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**What can the literacy narrative accounts of EAL students tell us about their transition from high school to university-based academic practices?**

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by

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**WRTRAC001**

A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master in Education (Literacy Studies)

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April 2002

*Declaration*

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature

Date

## **Abstract**

The concepts of narrative and life story have earned a place in the theory, research and application of various disciplines. The functions of narrative as vital clues to thinking have attracted attention in studies of linguistic, literacy and social science fieldwork. Literacy, here, is understood as a social practice involving what people do with literacy and what they make of what they do: the values they place on it and the ideologies that surround it. The focus is on English as an additional language (EAL) student transitions from high school to academic writing discourses. I highlight the challenges that six first year and four third year EAL students are faced with in their academic writing to shed light on their academic writing practices from school to university-based discourses.

The study explores the usefulness of literacy narratives as a tool in academic writing for revealing the perceptions and values EAL students' place on their academic writing identities. The literacy narratives highlight the multiple identities that students bring with them to the act of writing and are shaped by the questions, Who am I? Where am I going? Where do I come from? These questions probe the writers' perceptions of past, present and future academic writer identities and shifts of identity over a period of time and differences between first and third year students. In my analytical approach, I recognise the fact that writing is a social act whereby we say something about ourselves, and use it actively to affirm those values, beliefs and practices which we want to sustain, and to resist those values, beliefs and practices which we do not value (Clark and Ivanić 1997). The function of narrative here is to provide an understanding of how writers' construct what they do according to which ideologies and values, as well as how they are used to signal identity (Labov 1972). The literacy narratives

were used as a prompt for the semi-structured qualitative research interview. The literacy narrative and the interview together allow for an in-depth, individualised study of the challenges of EAL student's transitions. The semi-structured interview also shows contradictions that may arise in students' perceptions or to confirm significant findings in the literacy narrative.

I use Gee's (1990) social theory of literacy as a framework for understanding whether students are in, out or "colonised" by looking at their writer identities. The data shows that some writers accommodate willingly to the conventions of academic writing and adjust their identities accordingly. Some resist and establish their own writer identities. Others are what Gee (1990) terms "colonised", they find a "balance" between resisting and accommodating to academic conventions. A focus on students' future perceptions highlights a key finding namely the presence of the "literacy myth", which reflects the popular belief that literacy brings huge benefits. Another important finding is that third year students are more likely to take up resistant positions as they are more familiar with the institution and have had more encouragement to critical thinking. The ultimate aim of this study is to show how literacy narratives may be used as a tool to bridge the gap between school and academic literacies and in doing so bridge the world of schooling and university. Thus I conclude with recommendations for curriculum and teaching practices.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank my mum and dad for their prayers and financial support. Your love and encouragement has been an inspiration to my academic studies.

Veronica thanks for your moral support. Your continuous words of encouragement were never forgotten.

Nevan thanks for all your help in typing and emailing. You were a pillar of strength during a challenging period of my academic career.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Lucia Thesen, for her patience in a long-distance mode of supervision.

University of Cape Town

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## Chapter One - Introduction

### 1.1 Background to study

As a researcher, my interest in academic literacies is rooted in my involvement both as a secondary school teacher and as a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT). As a secondary school teacher I was involved in developing a bridging program in schools for students commonly referred to as “second language” learners<sup>1</sup>(ESL). In this study I refer to them as speakers of English as an additional language (EAL). The label ESL gives the impression that students are a homogenous group, whereas EAL is a more positive label as it recognises students’ other identities and literacy practices from previous contexts of language use as a resource. The bridging program was to enskill students in how to acquire academic discourses in preparation for tertiary institutional studies. The focus of the bridging program was on academic writing as social practice (Baynham 1995). The project, as a preliminary study to academic writing, highlighted one of the challenges that pupils had with writing namely, the use of the personal pronoun “I”. In many disciplines in the Faculty of Humanities, there is a prohibition, or restriction, on the use of the personal pronoun “I” and “we” except as organisers of information. Personal experience is seldom regarded as a source of authority. I discuss the authorial presence (Clark and Ivanic 1997) in writing more fully in Chapter Two.

As a full-time student at UCT in 1997, my theoretical interest in academic writing was explored in more detail in an Academic Literacies project undertaken by me entitled “ The Academic Writing Difficulties of ESL students”. The project was submitted to UCT in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Education in the Faculty of Education. A key finding in this project, is that the school learning situation of the participants can be taken as a chief contributing factor for academic writing difficulties. The research findings also indicate that one of the reasons EAL students find writing challenging is that they do not feel comfortable with expressing themselves in the first person in their writing.

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<sup>1</sup>English as Second Language (ESL) students: those students for whom English, the language of instruction, is a second language. All subjects of the present study are students whose first language (primary language) is not English with the exception of Carol, a third year student. She is an English first language speaker who was seen as “at risk” of failing to meet the demands in her first year of studies at an English-medium university.

Academic writing, in particular, poses a threat to the writer's identity in higher education, because the "self" present in academic discourse feels alien to them. By discourse, I am referring to Gee's (1990:150) definition. He uses discourses to include not only the ways of using language but also the beliefs, attitudes and values of the group.

As a starting point to the challenges most EAL students encounter, I considered the following issues prior to this study:

- a) What is the prior learning experience of EAL students?
- b) What are the social and academic writing challenges that need to be addressed in their transition?

### 1.2 Schooling experience

The background schooling experience is regarded as the main reason for EAL students being poorly equipped to deal with academic writing. The EAL students in this research are from <sup>2</sup>ex- DET (Department of Education and Training) and ex- HOR (House of Representatives) schools systems, where schooling was disrupted by strikes and boycotts. These are historically "disadvantaged" schools, which results in a wide gap between the demands of school literacy and university literacy practices. The term "disadvantaged" is used with caution as it can categorise EAL students as a homogenous group when in terms of language, ethnicity, gender among other categories they may be very diverse (Thesen, 1997). I choose to use the term "disadvantaged" as a reminder of the poor, mostly rural backgrounds EAL students come from. They come from backgrounds in which they do not have ready access to educational and technical resources. Clark (1993) in his research into the teaching and learning of science in DET schools notes that students have been exposed to transmission teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> Until 1996, there were nineteen separate education departments organised along racial lines. Schools located in township areas were designated for 'African' people. They were under-resourced schools governed by the Department of Education and Training (DET). The DET was known for its corruption and inefficiency (Kapp 2000:229).

Transmission teaching encourages rote learning that elicits superficial understanding rather than critical thinking. He says that transmission teaching was “a legitimate response to the highly prescriptive and restrictive syllabi which were typical of education in South Africa during the apartheid years” (Clark 1993: 31). As a result these students lack skills in acquiring academic discourse to a greater extent than is usual at almost any university. The school experience is a legitimate concern but we have to take account of what students bring with them at tertiary level to make the transition from high school to academic discourse practices easier, so that we do not simply apply deficit concepts to further disadvantage students.

### 1.3 Problems in transition

The transition from high school to university is particularly important as it is often accompanied by new identities, as students become academic writers using English as a medium for communicating their ideas. As Ballard and Clanchy (1988) have pointed out, this is a new experience for *all* students, not just EAL students. The transition also means entering an unfamiliar learning context that requires learning the academic conventions of writing an academic essay. The focus of this research is to illuminate the academic writing challenges faced by first year EAL students, in their transition from high school to university. The transition from school to university requires them as students in the Faculty of Humanities to adapt to a new academic learning context that involves mastery of academic discourse. The register that academic writers are expected to acquire is referred to as ‘academic discourse’. It is at tertiary level that these students are apprenticed into a unique form of discourse in their thinking, writing and talking.

I focus on academic writing because first year EAL students, in particular, often perceive writing to be their main stumbling block. My reason for choosing first year EAL students in the Faculty of Humanities, is based on the above, which is an indication of the fact that EAL students seem to experience the most difficulty in learning the conventions of writing an academic essay. Another influential study for my research is Vikki Igglesden’s (1999) report, which identifies issues for further research in the Academic Development Programme at the University of Cape Town. Igglesden’s research report, says that by the middle of their second semester, first year students seem to display feelings of relative accommodation to university practices and the memory of their initial first semester experience is by this time vague. In

regard to student experience of transition, the first year of studies and first semester in particular is when they encounter more challenges with adjusting to academic writing as well as challenges with social adjustment to a new and often confusing and alienating environment. An important aspect of this study is to explore the students' transition period from high school to university. The first semester is thus important as it is closer to first year students' school experience and the personal impact of their involvement at university has not yet been overlaid by the familiarity that would develop in students who had been at the university for longer (Igglesden 1999:45).

I have chosen to involve third year students in this research. Third year students provide insight into how over a period of time EAL students' writer identities are affected by the institutional context. Third year students are used to draw a comparison between first and third year students' perceptions of their transition. Third year students also provide a contrasting response as they represent the wider student population, as those who are likely to be more critical of conventions as they are more familiar with the conventions of the university discourse(s) and have had more time to develop as critical thinkers.

In this study, literacy is seen as a set of discourse practices and these practices are bound up with the values and beliefs of particular groups (Baynham, 1995, Gee, 1990, Heath, 1983, Prinsloo & Breier, 1996, Street 1984 and 1993). Such discourses are therefore integrally linked with the identity of the people who practice them. The discourse practices associated with tertiary institution to a large extent represents 'Western' culture, which practises the values and beliefs system of mainstream institutions of 'Western' society. A change of discourse creates a gap between the world of schooling and the world of university for EAL students. The EAL students in this study often have their own literacy experiences or school discourses that are very different from the secondary discourse that they encounter at university. It is this gap that I explore using literacy narratives as a "bridge" to explain what happens in the transition, in the students' own words, between school and university.

#### 1.4 What are literacy narratives?

In the field of writing and composition the autobiography is referred to as a literacy narrative. In Chapter Two I refer to autobiographical writings in the United States to discuss the 'literacy myth', which promotes the idea that literacy has powerful effects, in narrative writing. A literacy narrative, is a first person account of an individual's journey or process of "becoming literate". It usually foregrounds, issues of language acquisition whether spoken or written, and almost always focus on the transition from home to school or from school to university. At the most basic level the plot of a literacy story tells what happens when we acquire language, either spoken or written. Literacy narratives could thus be used as a research methodology, which could provide a new perspective to research in South African academic literacies as other more traditional studies have focussed more on students' formal writing, and interviews.

#### 1.5 Research Setting

I use UCT as a research setting because the Academic Development Programme has over the last seventeen years been responsible for a number of programs to facilitate the transition of students from school to university academic writing practices. Most of the researchers in the academic literacy field in the Academic Development Programme (ADP) at UCT draw on the ideas on the new notions of literacy by scholars of the 'New Literacy Studies' (Gee, 1990; Heath, 1983; Prinsloo&Breier, 1996; Street, 1984 and1993). In Chapter Two I elaborate more on the ideas of what has come to be known as the 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS).

Thesen (1997), among others in ADP, reflect on the ever-growing challenge of the Language Development Group (LDG) at UCT to accommodate the changes and more so the diversity of students. I am interested in whether literacy narratives, used as a methodology, could be used as a tool to probe deeper, and give insight into the academic writing challenges of first year EAL students. The main aim of this research is thus to assess the potential of using literacy narratives to shed light on the transition from school to university.

In light of the above the main research question I am addressing in this study is:

- **What can the literacy narrative accounts of EAL students' transition from high school to university tell us about their academic writing practices?**

Sub-questions:

- What differences are evident between first and third year accounts of their school to university literacy practices?
- What can the literacy narratives of first and third year students' tell of the extent to which students accommodate to, or resist, academic writing practices?

### **Conclusion**

The EAL student writers I am researching are attempting to establish their academic writer identities within the academic discourse community of the University of Cape Town (UCT). Using the New Literacy Studies approach to literacy as a theoretical framework, I intend to explore the issues arising in the students' own writing using their literacy narratives, with the aim of producing understandings which will be beneficial to both them and to others involved in academic writing. In order to define academic writing one has to explore what this means for EAL students at UCT. The literacy narrative may provide a platform from which students' can articulate their experience of transition from school to university.

## **Chapter Two- Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

It is important to note that this study, as noted earlier, is informed by the findings of a recent study carried out by a language research student Vikki Igglesden (1999) for the Academic Development Program (ADP) at the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Her study identified issues for further research in student transition from school to university. A recommendation from this study that I intend to explore is the usefulness of using prompts extracted from instances of their written work. In my study, the written work is literacy narratives. Literacy narratives, because they are accounts of individuals' understandings of and experiences with literacy, seem a particularly rich site for a study of this nature. Another recommendation I explore is the use of third year students to get their perceptions of their transition in order to show how senior students' perceptions differ from those of first year students, and how this could possibly change over a period of time. The primary aim of her study is to provide an in-depth study of students' experiences of the transition from school to university academic literacy practices. The study was requested by the ADP to evaluate what may be done to improve the service provided to students to facilitate their access to the university literacy practices at UCT. I propose that the literacy narrative may be a useful tool for understanding and facilitating access for the above, in that it may provide evidence of the ways that EAL students have internalised the discourses around the term academic literacy that are already in circulation within institutions.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.1) The 'New Literacy Studies' approach**

The theoretical framework of my study is centred on a 'New Literacy Studies' (NLS) approach to social literacy. One of the key theorists of this approach namely James Gee (1990) argues that :

...language is always spoken (and written) out of a particular social identity (or social role), an identity that is a composite of word, actions and (implied) beliefs, values and attitudes (1990:140).

