using debates about culture and cross-cultural contact. This is an important principle: content and skills are viewed as inseparable since the ways of knowing in the social sciences are inextricably linked to the forms of expression. As Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995, 4) point out: "Genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time."

In 2002, the essay topic read: "Identify and analyse the notion of culture which you find most relevant to your experience of the transition to the UCT environment. Draw on your readings and classroom discussions of the different perspectives of the concept of culture."

The marking criteria for the essay are made explicit as a way of inducting students into our disciplinary expectations and drawing attention to

the specificity of university essays (compared to the general ones written at school). Students are required to demonstrate an understanding of the concept of culture from different theoretical perspectives and an ability to apply theory.

In the preceding essay, on the relationship between language and identity, students have to develop a logical argument at its most basic level, that is, demonstrate that they can construct a position in relation to the different views in the debate. The Culture essay obliges students to move from the simple identification of different points of view to engage with theory at deeper levels of analysis, comparison, and application. The formal aspects of developing a logical argument through use of the discourse conventions are also dealt with at a more advanced level in this module through the teaching of what constitutes a definition in the various disciplines in the social sciences: coherence (the overall logic of an argument), cohesion (logic within a paragraph), introductions and conclusions. These formal aspects of the genre are all explicitly foregrounded in the marking criteria. Skills initiated in the first module, such as essay title analysis and referencing, are reinforced through tasks.

The essay simultaneously asks students to grapple with a concept central to the social sciences and provides the space for them to engage in critical reflection on their own processes of transition through dialogue with established positions. It provides students with an opportunity to discuss their struggles to come to terms with UCT institutional culture and to explore their defensiveness about the new environment. The following extracts from their preceding Language and Identity essays illustrate students' perceptions and feelings when they first arrive:

"People they can speak another language but they cannot forget their background or their identity" (S'busiso).

"People around you might influence your behaviour but they cannot influence your identity. . . . It is clear that that language a person chooses to speak can only influence his or her actions. The identity remains unchanged" (Sizwe).

"The fact that I am in an environment that requires of me to communicate in another language does not give me another identity but asks of me to change my behaviour to accommodate everyone" (Michael).

"I still strongly believe that the language you choose to speak cannot reveal your identity. It would take decades and decades for me to change this point

of view, I can even publish a book about it. The other languages you choose to speak have nothing to do with your identity" (Vuyani).

Students' authorial and autobiographical selves are very strong in these early essays. The essay topic did not refer directly to students' transition to the UCT environment; however, it is evident that students draw on the prescribed readings only minimally, and have used their current experiences of "difference" and diversity as the basis of their arguments. The "you" in the essays is invariably self-reflexive.

It would be easy to dismiss these as the clumsy first efforts of the novice writer unable to find an appropriate register. Bartholomae's (1985) now-famous article illustrates the difficulty students have in trying to take on an authoritative role, slipping instead into "a more immediately recognizable voice of authority, the voice of a teacher giving a lesson or the voice of a parent lecturing at the dinner table" (136). Indeed, this is partly the case in these extracts. However, taken as a whole, the identities constructed in the essays also provide us with evidence that students are struggling with who they are, as well as with their writing. The essays reflect an overwhelming desire to assert a consistent, singular identity: that of students' home environments. In many cases identity is conflated with ethnicity; in others it is distinguished from the "white," "English" environment of UCT. We see in these statements a desire to preserve, not to "lose" or "forget" an original identity. Moreover, cultural identity is intrinsically connected to students' home languages. What emerges in many of the essays (and in our interviews) is the notion that it is possible to assume certain roles, to "behave" in certain ways in one's environment without any consequent effects on one's core identity.

The essays also reflect the shock of students' transition to a completely different environment. Even though the UCT student population is now over 50 percent "black," its faculty are predominantly white and the architecture, codes, and rituals are still markedly "English" and upper class in character. For some "black" students, the transition also represents their first encounter with "black" people from other ethnic and class backgrounds. As a consequence of the apartheid policy of "separate development," many students still grow up and go to school in environments that have homogenous ethnic and language identities. Students are socialized into the need to defend traditional boundaries, the result of the apartheid emphasis on preserving such division, consequent postapartheid competition over resources and power, and



the perceived threat of assimilation to "Westernization" in the form of Anglicization.