Language is therefore not neutral. It is tied to identity and can only be understood in relation to social meaning. Gee also states:

Discourses, ways of saying, doing, being, and believing, are like literacy practices inherently ideological; resistant to internal criticism and self-scrutiny and are intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structure in society (1990:145).

Gee (1990) implies that EAL students have difficulty in acquiring academic discourses because discourses have a different 'culture' (ways of thinking and seeing) embedded in its set of literacy (speaking, reading and writing). I explore what Gee (1990) says, that one has to be socialised into a particular practice to learn to read types of text in a particular way. EAL students, in particular, need to engage in these academic literacy practices as they are outsiders to the literacies they have to control in order to be successful academic writers.

It is only once the discourse is acquired that EAL students get insider status to the group presuming that students want insider status. In the case of this research, the group referred to is the academic discourse community of the University of Cape Town.

My emphasis is on academic writing as a social practice. This is based on the fact that all forms of writing have social relations built into them. As noted earlier, one has to be socialised into a practice to learn to read texts in a particular way. One can only "belong" when one has been socialised into practices, which initiate them into a particular group.

Gee (1990) uses Discourse with a capital D. This he states is a kind of "identity-kit, which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions" (1990: 142). He says that is a complete package, which has its own way of thinking-talking-feeling-believing that indicates group identity. According to Gee (1990) those who have not fully mastered the discourse are regarded as non-members of the group that control the discourse. These outsiders who desire to be insiders are relegated to a subordinate pretender position, where they are 'colonised' by

the discourse or “appropriated” as Bartholomae (1985) puts it. ‘Colonised’ students control the discourse just enough to keep signalling that others in the discourse are their ‘betters’ and to “become complicit with their own subordination” (Gee1990: 155). One of the primary purposes of this research study is to explore EAL students own perceptions using literacy narratives to tell of their experiences of the challenges of mixed desire for, and resistance to, insider status and to what extent they are being ‘colonised’, as Gee (1990) puts it.

I believe that in relation to writing and identity, that EAL students as writers are, by appropriating the conventions, willingly or unintentionally becoming party to those interests, values, beliefs, and practices.

The focus of Bartholomae’s (1985) writing, as referred to earlier, points us in the direction that a writer, when writing with the discourses of a community, takes on the identity of a member of that community. He writes:

To speak with authority [student writers] have to speak not only in another’s voice but through another’s code; and they not only have to do this; they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this; they have to do it before they know what they are doing (Bartholomae 1985: 156).

The above extract indicates how academic literacies understood as codes or discourses have the power to act as gatekeepers, to maintain the status quo at academic institutions by allowing in only those who have acquired or learnt the discourse appropriately.

Where discourses are concerned, developing and extending literacies is not simply a matter of learning or acquisition. The extent to which a language user may possess secondary discourses that relate to ways of saying, doing and believing is dependent on the important distinction between acquisition and learning. I quote:

Acquisition is good for performance, and learning is good for meta-knowledge. Acquisition and learning are differential sources of power: acquirers usually beat learners at performance, learners usually beat acquirers at talking about it (Gee 1990:146).

He supports the idea that discourses are mastered through acquisition, not through learning. It can therefore be concluded as Gee (1990) states that:

Discourses are mastered by enculturation into social practices through scaffolding and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse...[and thus] If you have no access to the social practice, you don't get in the Discourse... [Furthermore], learning can facilitate nothing unless the acquisition process has already begun (Gee1990: 147).

He indicates that discourses are 'acquired' by interacting in a supportive environment with those who have already mastered the discourse. This implies that if we acquire discourses we will be better at performing them rather than learning them. Both are equally important in academic writing as 'learning' arguably allows students to be more critical and may give insight into the differences in discourses and why those differences exist. For EAL students who are unfamiliar with the conventions of academic writing, the need to learn these conventions presents a greater challenge.

A different and less deterministic view of developing literacies comes from Kress (1989) who argues that it is a creative reproduction of socially available practices and discourses for new purposes that arise in student lives. He argues that each individual creates these resources anew for themselves from the ones they have been exposed to, rather than simply acquiring them. The transition of first year EAL students to university is marked by new experiences in academic writing, which requires students to build and adapt their existing literacy practices, and to engage in new ones.

Here I need to make a distinction between primary and secondary discourses to further explore the school to university transition.

Gee (1990) provides a useful analysis of primary and secondary discourses that can be used to explain why some students experience difficulties in their transition from school to university. The primary discourse comes with enculturation; it is acquired as part of our birthright. Outside of the family environment are secondary discourses. These discourses are associated with institutions such as schools, church, and the workplace. The implication for students from backgrounds that do not

relate to the ideologies of the dominant discourse of the educational institution is that they will encounter difficulties in adapting to secondary discourses that are not only alien to their own home and community-based discourses but also in conflict with their values and beliefs. These students as a result are excluded from access to the social goods embedded within the mastery of the mainstream discourse(s) of the educational institution.

Brice Heath (1983) describes the uses of literacy at the level of social groups and communities in ways that are useful for understanding transition. Her study *Ways with Words* is an early classic in the tradition of the 'New Literacy Studies', and concentrates on how children in three communities in the United States acquire language and literacy, and are socialised into the value system and ways of their communities. The three communities are Roadville, a white working-class community centred on a mill; Trackton, a black working-class community also linked to mill life and working the land; and the Townspeople, a community of mainstream middle-class blacks and whites that are urban based. She analyses the literacy events of each of these communities. She gives a detailed description of what happens to the children as they learn to use language and form their values, which determines what needs to be done in order for them to become acceptable members of their own communities (1983:8). If there was continuity between patterns of socialisation and language learning in the students' culture and those practised at educational institutions, their chances of success are greater. Non-mainstreamers are placed at a disadvantage from the outset. Heath's study also illustrates how school-based literacy practices can be acquired by apprenticing the non-mainstreamers to a school-based literate person who will break down essay-text literacy into parts that the student will need to practice often (1983:363). The student has to be willing to engage in unfamiliar practices which are sometimes in conflict with his or her own values or self-identity.

The above discussion indicates that schooling, as a social practice, is not a neutral arena. Its purpose is to shape people's values and knowledge, and in turn necessitates a change in identity. This idea is further endorsed in Gee (1986) when he cites the work of Scollon and Scollon (1981) among the Athabaskan Indians of Canada and Alaska. In taking on the dominance of the essay-text literacy of the dominant culture, Athabaskans find themselves faced with an identity crisis. This situation, in which Athabaskans find themselves, is similar to that of many non-mainstream cultures in different countries. Mainstreamers are at an advantage because they are socialised in their formative years into valued secondary discourse practices, and their associated world-view is

similar to those of educational institutions that they will attend. This means that non-mainstream students have to change their cultural identities in order to become socialised into “Western” secondary discourse. Their chances of success depends on their willingness to adopt such practices and make any necessary identity shifts in acquiring academic literacies.

Many non-mainstream students aspire to the success they see in society around them, but they may experience difficulty taking on the cloak of the mainstream discourse practices and their world-view. They may even feel reluctant to do so, finding it a threat to their own values system and sense of identity (Kapp 2000). The form of literacy evident in ‘Western’ society is, according to Gee (1986) one which is neither natural nor universal. It is known as essay-text or essayist literacy, and involves a number of skills in using language in expository talk or text in contrived situations. Skills such as the ability to analyse, summarise, condense and manipulate text in new contexts are valued and developed.

The ‘New Literacy Studies’ approach to literacy by theorists such as Gee, (1990), Street, (1984 and 1993), Kress, (1989), Prinsloo & Breier, (1996), Heath, (1983), Baynham, (1995), foreground the ideological dimension of literacy. These theorists see literacy as necessarily plural, and argue that different social or cultural groups practice different types of literacy, and that literacy has different social and mental effects in different social and cultural contexts. It is a social practice that varies from one context to another. Street (1984) states that all literacy practices and written texts are ideological as they are shaped by the wider socio-cultural environment in which they occur. On the basis of this view, he challenges the traditional or “autonomous” view of literacy. He argues that “autonomous” literacy does not exist (1984, 1993). Institutions, however, tend to legitimise the “autonomous” view of literacy as a separate set of neutral competencies, autonomous of social context (Gee 1990). The “autonomous” view of literacy also makes the assumption that students entering universities are equipped with “ways of knowing” (Taylor 1988). Ballard and Clanchy (1988) criticise failing literacy standards at universities by blaming this on academics not being able to recognise the “unsteady transition between cultures” (1988:13), as students primary discourses are remote from their secondary (university) discourses. This view is what leads me to believe that we have to see what is obscured by the autonomous view of literacy by considering the culture of schooling in relation to academic literacy, and the social processes that go with it.

The students' previous learning experience cannot be ignored in the learning process, as they have to adopt new ways of thinking and writing. In the next section I discuss where the students come from by looking at language as an issue that requires consideration in academic discourse acquisition. This discussion provides vital clues as to why students' struggle at university.

## 2.2) The power of English in education

The Department of Education's Language in Education official policy (Department of Education, 1997a) promotes teaching through the home (primary language) language and another language, which is teaching through the medium of two languages (additive bilingualism). The Education policy, despite its strong promotion of primary language instruction, makes provision for parental choice of medium of instruction in certain situations. The favoured choice tends to be English as the medium of instruction throughout primary schooling. English is regarded as an important medium of instruction because of its hegemonic status as the language of power and status in South Africa and the world (Kapp, 2000). English as a language plays an important role in the lives of EAL students, and the students engagement in it is related to issues of power which influences the perception they have of themselves as writers.

Despite the fact that EAL students often blame failure in examinations on a lack of proficiency in English, they still place great value on English as a medium of instruction at school. As a result most EAL students, who received English as a medium of instruction, feel disempowered at university when they cannot follow the discourse of the discipline in lectures or participate in discussions. But the problem is more complex than EAL students' lack of proficiency in the English language. What we often fail to take into account is that in South Africa many EAL learners did not acquire the mainstream or schooled literacy (Heath, 1983) which would enable them to acquire academic literacies easily. Academic writing tends to embrace middle-class values, whereas most of the EAL students come from poor or working-class homes. Thus students tend to find both the values and attitudes, and the abstract academic discourse, alien to their experience of home and schooling. The students often have primary and secondary discourses that are very different from the secondary discourses they encounter at university. It is crucial to the EAL students' success at university that we recognise the rich diversity of backgrounds in terms of the languages they speak and the multiple literacies they bring with them (Bartholomae 1985, Thesen 1997, Gee 1990)

### 2.3 'Multiple academic literacies'

Students are often not acclimatised to academic ways of thinking and have difficulty in expressing themselves. Language plays an important role in the acclimatisation process but the acquisition of academic literacy or discourse presents a greater challenge to the problem.

Ballard and Clanchy (1988) say:

We have argued for a conception of literacy which includes but goes beyond surface correctness to embrace the whole context of culture in which language is being used. Becoming literate means becoming acculturated: learning to read and write the culture (1988: 19).

Academic literacy is tied to abstract ways of thinking of each discipline. As a result, students are only able to articulate the discourse of a discipline once they have a conceptual grip of the theoretical tools of the discipline, the material being discussed, and a sense of how language is used to express ideas in that discipline (Taylor, *et al*, 1989). A consequence of the above is that EAL students will face a greater challenge in the acquisition of academic literacy because they must firstly, understand, and then be able to use, the discourse of academia and more specifically the discourse of each discipline in which they study. In addition to this they need to develop a sense of the requirements of their audience and of their identity as writers. The acquisition of a range of disciplinary discourses implies that students unfamiliar with the conventions of academic literacies are at a disadvantage. This is complicated even more by the language difference and poor schooling.

It has been noted that most EAL students are motivated to be proficient in English as a language because of its social currency, its ability to provide access to further education, power and economic resources (Kapp, 2000). The students associate a high level of English proficiency with academic success and eventually access to valued social goods. This is what leads me to believe that these perceptions of the English language linked to power and status may provide vital clues to evidence of the "literacy myth".

#### 2.4 The 'Literacy Myth'

An important part of the 'New Literacy Studies' observations on the ideological nature of literacy is that literacy, in popular perception, is believed to have powerful effects. It is perceived to bring about political democracy, greater social equity, economic development, wealth and productivity, and political stability. It is believed to lead to people who are innovative, achievement orientated, productive, politically aware, less likely to commit crime and more likely to take the rights and duties of citizenship more seriously (Gee 1986, Prinsloo & Breier 1996). The above view promotes the idea of literacy as a liberator but it can also be used as a weapon.

Literacy used as a weapon can coerce people into a particular way of thinking. This use of literacy as a weapon comes through in Graff (1987) as he examines the history of literacy. His study contains several accounts of how literacy has been used as a tool to coerce people in oral societies into various moulds. He also shows how literacy is used to solidify social hierarchy. The elites are empowered and non-elites take on the values and beliefs of the elites. According to Graff, the process of schooling is used to ensure assimilation of non-elites, and power over them. He notes that many conservatives feared the acquisition of education by the masses, thinking that they would be unfitted for gruelling manual labour, unsettled in their stations and lacking respect for their betters. On the other hand the elites argue that this is not the case and that literacy can make the lower classes take on the values and practices of the middle classes. He, however, attributes the willingness of the lower classes to take on these values and norms not so much to literacy per se, but rather to their socialisation into school-based literacy, associated with the worldview of the middle classes.

The literacy-orality debate addresses many critical issues such as power, control, and critical awareness. Literacy as a technical skill, however, is not powerful in itself. The social context in which it is practised gives it significance.

Ong (1982) looks at literacy as a skill or capability as opposed to orality. He describes the features of an oral culture, also citing the techniques of memorising, planning and philosophising. "You have to think memorable thoughts" (Ong 1982:34). Repetitions, proverbs and metaphor assist a person to remember. They form the substance of thought, and the more advanced the oral culture, the more it is characterised by a set of expressions skilfully

used. Writing, however, captures thought, thus enabling the mind, which no longer has to hold that thought, to speculate on new things.

Ong (1982) says that oral cultures appear to literates as being “agonistic in their verbal performance and lifestyle” (1982:43). While oral cultures are known to produce powerful verbal performances, Ong believes that human consciousness cannot achieve its full potential without writing. Literacy, he says, is necessary for the development of science, history and philosophy, and for the understanding of literature, art and language. Ong’s narrative, forms its own grand narrative of literacy that maintains oppressive cultural hierarchies by creating a “great divide” that exists between the culture of school (secondary discourses) and the culture of home (primary discourses). In order to become literate in this culture, an individual must cross the seemingly “great divide” that exists between these two cultures.

The beliefs of Paulo Freire (1996) also promote the “great divide” narrative. He views literacy as an emancipatory tool or vehicle. Freire believed that literacy should empower people and would only do so if it resulted in their becoming active questioners of the world around them. The content and methodologies of Freirean approaches focussed on challenging learners to think critically about everything that was happening in the world around them. Literacy should liberate their thinking and thereby empower them to bring about the desired changes in their society.

The notion that literacy is empowering, that it necessarily leads to economic development, cultural progress, and individual improvement is often referred to by both literacy theorists and narrative writers as the “literacy myth”, because it consistently pervades the wider culture. Evidence of the “literacy myth” can still be seen in the tradition of literacy narratives.

## 2.5 Traditions of literacy narratives

<sup>3</sup>Kimberly Costino (2000) presented a paper that has been influential for my study namely ‘The Grand Little Literacy Narrative in the Field of Composition’. I make reference to this paper in my analysis of selected autobiographical writings to discuss evidence of the “literacy myth” in narrative.

Beth Daniell (1999) in *Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture* identifies, and traces the various narratives of literacy that have emerged in the narrative field fifty-year history. She introduces two traditions of literacy namely the ‘grand’ narrative and the ‘little’ narrative. The central point of her argument is that scholars in the field of narratives that have been written by composition scholars or cited in composition anthologies, are no longer reinforcing ‘grand’ narratives of literacy such as Ong’s “orality to literacy” narrative or Freire’s “literacy as liberation” narrative. An example of a “great divide” narrative, is Ong’s (1982) “orality to literacy” narrative where literacy has been argued to be “the basis of a great divide between cultures” namely oral (those who do not use writing) and literate (those who use writing) cultures (Gee 1990:49). These being narratives that Daniell (1999) and others, particularly in the ‘New Literacy Studies’, have described as “great divide” narratives and are now engaged in the work of producing “little narratives” of literacy that deconstruct and replace these ‘grand’ narratives. The “little narratives” offer insights about literacy practices and see literacy as “multiple, contextual, and ideological” (Daniell 1999:403). They also show that some people use literacy to make their lives more meaningful, regardless of their socio-economic and political situations and also show evidence of the literacy myth.

## 2.6 “Literacy myth” in narrative

Autobiographical writing, as a form of narrative writing, is popularised in the United States of America (USA). It is regarded as a way of illustrating or discovering truths and ‘telling’ about the social world.

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<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Costino gave a talk on “The Grand Little Literacy Narrative in the Field of Composition” that I attended in the Academic Development Programme unit at UCT. Costino, a visiting lecturer, was involved in the Language Development Group at UCT. The talk is based on research studies for her Ph.D. She focuses mainly on studies in the USA but makes an enormous contribution to my study, which highlights important issues in the literacy narrative debate, a concept which is relatively new to the South African context of research.

The concept of narrative writing in the USA is viewed as a mode of learning, with the belief that one's writing skills advances learning. In the South African context, writing at university is more for evaluative purposes. It is used as a medium in which writers are required to display knowledge, which is usually tied to previous learning (Leibowitz and Mohamed 2000). The idea that writing supports learning is to see the context of writing as a process; and that it is sometimes an unfamiliar practice to most students who often have difficulty in accessing the discourse of the university. It is widely agreed that is not an easy process to induct students in general into academic discourse as implied by Gee (1990), since discourse is more easily acquired than learnt. I will now use examples of autobiographical writing, drawing on Costino (2000), to look for evidence of how traditional views of literacy promote the "literacy myth".

Examples of autobiographical writings are the literacy narratives of Richard Rodriguez (1982), Linda Brodkey (1996), bell hooks (1996), amongst others. Richard Rodriguez's (1982) narrative, *The Hunger for Memory*, is a good example of the popular perceptions of the "literacy myth" in society. His narrative is the story of how he, a descendant of Mexican immigrants, as a boy who first entered the classroom barely able to speak English, completed his education twenty years later in the reading room of a British museum. He presents literacy as a set of skills or tools (Freire 1996) that once mastered inevitably leads to social and economic power and improvement. It suggests that literacy be linked to identity only in so far as it can influence, even transform, a person's identity. Rodriguez does, however, pose a slight challenge to the traditional view of literacy early in his autobiography, where he writes:

To admit the change in my life I must speak of years as a student of losses, of gains. In singing the praise of my lower-class past, I remind myself of my separation from that past, bring memory to silence. I turn to consider the boy I once was in order, finally, to describe the man I am now. I remember what was so grievously lost to define what was necessarily gained. (1982:5-6).

This passage highlights how Rodriguez's narrative is more closely aligned with traditional notions of literacy that promote the "literacy myth". According to Costino (2000), prior to Rodriguez's work few people spoke of literacy in terms of losses and gains. The dominant view of literacy suggested that literacy was always desirable and good, an unqualified gain with no losses

attached. Rodriguez's focus on these losses challenges that assumption. However, by continually casting the process of "becoming literate" and the losses and gains associated with it in terms of the separate worlds of home and school, Rodriguez undermines the force of his challenge.

Rodriguez elaborates on this separation when he writes:

The scholarship boy must move between environments, his home and the classroom, which are at cultural extremes, opposed. With his family, the boy has the intense pleasure of intimacy, the family's consolation in feeling public alienation. ... Then, at school, the instruction bids him to trust lonely reason primarily. Immediate needs set the pace of his parents' lives. Not for the working class child alone is adjustment to the classroom difficult. (1982:47)

In the above he describes the boundaries between home and school as strict and inflexible, and the types of discourses and language practices in each world are static and separate. He highlights the way he has internalised the privileged status of the middle class and its accompanying values by presenting this separation as natural, inevitable and unproblematic, and insisting that being deemed "literate" necessarily requires that an individual leave home and assimilate to school culture. He suggests that the traditional definition of literacy and the class status and values associated with it are ultimately more valuable than other forms of literacy and the cultures out of which they emerge. The dominant view of literacy suggests that literacy is always desirable and good, with no losses attached to it. By continually casting the process of 'becoming literate' and the losses and gains associated with it in terms of the separate worlds of home and school, Rodriguez undermines the force of his challenge.

Writers such as Linda Brodkey (1996), bell hooks (1996) and Min-Zhan Lu (1987) critically examine Rodriguez's (1982) narrative and its assumptions and implications by offering their own images and constructions of the process, and what it was like for them to "become literate". These writers focus more on the value and differences in literacy rather than the losses in the way that Rodriguez's narrative does.

As an example to explore the above discussion, I will refer to Linda Brodkey's (1996) *Writing on the Bias*. I focus on her narrative as it shows how literacy practices change from context to context to foreground the ideological dimension of literacy. In her journey toward literacy she moves between school and home. The students in this study, like Brodkey, are also involved in a journey. They move between school and university. They have to learn to negotiate the boundaries of their EAL school discourses against the demands of academic discourse practices.

Brodkey begins her narrative by talking about writing as a girl's passport from her own working class home into the houses, worlds, and lives of the middle class. She then moves on to explain her experiences in and with these two different worlds. Brodkey employs several metaphors to illustrate her journey toward literacy. The metaphorical language she uses in her writing encourages her to become more critical about her journey toward literacy. We see this in the passage where she writes:

I consider [toe tapping] still a quintessential spectacle of white lower-middle-class female sensuality. ... By contrast, the book I read illustrated ballet as a set of discrete skills to be learned and then routinely deployed in seemingly endless and sexless re-enactments of tableaux bodies transfixed in rather than moving through space. (1996:530-1)

Brodkey associates toe tapping with its uncontrolled, noisy vigour with the lower middle class; she sometimes refers to it as working class, the world of home. Ballet, on the other hand, with its strict set of rules signifies the world of school. In this particular description, Brodkey seems to be privileging her home culture. Her literacy narrative shows that this privileging is, however, not consistent throughout her narrative or throughout her life. At times she privileges home, at other times school. The only thing that is consistent throughout her narrative is the separation between home and school. Throughout her text, she contrasts the stories of home to the literature of school, the children's library to the adult library, the kitchen at home to the classroom at school, her new friends and their houses to the old. Like Rodriguez (1982), she also speaks of a longing for the middle class and of the losses and separations associated with it.

Unlike Rodriguez (1982), however, Brodkey (1996) does not accept this sort of assimilation and the loss associated with it as necessary or inevitable. She does not weigh what she has gained as necessarily superior to what she has the potential to lose. Instead, Brodkey values the literacy practices which is different ways of thinking, being, speaking, and acting that are evident in both kinds of worlds. She does not suggest that becoming literate is the same as becoming assimilated. Throughout her narrative, she continually points out ways that she has blended her two worlds and resisted assimilation. Brodkey continually sees herself as moving between two worlds; her division is not based on literate and illiterate as Rodriguez's (1982) narrative often suggests. Instead, Brodkey consistently highlights the kinds of values and literacy that she learned at home.

bell hooks (1996) in *Keeping Close to Home*, constructs a similar picture. She uses the metaphor of a bus in order to explain, and frame literacy in terms of moving between home and school and academia. The world of home is represented as materially underprivileged and school and academia as materially privileged. This bus represents the link that can be maintained between these two worlds. More importantly, it suggests the inevitability of the distance between these two cultures. A bus can, metaphorically speaking, transport hooks between these worlds but it can never really connect the worlds. We can see that, like Brodkey (1996), the cultures out of which her identity emerge and the literate practices associated with each culture remain static and separate. Costino (2000) argues that Brodkey (1996) and bell hooks (1996), as writers, use experience as evidence for the fact of difference, rather than as a way of exploring how difference is established and how it operates.

The above mentioned autobiographies construct images of what it is like for different people who hold different subject positions to "become literate" by drawing on their personal experiences as evidence for the fact of difference. Literacy narratives can be used to bridge the gap in our understanding of these differences between the world of schooling and university. Literacy stories are places where writers explore what Victor Turner (1980), in *Soliday* (1994), calls 'liminal crossings' between worlds. Personal narratives can be regarded as clues to people's identities as they provide access to personality and identity (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998). According to *Soliday* (1994) students' stories of everyday life can enhance their personal success as writers in the university. In focusing upon those moments when the self is on the threshold of possible

intellectual, social and emotional development, literacy narratives then become “sites of self – translation” where writers can articulate the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds.

The use of literacy narratives in this study may serve as a bridge to explain what happens in the transition, in the student’s own words, between school and university. Literacy narratives could provide crucial insights into our understanding, as educators, of what it means to be literate and what the consequences and implications of those understandings are.

When one looks at the limited academic writing discourses that EAL students bring with them to higher academic learning institutions, then we can identify the possible difficulties that EAL students have to deal with at university. These difficulties are in part a consequence of the way institutions perceive literacy and also the realities about South African schooling and the language issue.

### **Conclusion**

Transition to university presents a challenge amongst EAL students, who have to grapple with adjusting to the predominantly English environment and acquiring the new forms of writing which are characteristic of the university. While there is a growing concern among language practitioners at universities of the demands that the new environment has on EAL students in particular, there is still a need to research how previous experience affects learning at tertiary level. This research will attempt to illuminate the challenges of EAL students’ transitions by focusing on how EAL students’ perceptions of previous experience namely schooling affects learning at tertiary level.

Interviews conducted on first year students’ in Iglesden’s (1999) research project, reveal diverse challenges among the so-called disadvantaged groups with regard to transition from high school to university. Literacy narratives, because they are accounts of individual understandings of and experiences with literacy, seem an appropriate research method for a study of this nature. Because narratives, by definition, are always an act of construction and interpretation, literacy narratives would seem to serve as useful and important evidence of the ways that EAL students have internalised the discourses around the term academic literacy that are already in circulation within institutions.

## Chapter Three - Methodology

### Introduction

The previous two chapters have provided a context for the research, and some of the relevant theory, particularly in the tradition of the 'New Literacy Studies', that underpins the study. This chapter describes the methodology used in the study and gives an account of the research process.

In order to explore the challenges that EAL students encounter in acquiring academic discourses, it was necessary to find a research design within the broad parameters of educational research, which would allow for students to express the identities with which they feel comfortable, and to put students in charge of what they want to say in the research. The use of the literacy narrative in narrative research is potentially an effective tool for allowing students to describe their literacy experience, particularly that of high school to university, and to examine how they construct these experiences.