Herrington and Curtis (2000, 35) write: "When we attempt to learn a new discourse, particularly as writers, we are entering a subjectivity, and how we experience that subjectivity depends on how it fits with our private/personal sense of identity and values. When the fit seems natural, we may take on a particular orientation without critical awareness that we are doing so. At the other extreme, if we are asked to take on an orientation that violates our basic sense of self, then we may feel assaulted."

There is a danger that the desire to preserve and defend "difference" may prevent students from entering into the academic conversation as critical participants. They may suppress their own views and experiences, engaging instrumentally with the views they encounter in the academy. They may also remain trapped in "commonsense" assumptions and rhetoric, based on their own experiences. A good example of this occurred when a "colored" student proclaimed: "I have no culture," because he associated "culture" with the traditional ceremonies and rituals that characterize "African" communities.

It is for these reasons that we begin the module by using case studies and visual evidence to challenge students to review their assumptions in the light of historical and contemporary evidence to the contrary. For example, we show students photographs that illustrate that people do change how they live and identify over time. This is dramatically illustrated through the life histories of people who experienced the regulation of work and physical dislocation that characterized apartheid. Through discussion of these shifts, and of students' own life experiences of change from an apartheid context to the "new" South Africa, and of moving from home to university, we are able to broaden their notions of what constitutes culture beyond static conceptions of culture as tradition and ethnicity. Like Scott (2002, 127), we want to help them "to hear the voices of past experience so that the new voices of the University can become audible by recognizable echo or by contrast." Engaging students in verbal debate and exploratory talk in which they view their experiences and commonsense understandings alongside other perspectives, thus also constitutes an important part of the "acquisition" process: articulating and clarifying ideas that may be difficult to express elsewhere.

Britton, whose work is often associated with process approaches, stresses the value of helping students to connect what they know with the unfamiliar through exploratory talk. He writes about students using their

“inner reflections upon experience” as a means toward “interpreting the new and re-interpreting the familiar” (1986, 108). By the time students reach the Culture module, they are sufficiently comfortable with each other to engage in this kind of exploration. This is significant because, as our interviews showed, even students who were quite confident in our small-group discussions seldom spoke in their other classes during their first semester. In S’busiso’s words: “If maybe I raised my hand in class, there was something beating fast in my heart” (first interview).

After these discussions, we ask students to write a definition of culture. They are told to regard these definitions as tentative: there will almost certainly be changes in the light of new readings and new understandings. This is the start of their process writing. At this point, we are still stressing exploratory thinking and writing. We purposefully do so before they are introduced to the module’s theoretical reading, anticipating that they may otherwise be overwhelmed by the weight of authority.

#### **DEFINING CULTURE**

Our next step is to move into genre analysis. We introduce the class to the role of concept definition in social science argument construction. Students’ schooled understandings are that a definition is an uncontested, one-line explanation, elicited from the dictionary. We discuss (through illustration) the limits of the conventional dictionary for the purposes of defining concepts such as “culture” in the context of the social sciences. Students are presented with a range of definitions taken from different disciplines in the social sciences in order to draw attention to the centrality of definition to meaning making and to articulation of point of view in the construction of argument. Students confer over these in groups, answering the following questions:

- What does each definition emphasize about the concept of culture?
- Who is the writer addressing? Provide evidence.
- Are there similarities in the definitions? What conclusions can you come to about the “ingredients” of a good definition?
- What do you think of each of these definitions?

The aim of this exercise is to illustrate how writers articulate their membership of particular discourse communities. We show how point of view is embedded in definition and how the type of definition relates to disciplinary context. Students are introduced to the specialized vocabulary (e.g., “norms and values”) and conceptual distinctions (e.g., between

“society” and “culture”) that are particular to the social sciences. We also illustrate different styles of explanation (e.g., the use of metaphor or case study exemplification).