The most appropriate method, one in which students were able to articulate their experiences, seemed to be the writing of a literacy narrative followed by a qualitative research interview in a semi-structured interview situation. These methods used in narrative research, which will be defined later in this chapter, seemed most likely to allow students to produce a more detailed account of their experiences and perceptions for analysis.

### 3.1 Methodology and Methods

**Methodology** can be viewed as the epistemic dimension put to work in research. The existence of a variety of research methods, paradigmatic preferences and differences in phenomena suggest that it is a mistake to assume that a single research methodology, appropriate for all situations, may be found. The broad methodology I choose to locate myself in is qualitative research with a narrative orientation.

The narrative approach when used appropriately may provide researchers with a key to discovering identity as a narrative construction. Regardless of debates of factual grounding, informative value, the personal narrative constructs and transmits both individual and cultural meaning. An important

consideration to make in these debates is the fact that people are responsible for making meaning of their lives and that they construct their identities and histories from building blocks attainable in their shared culture, above and beyond their individual experience (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998).

My choice of methodology and methods was influenced by a constructivist approach, which claims that individuals construct their self-image within an interaction, according to a particular interpersonal context. I believe that a narrative approach allows one to access not only individual identity and its systems of meaning but also the narrator's culture and social world. I choose to use student perceptions of their transition from school to university by drawing strongly on what students write in the form of a literacy narrative, and in addition, use the interview as a prompt for further discussion and to see if contradictions arise in what they have written.

**Methods** are research techniques or ways of gathering data. The examples are interviews, questionnaires, a story, a life-story provided in an interview or a literary work or in a different manner such as field notes of an anthropologist who writes up his or her observations as a narrative or in a personal letter.

Vulliamy (1990) summarizes the debate about the relationship between worldview, method and methodology, by outlining the way in which the terms 'qualitative' and 'quantitative' have been confusing. He writes:

The widespread debate as to the relative merits of quantitative vs qualitative approaches... has generally been confused by a failure to differentiate considerations of epistemology from techniques of data collection and analysis (1990:9).

Vulliamy (1990) uses the terms 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' as 'frames' for both the contrasting paradigms and the methods linked to them. The use of quantitative methods, it is often assumed, is based on a commitment to positivism thus making method synonymous with methodology. This distinction allows us to think about research choices along a continuum in terms of the relationship between epistemology and research techniques. Within a number of positions he outlines, Vulliamy favors a middle course, which suggests that there are no restrictions by paradigms (Thesen 1993:9).

Research methods should be always selected to best fit the research question. When researchers are investigating real-life problems, it may be advisable to approach those whose lives are relevant to the issue in an open manner, exploring their subjective, inner experience on the issue at hand. To do this, I use the interpretive approach. This approach regards human actions and institutions as “social constructs” and stresses that there is no one, absolute meaning, it is always multiple, depending on perspective, who is speaking at what time, and who is listening. Fundamental to my study, is the fact that there will be multiple viewpoints on what academic writing means to individuals in an academic context. This research approach can also be regarded as “inquiry-guided” which means there is a dynamic interplay between theory, method and findings in the course of the research (Mischler 1990).

The narrative approach I use promotes pluralism, relativism and subjectivity. Positivist research has the tendency to regard people and their actions as objects in the natural world subject to the laws of science. Narrative research, which requires the use of qualitative analysis, differs significantly from its positivistic counterparts in its underlying beliefs that there is neither a single, absolute truth in human reality nor one correct reading or interpretation of a text.

Narrative, as a research method, can be considered as a “real world measure” that is appropriate when “real-life problems” are investigated (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998). The narrative represents that starting point where we can gain insight into what influences and experiences have a bearing on the perceptions that EAL students have of themselves as writers of academic discourse.

### 3.1.1 Narrative research

The Webster’s (1996) dictionary defines a narrative as a “discourse, or an example of it, designed to represent a connected succession of happenings” (1996:1503) According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998), narrative research refers to any study that uses or analyses narrative materials.

Narrative inquiry may be used for life-story research, or as a pilot study in the process of formation of objective research tools, or in a combined strategy of using objective surveys for a larger sample and narrative methods for a smaller group to allow for a more in-depth understanding. The narrative approach can also be used to evaluate a real-life problem. Researchers have proposed specific tools for focusing on specific aspects of the narrative or for reading a narrative as a whole.

Mishler (1995) in Lieblich *et al.* (1998:6) provides a wider perspective on various aspects of narrative research. He proposes a useful typology for the classification of narrative studies according to their central research issues. His typology includes three categories on the narrative namely:

- a) Reference and temporal order that refers to the relationship between order of events in reality and their order of narration;
- b) Textual coherence and structure which deals with linguistic and narrative strategies for the construction of the story; and
- c) Narrative functions that relates to the wider contexts of the story in society and culture

The above typology presents a wider perspective on various aspects of narrative research and is useful for my study as not much has been written on the subject of narrative methodology as a primary concern, and on the classification of methods in narrative research.

The use of narratives in research can be seen as an addition to the existing inventory of the survey, the experiment, the observation and other traditional methods. The use of narrative methodology results in unique and rich data that is difficult to obtain from experiments, questionnaires or observations. Most narrative studies are conducted with smaller groups of individuals than the sample size employed in traditional research. This factor enhances the quality of the results, as the quantity of data gathered in narratives is usually large and possibly makes it less generalisable.

According to Bakhtin (1981) in (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998), working with narrative material requires dialogical listening to three voices: the voice of the narrator, as represented by the tape or text: the theoretical framework, which provides the tools and concepts for interpretation: and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision-making process of drawing conclusions from the material. In the process of such a study, the listener or reader of a narrative enters an interactive process with the narrative and becomes sensitive to the narrator's voice and perceptions. The notion of voice here is linked to the term 'subjectivity' which is contradictory, and flexible. Ellsworth (1989) supports this view by saying that voices regardless of who they belong to are always partial, and should be used as a starting point for working together, constructing and reshaping alliances. I am interested in EAL students' subjective perceptions of themselves as academic writers.

Narratives help in our understanding of how participants construct what they do according to which beliefs and values, which historical influences, as well as what kind of identity work they are currently engaged in. Like Baynham (2000), my interest is to use narrative as a means to construct and represent speaker perspectives, values and beliefs in discourse. Student writers need to be informed that writing is an extremely complex social act, and not see it as a personal weakness. The process of writing involves the task of making difficult decisions on how to present oneself, which discourse types and associated identities to accept, and which to reject. Literacy narratives can be used to assist students to develop a critical awareness of their life-stories, and the types of social constraints that may provide answers to the difficulties they have with acquiring academic discourse.

Two methodological issues are raised namely validity and ethics common to all research practice.

### 3.1.2 Validation

The term validation used by Mischler (1990) is more appropriate in this study than validity. Mischler (1990) proposes two different criteria for evaluating narrative research, namely trustworthiness and authenticity. Mischler argues:

Focusing on trustworthiness rather than truth displaces validation from its traditional location in a presumably objective, non-reactive, and neutral reality and moves it to the social world a world constructed in and through our discourse, and actions, through praxis (1990: 420).

Similar to Mischler's (1990) proposal, my study does not seek the truth-value of the literacy narratives but proposes that a process of consensual validation is important.

Compared with the quantitative measures of validity, the criteria used in this study are qualitative in nature as they consist of conclusions that cannot be expressed in scales or numerically (Lieblich *et al.* 1998: 173).

### 3.1.3 Ethics

The field of narrative research regards the researcher and who is being researched as partners who will influence each other. The power relationship is not as stark as in traditional research methods. The narrative text, namely literacy narrative, allows for a minimization of power as the student is in control of the information for analysis and feedback is shaped by the text namely literacy narrative. I established a relationship with the students on two levels namely through the narrative for analysis and the interview.

In the 'Research and Methods' course for Masters students, offered at UCT, we looked at issues of 'empowering' research. It was recommended that: interactive methods are used as much as possible, the subject's own agendas should be addressed; and that feedback and sharing of knowledge should form part of the process. I took this into account as a guideline for my research. I would have liked the students to play a greater role in feedback and sharing of knowledge but e-mail as a means of communication did not have the desired effect.

## 3.2 Methods and Analysis

The primary methods used were:

- 1) the literacy narrative
- 2) semi-structured interview and
- 3) a research journal.

### 3.2.1 The literacy narrative

The literacy narratives in Appendix A were hand-written by the students. The headings "Who am I?" "Where do I come from?" and "Where am I going?" were suggested by me as a topic guide for students' in their writing task. These headings were to provide me with background information on the students past, present and future perceptions of themselves as writers and of their transition from school to university. The questions admittedly did shape their accounts quite strongly to maintain my research focus.

I began my reading with a pencil in my hand ready to mark the narratives. I made a conscious effort to remove myself from my teacher identity and look through the lens of a researcher in my reading. After a second reading of all the first year students' literacy narratives I began to notice common

themes related to language. The common concerns formed the principal ideas for analysis. The themes were conceptualised in an attempt to focus the descriptions and responses of the research participants per research question into manageable divisions for analysis. I used the same method of analysis for third year students' literacy narratives.

I will now give a fuller description of the interview and journal methods used in my research.

### 3.2.2 The Qualitative Research Interview (QRI)

The QRI was used in conjunction with the literacy narrative as a research methodology.

The advantage of this dual method of obtaining information is that the interview is shaped by the students' writing the literacy narrative and not by the interviewer. This, in turn, shapes the direction of the research as a process. As a researcher my subjectivity is therefore limited.

According to Kvale (1983: 174) the QRI is described as "semi-structured". It is carried through an interview guide using certain themes. The interview is taped and transcribed word for word to retain the grammar and cultural expressions of the students. The typed version from the tape constitutes the material for subsequent interpretation of meaning.

The purpose of the QRI according to Kvale is "to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee" (1983: 174). The term "life-world" is used to describe not only the living conditions and experiences of a person, but also their values and social framework. The difficulties researchers express over constructive validity are circumvented in the QRI, since the mode of understanding in the interview breaks with the methodological rules for research which follow from a positivist orientation to science in that it encourages variety and spectrum rather than uniformity. "The interview has often been denied a scientific status as it hardly fulfils such traditional requirements as reliability and validity" (Kvale 1983: 189).

The interview process used in this study follows the approach of the qualitative research interview. Mikkelsen (1995) describes this method simply as a semi-structured interview where "only some of the questions and topics are predetermined. Many questions are formulated during the interview, and irrelevant questions can be dropped" (1995: 102). In the interview there are questions on

background, experience, identity, perceptions, challenges, and questions address past, present and future. Kvale (1983) describes the QRI as “having a phenomenological (descriptive) and hermeneutical (interpretive) mode of understanding” (1983: 171). Hermeneutic research in human sciences is guided by an interest in obtaining a possible consensus of understanding between actors within the frame of reference of self-understanding mediated within a certain culture.

It is important to remember that the QRI was one of the research methods used in this study. The main method for analysis was the literacy narrative. The reason for not using the interview only as a research method is because firstly, its methodological status, in my opinion, is low although it is widely used. Secondly, it does not enhance my research questions in the way that the literacy narrative does.

### 3.2.3 Research Journal

I also used a research journal to keep a record of discussions with:

- a) fellow Masters students and lecturers who were also interested in academic discourse,
- b) meetings which were not recorded, and
- c) for personal reflections as the research progressed.

A more detailed description of the process of the research method appears below to contextualise each technique used in the study.

## 3.3 Analytical Approach

### 3.3.1 Categorical-content approach

Lieblich *et al.* (1998) argue that sharing one’s views and conclusions and making sense in the eyes of a community of researchers and interested, informed individuals is of the highest significance in narrative research (1999: 173). The model I use for the literacy narrative analysis is the categorical-content approach in narrative studies. According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998) this approach is a breaking of the text into smaller units of content and using them for descriptive purposes. This is usually termed “content analysis”. The categories are various themes that provide a means of classifying units of the text. The themes used in this study are the principal ideas expressed in the data. The themes are conceptualised in an attempt to focus the descriptions and responses of the

research participants per research question in to manageable divisions for analysis. An analysis of narrative structure meant taking a closer look at the entire text. For this I used the categorical–form mode of analysis which looks at discrete linguistic characteristics of defined units of the narrative. For example, how frequent they use personal pronouns in the text. The classification of the content-categorical approach refers to the manner of reading in a categorical fashion, which focuses on separate sections rather than the story as a whole (1999: 13-14).

### 3.3.2 Narrative structure approach

Labov (1972) says that narratives evaluate events rather than just report them. This means that narratives can be used to provide insight into understanding how writers construct their narratives and what they do according to which ideologies and values or identity work they are engaged in. These insider accounts such as literacy narratives allow the writer to reflect about their past and present literacy practices. Labov's (1972) analysis of the ways in which personal experience is transformed into narrative form is useful. The term "bridge" is used by Labov to show how the end of the narrative can bridge the gap between the moment of time at the end of the narrative and the present. It brings the reader back to the point at which they entered the narrative. My discussion of Labov (1972) has been relatively informal and introductory, but a linguistic focus on the data proved necessary for a section of my analysis on the identities that writers bring with them to the act of writing. My study focuses mainly on the content of narrative and how meaning is constructed. It does not, however, focus solely on formal aspects, such as structure of the story, the development of the plot, or various linguistic aspects of the narrative (see Labov and Waletzky, 1967). In paying attention to content only and not to form could result in the loss of important sources of information.

The primary purpose of the narrative structure approach to analysis is to show how the use of the literacy narrative as a narrative could serve as a "bridge", to explain what happens in the transition, in the students' own words, between school and university.

### 3.3.3 Writer Identity

Another aspect of inquiry was writer identity. Clark and Ivanic (1997) claim "acts of writing depend on the multiple identities that writers bring to them" (1997:158) and that acts of writing in themselves constitute an on-going struggle over possible identities. At the same time, writers

assume subject positions by discourse conventions they use. By conventions I mean abstract rules of behaviour or prototypical ways of doing things. The interests, values, beliefs and power relations associated with a particular set of discourse conventions act upon the identity of a writer operating within, or aspiring to write within, those conventions. My interest in this research is to identify students' perceptions of themselves as they adjust to and perform within the university environment.

Clark and Ivanic (1997) whose study is based on mature students, develop a useful model to discuss writer identity for student writers of academic essays. I applied an aspect of this model namely "the self as author" to the writing of student literacy narratives. For the purpose of this research it was important to discuss writer identity in relation to whether EAL students accommodate to or resist academic writing conventions. This meant that a focus on the "self as author" as an analytical framework for the literacy narrative was considered appropriate for the purposes of this research.

The writer's sense of authorial presence in the text, the "self as author" concerns the extent to which a writer feels they have legitimate authority to write that which they wish to write. That is, whether they have anything that is worth saying and whether they are in a position to communicate it. Where a writer does not feel authorised to establish their presence in their writing they may lose authority to other named authorities, to abstract impersonal sources or to the reader. Clark and Ivanic (1997) claim that student writings are prone to constrain writers to a subordinate role. Using this model I look at the "self as author" for an indication of whether students' resist or accommodate to academic writing conventions. This could also give an indication as to whether students are in, out or 'colonised' by discourse (Gee 1990).

### **3.4 Research Process**

In this section a fuller description of the research process is outlined below:

#### **3.4.1 Access**

The first year students in my study were accessed via the Language in the Humanities (LiTH) course in the Academic Development Program. According to a LiTH lecturer, all students in this course are identified by completing a language proficiency test; the student is deemed

“disadvantaged” by their previous language and education histories which means that they are likely to be ‘at risk’. I requested a meeting with three of the LiTH lecturers to get access to first year EAL students. In a ten-minute meeting, which I recorded and proved useful, I gave an outline of my research and asked for access to their students in one of their lectures. After an informative and lively discussion on my topic, we agreed that I would be allowed five minutes at the beginning or end of a lecture to inform students of my study. Giving my talk at the start of the lecture was more productive as the students proved to be more attentive listeners. The lecturers also advised me that the students should be offered an incentive to ensure participation. They felt that their students would be reluctant to become involved in my study, as they were “over-researched”. Their reluctance stems from students being asked to participate in a number of research projects on curriculum development in the ADP by researchers from inside and outside the university.

#### 3.4.2 Meeting with students

First year students:

My first meeting with the first year students who volunteered to participate was for coffee and a brief discussion of my research interests. The meeting was scheduled to last for an hour. In two coffee meetings I was able to meet with eight of the twelve interested students. In these meetings I explained to students what my concerns were in academic writing and the concept of literacy narratives. I was fortunate that most of the first year students had already been introduced to the concept of literacy narrative writing in the LiTH course. My discussion as a result was much shorter than intended with fewer references to individual writers in the field of literacy narrative writing. I also used the meeting to ask students for permission to refer to their birth names and not pseudonyms in my research. None of the students had reservations about this.

After the discussion I took down the names, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers of the students. Most of the students gave me cellphone numbers, which presented a research expense.

The benefits of the coffee meeting was that it allowed me to:

- a) establish an informal relationship with the students, outside of the academic environment which was more 'natural';
- b) explain the requirements of the research and outline my topic in more detail;
- c) determine payment for the writing of the literacy narrative and the interview;
- d) establish the venue and meeting times for the both the collection of the literacy narrative writing task and the interview.

Third Year Students:

The Students Records facility at UCT assisted me in locating third year students. I had hoped to contact them telephonically but they were living in student residences that did not provide ready access to telephones. The other alternative I used was door-to door knocking. As they were busy writing the half-yearly exam, I was unable to establish a fuller relationship with them. I mention the difficulty I had in making contact with locating them in the section: 3.5 Difficulties in the Research Process.

#### 3.4.3 The interviewees

I worked with a voluntary group of six first year students namely Nozuko, Bandisiwe, Luzelle, Tumi, Masopha and Mdumiseni and four third year students namely Maria, Carolyn, Phumza and Siyambonga. The first year students in this study are all registered at UCT in the Faculty of Humanities, and were registered for courses in academic literacy taught by the Language Development Group. The third year students in this study are also registered at The University of Cape Town in the Faculty of Humanities but they had already completed the Language in Humanities course within the Academic Development Program in the first year of their studies. Registration in this course is important for this study, as part of the course is to teach students "how to write" an academic essay and to assist students to adapt to the institution. Although the first year students transition was my primary concern, third year students were necessary to see what happens to EAL students over a period of time, as they become familiar with university discourses.

The next stage of data collection comprised the writing of a literacy narrative by first and third year students followed by the interview.

#### 3.4.4 Writing the literacy narrative

I collected the first year students' hand-written literacy narratives within the space of a week and used a similar time frame for analysis. Third year students' literacy narratives, also hand-written, were collected and analysed within one week due to time constraints which I elaborate on in the section: 3.5 Difficulties in the Research Process.

#### 3.4.5 The interview

The questions together with the interviews I refer to here appear in Appendix B. They appear as :

A-First Year Students

B –Third Year Students

Question 1-4 varied from student to student. Here I explored the individuals response to the questions, "Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?" as an academic writer in the literacy narrative. I had suggested these topics in the literacy narrative so that students write autobiographically and also to trace the movement of students through a discourse with a past, present and future.

The other questions focused on school writing practices to assess the influence of school writing practices on academic writing practices.

Why they had chosen UCT was asked to ascertain what student perceptions of the university are and whether they were coping in such an environment.

Academic writing conventions led to a discussion of the LiTH course as a writing assistance program.

Students were questioned about their perceptions of themselves as academic writers.

The closing question was on the literacy narrative to examine the usefulness of this form of writing for the writer. It gave the researcher a sense of the interviewee's thoughts as they wrote the literacy narrative.

#### 3.4.6 Interviews

A typed transcript was made of each interview conducted. In transcribing these interviews, I retained the grammar of the originals so as to give the reader a sense of the individual speaking and what they say. In my analysis I focus more on the how rather than what they say as I am looking at them as narratives. The literacy narratives were analysed first and the interview data was used to show contradictions and for elaboration on certain issues.

The interview data was collected in a qualitative research interview over a period of one month. The 30-45 minute interview focused mostly on the content of the literacy narrative writing of the students. There were common questions that I formulated as part of the interview to get a greater sense of student writer identity. After each interview, I used the taped material to transcribe student responses to the questions. Interviews were held at a venue suggested by the interviewees.

The two methods complemented each other, the literacy narrative prompted students to reflect on their writing and laid the foundation for the interview discussions which allows students to talk about their observations and put a kind of interpretation on any impression they may have conveyed of themselves as writers.

### 3.5 Difficulties in the Research process

There were several difficulties that were experienced by me as the researcher and the interviewees. The initial difficulty was to locate funding for the research process. Funding was necessary for payments of students. One of the lecturers suggested that I offer to pay students for participation. This was suggested in my meeting for access with first year students' doing the Language in Humanities course (DOH101). Students were offered payment as an incentive to get them to write the literacy narrative and complete a lengthy interview. Funding was also needed for telephonic contact with students to establish meeting times for interviews. Most of the students provided me with cell phone numbers in their contact details and preferred this as a means of contact.

The students' initial response was generally reluctance to get involved in yet another study of "second language" learners at UCT. I noticed this reluctance by the small number of students who attended the "free" coffee meeting. They were, as mentioned earlier, according to the lecturers I met with in the Academic Development Unit, "over-researched".

Access to third year students was a laborious and challenging task. The Student Records facility at UCT keeps a record of students personal information such as contact details and course registrations, *inter alia*, and they provided me with a list of all the students registered in the Faculty of Humanities for the year 2000. Most of the students lived in student residences that do not provide students with direct telephone access. Door-to-door knocking became essential to find interested third year students, which took up lots of time trying to locate them. As a result of the difficulty in finding third year students, my data collection period went into the mid-year exam period at UCT. Students as a result were reluctant to participate because exams were already in progress; the offer of payment was once again a worthwhile incentive.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter describes the research design used in this study, its suitability, value, limitations and difficulties. The analysis is grounded in the discursive construction of writer identity, namely "the self as author" as proposed by Clark and Ivanic (1997) and is an important issue for analysis. The analysis provides aspects of writer's identity from which there is evidence in the literacy narrative and the interview. The structure of the literacy narrative is discussed by a focus on Labov (1972) which is a structural analysis to show how the linguistic feature of the past and present tense of accounts or experiences in the literacy narrative is not uniform or rigid. The process of analysis enabled me a foundation for levels of interpretation. This is elaborated on in Chapter Five and Six.

The next chapter presents an analysis of the results or data derived from the literacy narratives and the interviews.

## Chapter Four – Data Description and Analysis

### Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis which emerged from the literacy narratives and semi-structured qualitative research interviews. The literacy narrative is used to explore what the literacy narratives “tell” us about the students’ perceptions of their literacy practices and hence writer identities of EAL students in this study, and ultimately provide an answer to my question:

**What can the literacy narrative accounts of EAL students’ transition from high school to university tell us about their academic writing practices?**

Appendix A has all the copies of the original hand-written literacy narratives of both first and third year students. I use the symbols:

>> when referring to the interview question

The brackets [ ] are used to denote my own word/s to make understanding clearer. I have retained the grammar of the original when I refer to data from the literacy narratives.

Where there are dots ... it indicates a significant pause.

This chapter will focus primarily on the content of the literacy narrative and provide insight into what the literacy narrative reveals about the school and university writing of EAL students. I will now proceed to do a content-categorical analysis of the literacy narratives and will also refer to the students’ interview responses to provide more depth to what they are saying and to look for any contradictions that may arise.

As a researcher, my interest is to explore the students’ transition from school and other literacy practices to university practices (where ‘literacy’ is understood to include reading, writing, thinking and speaking practices). The literacy narratives as text, gives the reader a sense of first and third year students’ perceptions of transition from school to university.

The themes which emerge from the principal ideas in the text, comprise the following focus areas:

- 1) Multiple Identities
- 2) The “Literacy Myth”
- 3) Writer Identity
- 4) Identity as EAL learner
- 5) Academic Support Network

#### **4.1 Multiple Identities**

The literacy narratives in this study highlight the way that narrative can be used to construct and represent the writer’s values and ideologies in discourse (Labov 1972). The literacy narrative questions, which function as paragraph topics namely, “Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going?” asks how students understand, value and construct ideologies around their literacy practices whereby they are able to reflect about their school literacy practices and current academic literacy practices. These questions function as thematic organisers in the students’ narratives. Literacy narratives in this study illustrate how narrative can highlight writers’ multiple identities that they bring with them to the act of writing, and how these identities are constantly shifting and changing over time.

The narrative structure of the introduction and conclusion highlights the multiple identities that students bring with them to the act of writing. The writer’s sense of “self ” is usually influenced by the multiple identities which writers reveal in the presentation of themselves. I look at how the students bring their multiple identities to the act of writing by analysing the structure of their introductions. We see a shift in these identities in the concluding paragraphs. Their sense of “self” is not static and is constructed differently in different contexts, their present context being the university. It is also interesting to explore multiple identities to show students “movement between worlds” (bell hooks, 1996).

### First Years:

The first year students' narrate their "movement between worlds" either positively or negatively. I will begin with the students who mention positive experiences in their introductions.

Luzelle brings her academic status as a first year social work student and her school academic status as top student to this piece of writing.

*My name is Luzelle Adams. I am a first year student at the University of Cape Town and I am studying social work. I matriculated last year at Steynville Secondary School, in Piketberg. I am from Piketberg. I was the dux- student of the year.*

Luzelle's shift of worlds is between school and university.

Bandisiwe highlights her academic and family status.

*My name is Bandisiwe Cabangana. I am 18years old and currently a Bachelor of Social Science student doing Gender and Women's studies at the University of Cape Town. I was born in the Eastern Cape in Umtata 18 years ago. I am the youngest daughter of M.D Cabangana who is a teacher. In this piece of writing, I will be telling how I went through transition from high school to University.*

Her family is based in a city, in an area, which is predominantly rural. Her university environment, which is urban, is a contrast to her rural upbringing.

Nozuko highlights her identity as a member of a particular community and her status as a top scholar in school to emphasise her positive school experience.

*I am Nozuko Matakata and was born in the Gauteng region in a town called Vereeniging. I started going to school when I was seven in a "black" school called Phamehlo primary school. In this school I did all my classes from grade one to grade eight. While I was in this school I was always the most excellent pupil in all my*

*classes and I remember that I did not do grade five, I moved from grade four to grade six. When I arrived in grade six I continued to be the best student and there was always a gap between me and the person who was number two (as in our progress reports we were ranged this way).*

Nozuko highlights her school experience to explain the shift in academic status at university. She moves from being the “best student” at school to being defined as a struggling student at university.

Mdumiseni and Tumi, do not share the same positive experiences as Luzelle and Nozuko in their introductions.

Mdumiseni foregrounds his identity as a second language speaker and his academic writing status.