The definition exercise foregrounds the social nature of text construction and is key to establishing a metalanguage about the genre of the social science essay. At the end of this session, students return to the process of developing their own definitions by taking into account those that they have read (in terms of both form and content). This is crucial to our belief that they can disagree with, but not ignore, the new discourses and ideologies with which they are confronted. In order to be acknowledged as a legitimate voice inside the debate, students have to engage with its multiple points of view, using the linguistic conventions that characterize the genre.

#### READING AND WRITING CULTURE

We see reading as underpinning the writing process—one reads for a purpose, and reading plays a crucial part in “acquiring”/ “learning” the discourse. In Dias’s (1994, 194) words: “[W]e need to talk of students finding themselves in the language of the texts they must read, of living in that quiet tension between exploring and defining what they know and recognising what the texts offer towards clarifying, shaping and extending that knowing.”

We use articles written in Africa that illustrate different views of culture and different written genres. Our major theoretical text is Robert Thornton’s (1988) “Culture: A Contemporary Definition,” a difficult article both in terms of the conceptual terrain it explores and its language level. It is used as a theoretical basis for analyzing the notions of culture in the autobiographical, anthropological, and political texts that follow, and as a vehicle for teaching students the skills to read and analyze a demanding text.

Thornton explains contemporary notions of culture in South Africa by tracing the term’s intellectual history to romantic and modernist conceptions of culture and nation. He explores when, how, and why boundaries are created, and traces processes of socialization and constructions of “self” and “other.” Thornton’s contention that the boundaries of race, class, and gender are a construction, existing only in the imagination, as well as his challenge to the contemporary ideology of multiculturalism, provide the focal points for heated discussion. Invariably, we find our own understandings challenged by students’ perceptions and interpretation of their cultural environments.

Because the Thornton article is such a good example of the genre, we use it to model social science argument. Through an exploration of subheadings, the introduction and conclusion, the use of evidence to substantiate claims, as well as sentence-level analysis of the use of modals, pronouns, conjunctions, and citation in the article, we are able to illustrate how writers define their positions within the debate and create coherence. Critical language awareness at the sentence level is crucial because, as a result of an emphasis on oral proficiency and a lack of focus on close, critical analysis of texts at school, students have very little meta-awareness of how grammar works to create meaning. In addition, the often instrumental approach to referencing in their “mainstream” courses results in students viewing citation solely as a display of reading or as proof that one has not plagiarized, and not as a process of tracing tradition and establishing authority (Angélil-Carter 2000).

The Thornton article is carefully scaffolded by us, but students then move on to reviewing three other texts (Achebe 1975; Biko 1987; Ramphela 1995) in groups, using worksheets that reinforce reading skills. Thornton’s metaphor of “boundaries” is used as an analytical tool. An important part of the discussion is an analysis of each writer’s position on cross-cultural contact in terms of its historical and social context. As they progress, students are reminded of the need to develop and refine their definitions and think through their own positions in preparation for their essays. We teach mind-mapping tools to enable them to plan their essays by identifying, summarizing, and comparing the different views of culture. We also revisit the essay topic and marking criteria. Thus, in preparation for the first drafts of their essays, students engage in a process of “learning” the genre, alongside process exploration through talking, reading, and writing. They move through a recursive process of analyzing the arguments of others and composing their own, and are constantly reminded of their roles as critical participants in a debate.

After the first drafts of the essay have been written, we engage in further close linguistic analysis and awareness raising about the genre by modeling good practice through analysis of extracts on “culture” by published authors and novice writers. We look at how coherence and cohesion are established in writing, paying particular attention to linguistic markers of cohesion such as conjunctions and pronouns, because these pose particular difficulties that relate to transfer from the African languages. Students review their own drafts in the light of these tasks and comment to us on their analysis of their own essays. This is part of establishing a

metalanguage, which enables them to analyze and talk about their own writing. It is also part of reiterating that writing is a process. Improvement happens through self-reflection and dialogue with their teachers and their peers.