*My name is Mdumeseni Lusaseni. I am 19years old. I attended my high school at Luhlaza. English is my second language. And as an academic writer I find many problems because English at tertiary is crucial. The way I write my Essays and Assignments at university is different from that of high school. There are many rules in academic writing that I am not fermiliar with.*

He moves between being recognised as a second language speaker and a member of the academic community. He highlights the difficulty he is experiencing at university as a result of the English medium of instruction. I will use the same paragraph as data in the theme: Identity as EAL learner.

Tumi used a different format in her introduction but seems to display a noticeable identity of a struggling student, like Mdumiseni, in her writing.

*The transition from high school to university was a very strenuous one. Well it still is because one has to cope with all the changes in a couple of days. But the most difficult one is the academic transition.*

She is distressed by her transition from high school to university.

I have used Masopha's introduction in the theme below which also shows evidence of his multiple identities but primarily for evidence of the literacy myth.

### Third Years:

The third year students' introductions foreground two issues. Phumza and Carolyn focus on their identity as academic writers and Maria and Siyambonga on their proficiency in the English language.

Phumza, a politics student, wrote:

*I did not engage in any academic writing at school, as I did here at varsity. Writing in school was very limited, in the sense that even the historical essays, that we wrote, were just a mere continuation of the cramming of fact, dates and events. There was no critical writing, critical analysis, as is the case in ' varsity.*

Phumza uses an interesting academic register by using words like "engage in" and "in the sense that". Her post-school success is dependent on a personal ability, such as being able to write and analyse critically. Her introduction presents her main concerns of the topic under discussion, which are academic concerns.

Carolyn displays the confidence of a third year student in her introduction. There is an overarching positive sense of self in her narration.

*This essay will focus on where I come from and where I am hoping to go. I will give a brief overview of my family and my hobbies.*

*Firstly, I am 20 years old and my hobbies are reading and writing. I come from a family of five. I am the second eldest. I have one sister and one brother. I come from a close knit family. I was born in 1980 at the Somerset hospital in Cape Town. I grew up in Langebaan and Plettenbergbay. My father's job entails a lot of travelling thus*

*we as a family had the opportunity live in different provinces. We moved to Cape Town when I was in standard three. I thus completed my schooling in Cape Town. I attended Blossom Street Primary school and Athlone high school. I was very involved in extra-mural activities at school. I was a prefect in primary school and during high school I was involved in a life skills program. This life skills program helped me tremendously with shaping what I wanted to do when I leave school. It also gave me confidence to tackle the world head on I matriculated in 1997 and I decided to register at UCT for my BSOCS degree.*

Her confidence is communicated through words and expressions such as “as a family had opportunities” and “very involved in extra-mural activities” and also “gave me confidence”. Carolyn comes from a middle class background, which may have afforded her more opportunities than the rest of the students in this study.

Siyambonga presents his multiple identities as follows:

*My name is Siyambonga LIMANI, I was born in Transkei in a small village called Nogate Township (Qamata). I started my schooling at the nearby school called Mhlobo J.S.S. We used English and Xhosa textbook, we were taught in English but Xhosa was used mostly, to interpret everything to us.*

He tells us that he was born in a rural area. He draws attention to the fact that although English was the medium of instruction Xhosa “was used mostly”. As a Xhosa first language speaker, he attended a dual medium of instruction namely English and Xhosa school.

Maria, who is majoring in Psychology and Industrial Psychology, writes:

*My name is Maria Mangope. I am 21 years old and I am doing my last year in Psychology and Industrial Psychology. I was born in Johannesburg but my early childhood was spent in Botswana with my grandparents. I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> born out of 4 girls. I am an outgoing, talkative and enthusiastic individual with great determination to achieve and a positive attitude towards life. Although my mother tongue is*

*Setswana, I consider English to be the language that I am highly knowledgeable of, as I can read, write and speak it better than all the 5 languages I know.*

She reminds us that she is an adult by giving her age, and that she is an academic student. She presents herself as a ‘coper’. Despite being a Setswana first language speaker, she is able to cope with English as a medium of instruction, and considers it as the language “...I am highly knowledgeable of...”

Third year students’ introductions, with the exception of Phumza and Carolyn’s introductions, highlight the journey students had to undertake. They mention the English language which signals the language concern in this study which is discussed in more detail in the theme identity as an EAL learner. But interestingly, they do not consider language to be the problem.

#### **4.2 The “Literacy Myth”**

The ‘literacy myth’, put simply, reinforces the thinking that literacy can bring about life-changing benefits. Students’ language attitudes and practices are embedded in far more complex processes of identity formation which are influenced by the university and socio-economic contexts. Most of the EAL students come from ex-DET school backgrounds which promotes the thinking that the English language and a tertiary education can help one transcend the boundaries of their low-income socio-economic backgrounds.

As stated in the previous theme, I use Masopha’s introduction as an example to show how the backgrounds students mention in their introductions are usually transcended in their pursuit of overcoming these challenges by focussing on material objectives.

##### First Years:

Masopha, in the introduction to his narrative, to a large extent epitomises the challenges associated with the movement between worlds. This also reminds me of the way bell hooks (1996) uses the metaphor of a bus in order to explain and frame literacy in terms of moving between the “materially underprivileged world” of home and the “materially privileged world”

of school and academia; “the world of the material” and “the world of the working class, the poor,” “the academic world” and “real life.”

He writes:

*I started going to school when I was five years old. Having grown up in rural areas where education opportunities are not abundant due to a number of factors including a lower financial status, my parents struggled for my education. In the primary level, I encountered no problems and I could even write an examination without even studying.*

Masopha moves between his rural, poor, working class background and the academic world. The rural experience and the lack of finance broaden the distance between his worlds. He interestingly explains that it was money that was a problem rather than the quality of his rural upbringing. I use his introduction as an example to highlight the backgrounds of most ex-DET scholars. He makes reference to his background by drawing our attention to the difficult circumstances that most EAL students have to endure, “grown up in rural areas” “education opportunities are not abundant” “lower financial status” and “parents struggled for my education”. He may be typical of many poor students and their parents, for whom a university education is the symbol of future mobility and with it comes the promise of huge benefits.

After a careful look at the conclusions of the students’ literacy narratives one can see evidence of the literacy myth. There is an awareness of the instrumental value of material goals to transcend the boundaries of their backgrounds.

Masopha and Luzelle are different in that they are more realistic about the expectations of themselves as university students. They show academic maturity by being realistic and this is what separates them from the rest of the first years.

Masopha, in his conclusion writes:

*All in all, the university seem to be more than what I expected when I was still at high school. With things being totally different, I think it will take time before I mastermind a total academic adaptation or acclamatization to UCT. Now I feel that I am still in the midst of transition.*

Masopha believes that adapting to university-based practices will “take time”, suggesting that it will be a long and gradual process because of “things being totally different”.

Luzelle, like Masopha, also seems to have more realistic expectations.

*I hope that I will improve because I plan to study for a very long time at the university of Cape Town. And because this university is english, it will be a burden for me if everybody is having problems with my way of writing.*

She reminds the reader and herself of her present academic writing challenge. Her present challenge is to become proficient in the English language; she refers to it as a “burden”. The word “everybody” suggests that she sees her challenge in terms of how she is being judged and not about her ability.

Tumi, Bandisiwe and Mdumiseni provide a contrast to the above. Tumi writes:

*I'm not going to give up, I'm going to strive till I get it right, till I get a first class. In my assignments and essays.*

Tumi highlights the importance of obtaining a distinction in her academic writing as a gateway to academic success. In my opinion, a distinction as a symbol of academic success, will gain her the academic recognition she seeks.

Mdumiseni focuses on his future career interest.

*There is a lot of improvement though. Because now I am getting used to the academic writer. I must say it is demanding but worthy at the end of the day. One day I see myself as a professional academic writer because even the job that I want needs a good writer. I want to be a journalist.*

He associates academic progress with bringing him a step closer to realising his future career goal, and that is to become a journalist. He believes that becoming an academic writer is a “worthy” effort. He looks at his future aspirations by writing “One day” he will be a “professional” writer and in doing so aspire to middle class status as a journalist.

Bandisiwe believes that “being positive” or optimistic is the key to her success that will help her transcend the boundaries of her situation.

*I believe that one day I will be something, in this world even if I went through hard times. Being positive at all times is the only thing that will help me get through everything ahead of me. I see myself as one of the very strongest women in South Africa fighting for our rights.*

The words “something, in this world”, in my opinion, is an expression that refers to some sort of gain which could be personal recognition or material success. She reminds us of her interest in Gender Studies in her concluding sentence. She foregrounds this interest earlier in her introductory paragraph. The words “strongest women” reinforces the need for personal recognition in society.

Masopha and Luzelle recognise the difficulty of the transition but remain hopeful that they will eventually succeed at university. Mdumiseni, Tumi and Bandisiwe conclude their narratives as stories with a happy ending and a transcendence of a boundary that will bring about success. They see their success as writers in terms of career opportunities, for gaining academic status, and for recognition in society.

### Third Years:

Third year students' conclusions were different to that of the first years. The fact that third year students are closer to the end of their studies could be one of the reasons for these differences.

Carolyn concludes her narrative with the following thoughts:

*In conclusion, this essay gives a brief overview of my life. It demonstrates where I come from and where I am hoping to go. I hope the above will assist you in your quest.*

Carolyn ends her narrative using academic register 'In conclusion' and 'It demonstrates'. The 'you' she refers to in her conclusion is the researcher. This indicates a strong awareness of audience that is a trait of academic writing. When making decisions about how to present themselves in their writing, writers, to a certain extent, have to consider the expectations of their readers. This, however, applies more to academic essays as their readers will be their assessors.

Maria ends her narrative with the following paragraph:

*Lastly I attribute coping the transition from high school to University to the fact that I was used to the teaching style. I also have the ability to learn quickly and I always strive to do my best at whatever task I put my heart to.*

Maria takes the reader back to her transition from school to university. She feels her transition was not difficult owing to the fact that she "was used to the teaching style". She focuses on her ability "to learn quickly" to highlight her self-confidence and her chances of success at university. In her concluding paragraph she uses academic register, for example "I attribute".

Carolyn and Maria by using words like "demonstrate" and "attribute" consciously or unconsciously signal an affinity with academic identity. Phumza and Siyambonga mention their career interests .

Phumza writes:

*Where Am I going?*

*Journalism is where I want to go to. I am involved in the Newspaper, writing articles for the sports column. My academic writing has assisted me in excelling in this newspaper. It has especially in areas of writing, reading analysing documents even what people say, when being interviewed. Listening is also of crucial importance, especially in the arena of newspaper and History. The courses that I did in first year, were indeed a good foundation, especially English for Academic Purposes and Critical Thinking.*

Phumza's conclusion is conversational. She begins her paragraph informally, "Journalism is where I want to go to". She uses the comma to pause and separate ideas instead of a full stop. She is currently employed as a writer of a newspaper, which is for her career orientated and income generating. She believes that her success as an academic writer is rooted in courses completed in her first year of studies and refers to them as "a good foundation".

Siyambonga highlights the progress he has made in his second and third year of studies.

*At second and third year I didn't have any severe difficulties in academic writing, but obviously the fact that English is a second language will still be a fact and time will make it up someday. I have a dream of publishing one day.*

Siyambonga's experience of academic writing difficulties is narrowed to his first year of studies. The word "severe" implies that first year writing was quite a challenge for him. His reference to being an EAL student shows how English carries the symbolic value of a key or gatekeeper depending on "time" that will "make it up someday". He ends his narrative by mentioning his "dream" to be a publisher.

Third year students' conclusions in comparison to some of the first year students do not have happy endings common to story telling which tend to conform to the idea of a happy ending. It is important to remember that narrative writing is further from their experience as academic

writers. Phumza and Siyambonga focus on their future careers because they are closer to that future goal as they near the end of their academic careers. They do, however, seem to associate their university experience with future success in the working world. Another interesting difference is that first year students' as "apprentice" academic writers, foreground their difficulties whereas third year students show academic maturity and present themselves as 'copers'.

### **4.3 Writer Identity**

*"It's like you fall into the stream, you have to survive the tide."*

The subtitle of this theme is taken from a student's comment in the interview. The perceptions students have of themselves can provide insight into the extent to which they are willing to accommodate to or resist academic writing conventions. I will now look at the concept of writer identity to explore Gee's (1990) theory on whether students in this study are 'in, out or colonised'.

My primary concern in this theme is to provide insight in to whether students see themselves as members of the academic community because they have no choice but to "fall into the stream" and conform to the conventions of academic writing or if they "survive the tide" and find their "own voices" or writer identities. School writing plays an important role in shaping the influences of writer identity.

The difference between school and university writing plays an important role in the formation of writer identity. These differences are highlighted in both the literacy narratives and the interviews.

#### First years:

Most of these students are aware of the differences between academic and school writing since entering the university. They draw comparisons between school and academic writing based on what they have been taught in one semester at university.

Luzelle initially, did not see a difference in the way she wrote at school and the way she writes at university.

*But for me it is strange, because the way I wrote at school is still the same as now. And at school I achieved high symbols and now everything is just the opposite.*

Later in the interview she does acknowledge the difference in writing. She says:

*The structure and the way we use language is different from school.*

She blames her poor proficiency in English as a medium for her struggle in acquiring academic discourse.