The concept of dialogic feedback on writing is unfamiliar to most of our students. Students tell us that at school they often handed in essays without rereading and teachers handed them back having marked only the grammar. We mark students' drafts, using the metalanguage of the course and the explicit marking criteria to draw their attention to how they have defined, used authority, and to where coherence has worked or broken down. We also engage in verbal feedback where appropriate.

### **CROSSING THE BOUNDARIES?**

Our analysis of the 2002 Culture essays revealed that some were still written in a mainly oral register, and some students wrote personal narratives that avoided the theory. However, most essays grappled with argument construction, and though students' efforts to use the discourse conventions were often overly self-conscious, for the most part there were marked shifts from the first essay, both in the ways that students position themselves and in their fluency in the discourse. In her first essay, Noluthando had written: "I only learned their [whites'] culture and language to adapt not to adopt and I did not lose myself in their culture for I practised theirs only in the school vicinity to suit the environment."

In the Culture essay, her shift is typical of many of her classmates. She starts by anchoring her discussion in the language of her first essay and identifying with the black consciousness sentiments in an essay by Steve Biko (1987): "I found it very difficult to adopt and adapt to the UCT society, because I thought that by doing that I would lose myself into a foreign culture."

She goes on to discuss her fear of becoming a "coconut," which she defines as people who are "black by race but behave like whites." Then she says: "[B]ut as time went on, I found myself not interacting and became an outcast. It is only then it occurred to me that culture is not stagnant, and that I needed to cross these boundaries (Ramphela 1995). . . . I found myself at the crossroads of cultures, my own culture and that of UCT, which is like two different worlds to me (Achebe 1975), for I enjoy some things that are done in both cultures."

The influence of the ideology of the Language in the Humanities course is strongly evident here. Although we present the Culture module

as a debate, together with the current rhetoric about building a unified South Africa, the theoretical framing of the module makes it very difficult for students not to engage with the notion that South Africans share a common culture and that boundaries can be crossed. Nolutando had indeed been quite isolated and withdrawn partly because of her anger about not being accepted into the School of Law, and because she found UCT culture “somehow white” (first interview). She seemed to feel that she must protect herself from being assimilated. Achebe’s (1975) metaphor of the potentially liberating and enriching effects of existing at the “crossroads” of Western and African culture and choosing which aspects of each to adopt allows her a way to “enjoy some things that are done in both cultures.” The discourse of the Culture module opens up a way of rationalizing changes in her style of dress and allows her to relax her defensive behavior toward fellow students and the institution.

Our interviews revealed that, particularly for some of the students from rural backgrounds, the Thornton (1988) article was liberating, allowing them to see how boundaries of gender, race, and tradition have been used to control and limit. Noloyiso writes about the policing of tradition by the “elders” in her rural community: “They created boundaries by saying ‘you are this kind of a person in this kind of culture’ and they used to tell us what must be done. If you ask why, they tell you that ‘it is our religion.’ Sometimes they say ‘you will die’ and in that way they try to stop us from mixing our cultures with other cultures.”

In her interview, Noloyiso talks about how “free” she feels at UCT. The discourse of the Culture module provides her with the resources and the language in which to express this. Another example of this is Garth, the elected class representative, a “colored” student who was extremely popular in class and seemed to connect easily across boundaries of gender, race, and disability (there were two blind students in the class). Both in class and in his first interview, Garth revealed that he had been taught to despise “black” (African) people by his “white” grandmother who had raised him in his rural village: “I remember that my grandmother used to say blacks stink, they never wash and you are not supposed to eat [food that comes] out of their hands.”

In his essay Garth writes: “Coming to UCT represented a lot of things that I was socialised against. . . . I am proud to say that unlike Ramphela (1995) who ‘stretches across the boundaries,’ I can freely cross the boundaries of another culture and find commonness within that culture with which I can communicate. . . . Culture does indeed change, because it is

not organic but social, which means it can be unlearned and redefined. Culture changes and its boundaries are crossed daily, by people who are brave enough to find out more about the 'other' (DOH101F, Course Reader, 2002) and who are willing to accept differences and also acknowledge the sameness that is found within the other culture."

For Noloyiso, Garth, and others, the Culture module seemed to have the effect of questioning the "taken for granted." In her first interview Sisanda says about the course: "The themes we learn about made me search deeply within me to find out who I really am and how I came to be that person. . . . I enjoyed the culture essay because it is asking me about my own experience, things that I've always taken for granted, my everyday life I'm encountering at UCT."

For these students the Culture module had achieved its goal of not only teaching the discourse conventions, but of helping students to move beyond the defensive positions in their first essays toward exploring their "becoming-selves" in relation to the discourse (Clark and Ivanič 1997, 134). However, it was also evident from the interviews that a number of individuals who had written of embracing diversity and "crossing boundaries" in their essays adopted a stance contrary to their beliefs, and were in fact uneasy (or in the case of Bulelwa, deeply alienated) in the environment. In her essay Bulelwa writes: "I have certainly settled in the UCT environment without any huge problems. . . . Although I seem to have adapted well here, I still remember the way things are done back home."

When asked (in the first interview) how she would describe UCT culture, Bulelwa replies:

It is different from where I come from. Even if you were not a student, back home you would feel warmth. You would be part of the group and even if we would have visitors they would end up friends with everybody. There would always be warmth and here you don't see that. . . .

*Rochelle:* And have you managed to make friends here?

*Bulelwa:* Not the way I would like. I used to have friends, I mean everyone was my friend and I didn't have a specific friend. But here it so difficult and you can't even choose who you would like for a friend.

Similarly, Sizwe spoke passionately in his interview about how Steve Biko's notion that "we are throwing away our culture and being influenced by Western culture" had had a powerful effect on his thinking. When asked why he did not use Biko in his essay, he said: "I didn't know how I was going to put it clearly in the essay, so I chose the other writers"

(first interview). In informal conversation with us about his experiences in other courses, Andrew spoke of how he often took positions with which he disagreed “for fear of being judged” or because essay questions did not always make allowances for other positions: “the structure is determining you.” He had experienced particular difficulty expressing authority in part because of the very different messages he was getting: in psychology he was told to avoid the use of the personal pronoun, while in social work he was writing personal reflective essays. An analysis of his psychology essay revealed that his response was to mimic the discourse, skillfully paraphrasing the views on gender violence without any attempt to assert an authorial presence despite the fact that he comes from a community context of extreme violence and is a community activist. His essay reflects conscious distancing through phrases like “society out there.” His efforts were rewarded with an excellent mark.

Clark and Ivanič (1997, 144) write: “Writers consciously or subconsciously adjust the impression they convey to readers, according to their commitments and what is in their best interests. These two forces may be in conflict, especially in situations like writing an academic assignment for assessment purposes. Writers often find themselves attempting to inhabit subject positions with which they do not really identify, or feel ambivalent about.”

This is an important point. We believe that the process of learning/acquiring the discourse must include space for students to explore who they are and who they are becoming. However, for a variety of reasons, students may choose to distance themselves from such exploration. This also constitutes an acceptable position. Our task is to help students develop meta-awareness of the image constructed by their “discoursal choices” (Clark and Ivanič 1997, 231) and of the constraints and possibilities within their disciplinary discourses. We are quite open about this in our discussions with students. While it is not possible to teach this kind of nuanced analysis outside of the disciplines, we believe that, through feedback, we can make students aware of the effects of their discoursal choices and remind them of the importance of their own experiences and points of view.

On the basis of our second interviews, conducted after students had returned to the university after midyear trips home, we concluded that the contradictory positions in students’ self-representation are often the result of their own ambivalence about who they are and where they belong. It is also the result of an anxiety produced by the negative



feedback they receive on their writing. Many feel that it is easier to assimilate to the dominant discourses than to try to be critical participants. In the face of this, it seems important to acknowledge the extent to which students make strategic choices based on their own agendas (see also Thesen 1997; Herrington and Curtis 2000). By the end of her first year, Babalwa still wanted to be told the correct answer and was frustrated by her philosophy course, where "you keep on debating because there's no answer. . . . They say they don't look at the outcome, but in a way you are because you are using education as a means to go."