In her literacy narrative Tumi refers to the difference as:

*Writing assignments at varsity is definitely different because at school one reads the article and re-writes it in his/her own way, but here at varsity one has to question everything, and this becomes difficult to cope with coz, one did not learn this at school. It's really confusing.*

Tumi is distressed about the changes that she encounters in writing at tertiary level. She was not taught at school to formulate her own opinions and think critically. The above quotation is an indication of the difference in writing that students like Tumi have to overcome at university.

Mdumiseni refers below to the differences in his writing:

*I can say in high school as a writer we are taught the basic skills of approaching an Essay. For example, In an introduction we were taught to write what we are going to talk about in our Essays ... But here at university we do not do that. It is different here because there are rules that need to be followed in each and every discipline. The way we structure our Essays is totally different from that of high school.*

Mdumiseni refers to the differences in terms of the structuring of the essay and the rules that need to be taken into account in writing. He elaborates at length about the differences:

*The difference is that the standard at university is high and then we are expected to follow certain rules in order to write. But in high school we were expected to memorise facts and write about facts only. But here we have to argue with the writer and find some faults.*

He also highlights the rote learning system used in most ex-DET schools.

Luzelle, Tumi and Mdumiseni refer to the genre<sup>3</sup> of the academic essay. In the Faculty of Humanities, the dominant genres are the 'argumentative essay' and 'critical textual analysis'. They focus on paragraph structure as a discourse feature of the 'argumentative essay' and textual analysis.

Bandisiwe refers to her academic writing practice in response to this question:

>>>Can you use the writing practices that you learnt in your school writing at university?

*Well I think they might help you in one way or another but what I've noticed here is you don't just write about something. You critically analyse it. In all my courses that's what I've been taught. So now here you have to think, you don't just write.*

Bandisiwe, like Masopha, refers to the difference in writing in terms of the thought processes involved.

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<sup>3</sup> Genres are conventionalised forms of texts, which 'derive from and encode the functions, purposes and meanings of social occasions' (Kress, 1985: 19)

Masopha writes:

*One other change is that instead of writing what I was taught only, here I have to write my own opinions about I have been taught. Instead of dealing with what other people think, I am trained how to think. Here I can argue what another person has written.*

His school experience of writing is expressed as not being encouraged to think critically but rather to regurgitate the ideas of the teacher.

Both Bandisiwe and Masopha focus on the ability to critically evaluate information in academic writing as a major difference between school and academic writing. They also, in different questions, refer to the independent way of learning as a difference between school and academic writing.

Nozuko refers to academic writing as interesting if one is allowed a choice of topics.

*Writing is a very interesting string of academia although most of the times it is difficult to do a writing task, unless one has to choose his or her own topic. What makes writing difficult (be it essays, these etc) is that, there are correct and incorrect ways of doing it (and that has its purpose for being like that) whereas if people had to write things or about things as they flow in his or her mind it would be more interesting and enjoyable.*

Nozuko refers to the school practice of choosing your own topic in dialogues and composition writing as something she would prefer in academic writing. She also refers to the use of the first person pronoun 'I' in the interview. She says that she has been taught at university not to use the word 'I' in academic writing.

>>Do you use the word "I", the first person pronoun, in your academic writing?

*Because they advised us not to use the first person. So I always say like, " One can deduct... "*

As a difference in writing, she says that school writing did not see the use of 'I' as problematic in writing. This is because the genre of writing at school lends itself more to a narrative structure in which the pronoun 'I' is appropriate. The first person pronoun is what led to a discussion on plagiarism in the interview.

I will now elaborate on the issue of plagiarism so that it is contextualised in this discussion of writer identity analysis.

### Plagiarism

All the first year students highlighted the issue of plagiarism in the interviews. This was brought up in a discussion on referencing as an academic convention. The first year student is involved in a form of apprenticeship where mimicking the conventions and discourse of the academic community (Bartholomae, 1985) is expected provided that they adhere to referencing conventions.

Students seem to realise the importance of referencing but they see it more as a means of avoiding plagiarism.

Nozuko highlights this in the interview question:

>>What happens when you have an idea but after research you read it in a book? Do you acknowledge it as your or the authors idea?

*It's a bit of a problem because sometimes you didn't know that someone has written the idea. You wouldn't have read all the books so you would think it's your own idea, and then somehow they say you have to reference so as not to plagiarise.*

Nozuko later provides a useful definition of plagiarism, which echoes the common understanding of the word shared by most students in general.

>> What is your understanding of the word 'plagiarism'?

*I think plagiarism means you take someone's ideas and you copy them down as your own without acknowledging the person.*

Masopha talks about the benefits of referencing by saying:

>> How does this (referencing) affect your marks?

*Actually I get many [good] marks for my writing but I have to reference that's why I get better marks.*

Masopha believes his marks improve when he references as opposed to when he chooses not to reference. He says, later in the interview, that although he gets good marks for referencing, he prefers to use his own ideas.

*Actually referencing is what you should apply to all your writing. I feel more comfortable with writing only cause sometimes I even forget to reference. So referencing I am not used to it that much cause I only write my own opinions.*

Tumi, Bandisiwe and Nozuko find the issue of plagiarism as a problem in academic writing.

Tumi's response to the following question is:

>> How do you feel about the academic writing conventions at UCT?

*At first it was hectic. You don't understand why you should do it, you know. Sometimes with plagiarism sometimes you wrote this sentence and it's yours and then you realise it's in the text and you have to change it. But I understand why we have to do it, but you have to get used to it after practising over and over again.*

Bandisiwe says:

*To be honest with you this is my first time so I don't know what they are preparing me for. It is possible that they helping me for something. Although sometimes it is hard. You think you writing in your own words or you have the same ideas with ... Only to find out you have plagiarised but there is no problem except that it is difficult sometimes.*

Bandisiwe refers to the frustration of most first year EAL students and that is how write authoritatively. It appears that the students use the modes of textual construction learnt at school, which usually meant paraphrasing an idea or authoritative textbook.

Nozuko echoes Bandisiwe's words:

*It's a bit of a problem because sometimes you didn't know that someone has written that idea. You wouldn't have read all the books so you would think it's your own idea, and then somehow they say you have to reference so as not to plagiarise.*

Mdumiseni's thoughts on plagiarism were:

>> If you have an idea before reading about it, do you still put it down as your own?  
*You have to change your whole essay because it will be called plagiarism. We are told you could be taken to the university courts, so we have to state that it's from the writer's point of view.*

Mdumiseni regards plagiarism with much fear and emphasises it as a 'criminal' offence in writing.

Luzelle saw it as providing evidence for her claims in academic writing.

>> Do you use the first person, "I" in your writing when you agree or disagree with a writer?  
*You can do it but then you have to give evidence.*

>> So you feel more comfortable with referencing in your writing?  
*We are supposed to reference. We can't say something; we have to give reasons why.*

Luzelle's remark about them not being able to say something is disturbing. She seems to be implying that her "voice" is lost to other writers. A difficulty in academic writing for EAL

students is that of how to detect the different voices, and how to position themselves in relation to these voices. Gaining authority in academic writing means learning how to use the voices of others to develop one's own.

The above analysis is useful in that it sheds light on EAL transitions from school to academic writing conventions. First year students regard referencing as an academic device or convention to improve their marks rather than to show evidence of wider reading. They still prefer to rely on other writers' ideas and opinions to safeguard themselves from accusations of plagiarism. This is a crucial insight into the voicelessness in some first year EAL students writing in general. This, as indicated in Chapter Five, will have a marked effect on their ability to write authoritatively.

#### Third Years:

All the third year students in their narratives, except for Phumza and Siyambonga, did not focus strongly on the differences between academic and school writing. The reason for this could be that they have spent a considerable number of years at university, and their school writing is further from their writing experience.

Phumza expressed the difference between school and academic writing as follows:

*Writing in school was very limited, in the sense that even the historical essays, that we wrote, were just a mere continuation of the cramming of facts, dates and events. There was no critical writing, critical analysis, as is the case in 'varsity.*

She also states in her interview that her school experience of writing did not prepare her in any way for academic writing.

Siyambonga writes about this difference in terms of the difficulty he experienced in his first year transition from high school to university.

*At school we were taught very differently in terms of academic writing. So when I was in first year I couldn't adjust easily. The form of writing was too tight, precise objective and procedural.*

Both Phumza and Siyambonga mention the critical thinking aspect of academic writing as one of the important differences between school and academic writing. The first year students also highlighted the above as a major difference in writing.

Maria feels that she acquired the necessary university writing skills from her school subject, history.

*I feel that the only difference between history and University writing is that one has to research and reference. In a way I found University writing easier as one just had to research and from then on construct an argument.*

She writes that she does not regard academic writing as a challenge that she had to overcome.

*I feel that I did not have a problem grasping university writing quickly and the fact that I was on the Dean's merit list serves as evidence that I coped with university writing.*

Maria highlights her academic achievement, "I was on the Dean's merit list" as evidence for the above. She seems to resist being defined as a "problem".

Carolyn uses the interview to talk about the argumentative essay by drawing on academic register to explain the differences.

>> Tell me more about the differences.

*The basics are the same but the way you have coherent arguments, the way you have to have premises to support a valid argument. At school you didn't have that. Your arguments, you would make a claim and you would not elaborate that vastly on it. At UCT you have to have evidence for your argument. If you make a claim you have to have valid premises and stuff.*

She also talks about the conspicuous absence of referencing in school writing.

*I think my lack of referencing, I'm actually surprised that the teachers didn't lecture me and ja that's the main difference I would say.*

It can be assumed that the third year students now feel more equipped to deal with the differences as they have over the years had time to acquire membership in the academic community. This was highlighted in the interview in a discussion on the use of the first person pronoun 'I' in academic writing where plagiarism was also a topic of discussion.

Carolyn talks about the first person pronoun in terms of 'voice':

*They prefer your own voice. Your voice must come through. They don't want to read a book of authors or other authors' ideas. They don't want to hear too much of that, they would want to hear your own voice as well.*

In her discussion on the differences between school and academic writing she also mentions the importance of avoiding plagiarism.

>> How different is school writing to university writing?

*I think that's the most difficult part of varsity life is to write your own essays, find resources. And you must be very careful of using authors ideas.*

Phumza talks about the differences in academic disciplines to show how the use of the first person is used differently in History and Politics.

>>Are you using your own “voice” now in third year in comparison to first year?

*For Politics you definitely not supposed to. You can in the conclusion; you have to restrict yourself because they don't really want to know what you think basically. It's an academic paper and they don't have any interest in what you saying. You can come out in the sense that maybe you agree with the writer and you have to structure it in a different way. In History you can, in the history that I'm doing Historical approaches.*

Phumza displays an interesting awareness of disciplinary differences in writing.

Siyambonga did not refer to plagiarism in his interview. He stresses the importance of adhering to academic conventions as essential to academic writing.

>> How do you feel about these academic conventions as tools of writing?

*Basically, I mean it's very obvious that it's essential. We can't really do without it. I think that it does, it defines any writer to validate his source of knowledge. What I mean is that all learners in the field of development learn from how other people think. In other words we are not islands. No man is an island. You learn from the wisdom of others and from all kinds of things. And also one has to be structured in what he does. I think the coherence part of it, those are the things, which are essential.*

Siyambonga shows academic maturity in his thoughts on academic conventions “it defines any writer to validate his source of knowledge” “one has to be structured in what he does” “ the coherence part... are essential”

Maria's response to the interview question about how she felt about academic writing conventions was:

*You can't just write anything. And referencing is all about avoiding plagiarism... It's just to acknowledge. Referencing doesn't mean that you pay that person one cent for using them but it's just to acknowledge. Anyway I think using evidence, it gives your argument credibility. It makes it richer in a way.*

Maria also shows maturity in her response to the question. She gives her understanding of academic writing conventions by referring to referencing as a way “to acknowledge” and “give[s] your argument credibility”. She has also clearly bought into the academic conventions and values. She does not see them as a denial of her own writer identity.

Carolyn, Phumza and Maria provide insight into third year students' use of the first person pronoun. They know what plagiarism is but do not seem intimidated by it. The first year students, as a contrast to the third years, are also not yet aware of the self as audience. This has a marked effect on their ability to write authoritatively.

My argument here is centred around the idea that a writer's ideological position is influenced by the social context, which in this instance is the academic community and wider community, and the writer takes up a position of power or lack thereof in relation to that context. These positions of power are influenced by the discourses to which students have had more exposure to in their academic tuition. This is clearly evident in third year students' who do not see academic conventions as threatening to their writer identities. The data on writer identity provides insight into how far EAL student writers' either resist or accommodate to academic writing practices at UCT.

#### **4. 3.1 The “self as author”**

According to Ivanic (1998) if writers are confident of themselves as writers then they will write authoritatively. The “self as author” is a way of analysing the extent to which student writers present themselves as authors. The “self as author” analysis is used to show how far writers claim authority as the source of the content of the text, and in how far they establish an authorial presence in their writing (Ivanic 1998). With hindsight, the academic essay would have enabled me better to say whether these students are an ‘x’ or ‘y’ kind of academic writer.

### First Years:

The first year students are still in the process of learning how to combine the characteristics of being a member of the academic community with those of being an apprentice. They approach the difficulties in their transition from school to university with a sense of powerlessness, which gives an indication of their self-worth. This is evident in the outlook they have on their difficult transition.

Bandisiwe writes in a quote I use later in the theme Identity as EAL learner:

*I cannot lie, I did experience a lot of problems and basically with my language. As I am an English Second language speaker, I found myself trapped...*

Bandisiwe uses the word “trapped” to describe her present situation. The connotation of this word in an academic context suggests disempowerment.