We found this statement fascinating because Rochelle's ethnography of Western Cape township schooling traces a trope where certain students are identified by teachers as "going": they are the students who are classified as achievers, who are expected to have a future outside of the confines of the impoverished, violent townships (Kapp 2000). Babalwa is one such student, classified as "at risk" by the university, yet frustrated by being held back, not being given the "means to go." Because of financial pressures from home, university education is a means to an instrumental end for Babalwa, and the academic debate is far removed from the reality of needing to pass in order to earn a living.

After the Culture module, we move on to the last module of the course, which focuses on the concept of gender. We reduce the scaffolding substantially and students have to work through the reading and writing process far more independently. This is part of reinforcing the need to internalize the methods of the course and to transfer and apply this knowledge to their other learning contexts. Students engage in exploratory talk on the nature/nurture debate, drawing on their earlier discussions on identity and cultural boundaries. They use their metaknowledge of genre to engage in close critical analysis of the readings and to present their observations to their peers. The process of analyzing the essay topic, producing drafts, and writing final essays is similarly informed by peer dialogue. We assist with guidance and feedback only when asked to do so.

By the end of our course in 2002, we felt that students were, for the most part, grappling with their roles as critical participants in the academic conversation. They were able to articulate and demonstrate meta-level understanding of the genre of the social science essay. The practice in exploratory talk and writing had also enabled them to become a lot more confident and, by the second semester, almost all reported that they were active participants in tutorial discussions and were less daunted by the writing process.

However, we are aware that there are distinct limitations to what can be achieved in a short course. Students “learn” quite quickly how to make many of the discursal moves that characterize academic language. “Acquiring” ownership of a position takes much longer. In part, this is a factor of their educational backgrounds, their hesitation about whether their views will be valued in such a culturally different environment, as well as the multiplicity of discourses that they negotiate in their first year and the negative feedback they receive on their essays when they write outside of the accepted ideology. But it is also the result of their own identity transitions, the complex tensions between home and academic discourse, and the resultant ambivalence.

### CONCLUSION

In attempting to illustrate our use of genre pedagogy, we have shown how process approaches that stress “doing” and exploration can be placed alongside genre and academic literacy approaches that focus explicitly on the nuances of form. A genre approach is a key resource for providing initial generic access to the discourse. However, acquiring the deep structure of the disciplines and becoming critical members of the discourse is a process, and has to be continually addressed within the context of the disciplines over time.

The students we teach have often experienced crime, violence, and abuse closeup and have had to battle through tough ethical choices with little adult guidance. In this sense, they may have lived experience of many of the social issues that are central to the concerns of disciplines in the humanities. The fact that they have had to move between radically different discourses (when they enter UCT) is a valuable resource that may enable comparison and critique (Gee 1990). Providing the space and the tools for students to explore their own sense of self in relation to disciplinary discourses has the potential to open up an affective and cognitive space, as well as creating the opportunity for mutual learning within the academy. In Thornton’s (1988, 18) words: “to discuss culture is to be a part of culture, to have an effect on it, and ultimately to change the very nature of the ‘object’ itself.”

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## NOTES

1. It is impossible to contextualize fully the imbrications of South African language and educational backgrounds without using the apartheid system of racial classification ("African," "colored," "Indian," and "white") upon which they were based. However, to signify our own beliefs that these categories are, to some degree at least, artificially constructed, we will use quotation marks. In this essay we use the category "black" inclusively to refer to "African," "colored," and "Indian" students.
2. In the South African system of tertiary education, students enter into disciplinary specialization in their first year. In the humanities at UCT, all students are required to take at least one disciplinary-orientated introductory course. Students who are deemed "at risk" are also required to take Language in the Humanities. For the most part these are students who come from disadvantaged home and school backgrounds who are also second-language speakers of English.
3. Gee (1990, 146) makes this useful distinction between "acquiring" and "learning" secondary discourses by drawing on Krashen's description of second-language learning.