Luzelle’s concern was:

*And because the university is English, will it only be a burden for me if everybody is having problems with my way of writing.*

She refers to a concern she has of how others, presumably her lecturers and tutors, will perceive her namely as a “burden”, this displays feelings of powerlessness.

In the literacy narratives Bandisiwe and Luzelle seem to be severely “constrained” because of their language difficulties.

Mdumiseni views academic conventions negatively when he writes:

*Those kind of things are new to me. And they make me not say as the way I see things. There is no too much freedom as an academic writer.*

Mdumiseni refers to the restrictions placed on him by academic writing conventions “not too much freedom”, and sees it as a limitation in his expression of himself as an academic writer.

Tumi in her narrative is seriously distressed about her situation.

*I'm struggling very much to pass, but the worse thing is doing all your readings, and following all the instructions, and when submitting the assignment/essay feeling very confident, and then when results come, you've got the lowest mark. This seriously disturbs me.*

She describes her situation as “struggling very much to pass” and says that it “seriously disturbs me”. Her difficulties are expressed strongly as having a negative effect on her confidence as a writer.

Nozuko refers to her past success as a top student at school. Her frustrations at present are a result of her low marks.

*But here my dream seems to be shattered as I get fifties too here which I never got previously. This is very frustrating for me, as I tend to be more than serious about my results.*

Nozuko has a strong sense of disappointment and frustration. We see this where she writes, “dreams seem to be shattered” and “frustrating for me”.

Masopha's approach to his situation is with academic maturity.

*With things being totally different, I think it will take time before I mastermind a total academic adaptation or acclimatization to UCT. Now I feel that I am still in the midst of transition.*

He talks about his circumstances in a rational way “it will take time” and “still in the midst of transition” and is confident that he will eventually succeed.

We see a confidence in Masopha as a writer when he narrates his academic transition experience using his academic “voice”. He views his transition positively.

*However, there are two major academic changes I have encountered beside those listed above. The first one; here I am doing subjects (known as courses) relating to my career only. This helps me to focus seriously on my goal. One other change is that instead of writing what I was taught only, here I have to write my own opinions about I have been taught. Instead of dealing with what other people think, I am trained how to think. Here I can argue what another person has written.*

He gives the impression that he has already learnt to identify what is required in academic writing.

In the above paragraph Masopha seems to be writing more as a fully- fledged academic student by using expressions such as “However, there are two major changes” “The first one” and “One other change is that”. There is a sense of empowerment as his discourse position is that of a student. I associate this with what Bartholomae (1985:143) calls “being insiders, granted a special right to speak”.

The other first year students did not assume this identity throughout their writing. They were unsure whether and how to assume it for most of the time. Masopha sees academic writing conventions as necessary but says it stifles his ideas as well. The idea of being in the “midst of transition” in his narrative is a way of separating his identity from the academic expectations of his environment. Third year students provide a noticeable contrast to the first year students in this regard.

#### Third Years:

The third year students’ as a result of their journey through the years at UCT, have been given time to take up positions that position them as members of the academic community. These positions according to Ivanic (1998: 322) are not fixed or consistent.

Siyambonga and Phumza highlight the academic freedom they enjoy as final year undergraduate students.

Siyambonga in the interview says:

*But I also think that there has to be a way, which is also liberal...,which really captures the personality of the person in terms of writing. ...I'm not bound by anything. I'm not quantified; precise to do this I'm just writing. ... What I'm trying to say sometimes it makes sense for me to write the way that we like and still make sense to any person that can read it.*

He is confident of his status as an academic writer and at this stage of his writing is “not bound by anything” I think he is referring to the restrictions placed on him by disciplinary writing conventions.

Phumza reminds the reader in her narrative of her status as a third year student to indicate her academic development.

*But in third year I've noticed there is a call for me to be more developed. To go about new ways of doing certain things especially in Politics.*

She highlights the fact that writing is a process and that students reach different stages in their writing as they progress to final year of studies, they become “more developed” and find “new ways of doing certain things”.

Maria, in the interview, takes responsibility for the choices she makes in her writing.

*They've taught you the basics but it's for you to make it work for you. You have to do the rest of the work.*

Carolyn in response to a question on where she sees herself as an academic writer replied:

*I will accommodate the writing skills that I have learnt and voice. My voice it does come through in my writing. I make a point thereof. In my essay writing as well I don't just use authors opinions, my opinion must come through in my essay writing.*

She shows an awareness of what is required of her as an academic writer. She highlights a key aspect of academic writing namely the use of “voice” which could serve as an indication of authorial presence in writing.

A thorough enquiry using the literacy narratives and the interview data in Chapter Five will reveal that these students constantly shift between roles. The third year literacy narratives are useful in that it allows one to explore to a certain extent, student perceptions of themselves as academic writers.

#### **4.4 Identity as EAL learner**

Difficulties with adjusting to English as a medium of instruction were a common theme in first year literacy narratives. Five of the six first year students reported this as a demanding major adjustment in their academic studies. However, difficulties in adapting to the English language used at university were not confined to first years as third year students also experienced difficulties but they chose to focus on the discourse conventions in their writing rather than on language difficulties, as in problems with medium of instruction.

According to Bartholomae (1985), when students write with the discourses of a community, they take on the identity of a member of that community by privileging the discourses of that particular community. In the case of writing at university, it is the identity of a person with authority. This theme focuses on the EAL identities of the students by examining the difficulties that the students experienced in acquiring university – based discourses as a result of their EAL identity. I believe that the perception they have of themselves as EAL learners influences their authorial presence in writing.

Four of the six first year EAL students highlight English as a medium of instruction as a challenge in their school to university transition. They highlight this challenge in both their literacy narratives and in the interview. I make reference to the interview in this section to highlight contradictions, and to provide more insight into what students write and say about their language challenge.

First years:

Luzelle describes her transition by focusing on her language difficulty:

*I find it very difficult to achieve good marks here at university, because of the fact that English is my second language and I know that I am not so good in English.*

Luzelle uses the literacy narrative as a platform to highlight the difficulties she is experiencing in acquiring the English discourse used at UCT. The principal idea, which is the most frequent idea in the text, is the struggle she is having with English at tertiary level. She also makes reference to her past success as a “dux student” in the interview, which is an academic achievement, awarded to the top academic achiever student in schools. This reference to her academic success at school provides the reader with an explanation as to why she feels confused about her poor academic performance at university. She also makes constant reference to being a “second language” speaker throughout her literacy narrative and identifies this as the reason for her difficulty in acquiring academic discourse, which to a certain extent shows academic maturity in being able to identify the source of her writing problems at university.

The other students in the literacy narrative expressed their difficulties as follows:

Bandisiwe wrote:

*I cannot lie, I did experience a lot of problems and basically with my language. As I am an English second language speaker I found myself trapped because the lecturers here are Whites and of course the medium of instruction is English.*

Bandisiwe feels disempowered by describing herself as “trapped” in the academic environment. She views race and language as being synonymous, “... lecturers here are Whites and of course medium of instruction is English”.

Mdumiseni who also focussed on his EAL identity wrote:

*English is my second language. And as an academic writer I find many problems because English at tertiary is crucial [crucial].*

Tumi mentions her English language difficulty in the interview in response to a question related to how she was adjusting to English as the medium of instruction.

*The first and most biggest problem I had was understanding every word.*

By not including this difficulty in her literacy narrative, we can assume that she did not see it as a possible link to her academic writing problem, or that she consciously or unconsciously chose not to foreground this aspect of her identity in her writing. She may have also wanted to present a positive image of herself.

Masopha and Nozuko provide a contrast to the above. They believe that the schools they attended prepared them adequately for instruction in the English medium. In the literacy narrative they do not highlight English proficiency as a challenge at university.

Masopha regards himself as being “privileged” to have attended the school he went to. By referring to himself as privileged he sets himself apart from his EAL group identity.

Nozuko, however, contradicts herself in the interview.

>> Did you experience any difficulty in English as a medium of instruction at UCT?

*Ja, I did a little even though they always encouraged us to speak English in school because everything was taught in English except for Xhosa. So everything was taught in English even in Afrikaans when they tried to explain things they used English... So sometimes they used Xhosa to explain. So it was like difficult because we were not used to it.*

In the literacy narrative she does not regard her EAL identity as a challenge to overcome in her academic studies. She presents a positive image of herself in the narrative to highlight her positive school experience. In the above response she refers to the difficulty of English learning at school.

Bandisiwe highlighted an important on-going teaching practice used in most ex-DET schools. This is the use of primary language translations or code - switching where English is taught through the medium of Xhosa.

>> Did you experience problems adjusting to the English medium of instruction at UCT?

*Like we were taught in English but the teacher was able to say this is what I mean in my home language, which is Xhosa. So here everything is done in English; there is no time where if you don't understand in English then someone will translate in Xhosa.*

The above responses indicate that most of the first years ascribe their lack of success at university to their EAL identity. They also highlight their school context of English learning.

### Third Years:

All the third year students in their literacy narratives did not foreground their EAL identity as a major point of struggle in their transition from school to university.

Siyambonga in his literacy narrative mentions his school experience of being taught in English as a medium of instruction. He attributes this background to him being able to cope with English as a medium of instruction in his first year at UCT. He wrote:

*I moved to Umtata for my Senior Secondary schooling, and I was lucky to be in a school where the medium of communication was English.*

He refers to himself as being “lucky” because English in ex-DET schools is sought-after as a language of status because it is generally viewed as the language of power and privilege both nationally and internationally. In the following sentence, he makes reference to the fact that he is an EAL learner in the context of the university:

*When I moved to UCT I already had a confidence on the language (English) which obviously isn't my mother tongue.*

It was determination and a will to ‘survive’ that helped him cope with the challenges in his transition:

*I became determined to succeed despite the challenges- complexities of it.*

Siyambonga also highlights this difficulty in the interview by very perceptively referring to the inherent ideologies that accompany language acquisition.

*It also goes to a way of doing things, you know. Language was not the issue but it's the thinking behind the language, the philosophies that kind of thing. I mean I wasn't exposed to that standard you would assume was very high. You know articles with wit such as jargon.*

He draws the attention to the crux of the problem, which is the acquisition of academic discourse rather than simply language in his words, “Language was not the issue... thinking behind the language, the philosophies”.

Carolyn, in the first year of studies, found English as the medium of instruction at UCT a challenge.

*In my first year I had to sit with the dictionary. From my first year onwards I'm coping.*

Carolyn, despite having schooled as an English first language student, describes herself as an EAL student in her first year of studies at UCT. She highlights the difficulty she had with language as a medium in the interview.

Maria regards English as a language that she has a good command of in comparison to her primary language.

*Although my mother tongue is Setswana, I consider English to be the language that I am highly knowledgeable of, as I can read, write and speak it better than all 5 languages I know.*

She does not display feelings of “mother tongue” loyalty, which indicates a shift in her cultural position. Her position is motivated by a resistance to be seen as deficient in the English language.

Phumza, who attended an ex-model C school, backgrounds her EAL identity in her literacy narrative by focussing on issues in academic writing. At the beginning of the interview, she talks about her schooling:

*It was very different from where I came from because I was in Port Elizabeth. And I had been in a different environment in a different school. English was the first language because it was a multi-racial school.*

She refers to being schooled in a “different” environment. Phumza draws attention to the fact that she was previously exposed to English as a medium of instruction at school by referring to its status namely, “a multi-racial school”.

The above analysis gives us a sense of the way in which students consciously or unconsciously, signal their EAL identity in their discourse choices in writing. For example, Maria has made a conscious choice not to identify with EAL categories. Siyambonga’s resistance to his EAL identity is conditional. He consciously rejects his EAL identity only if it is used as a form of discrimination aimed at black students. Carolyn aligns her first year of studies with her EAL identity. Phumza highlights medium of instruction as a difference between ex-model C and ex-DET schools. All the third year students display a social awareness of identity.

#### **4.5 Academic Support Network**

All the students in this study have completed or are completing what is now called a Language in the Humanities (LiTH) course at UCT. This was one of the prerequisites for participation in this study. My interest was to see if students were aware of the changes, if any, in their identity as academic writers, and whether attendance of these courses had made any difference. All the first year students in a discussion on the course, in response to a question from me, referred to the LiTH course as a support network. The success of students as writers is largely dependent on how well and quickly they internalise the concepts and phrases necessary for academic discourse. The interview provided more useful information than the literacy narrative for this section. The subtitles Who am I? Where do I come from? and Where am I going? in the literacy narrative may have restricted students in their comments concerning this theme.

I was interested in finding out student perceptions of academic writing conventions and this course in particular, focuses on teaching academic conventions. Their perceptions also draw attention to the gap between schooling and university which provides insight into what we need to consider when we attempt to ‘bridge’ the gap on academic literacy courses such as

these. The students' perceptions also give an indication of the extent to which students internalise discourses. The course is referred to as the Language in Humanities (DOH102) course, in earlier years it was DOH 101 or English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

#### First Years:

Bandisiwe refers to the course as an additional class to help students in their transition. In the interview in response to a question on how much she had gained from the course, she answered:

*It helped me a lot because it introduced us to what is expected of us here. First of all as I came here I didn't know anything about referencing things. It gave me the basic that's how it helped me.*

Bandisiwe refers to the value of the course in terms of expectations "what is expected of us here" and by saying "I didn't know a thing about referencing" she highlights the inadequate preparation of school writing for tertiary studies.

Luzelle talks about what her school writing did not do for her by using the DOH 102 course as a point of reference. I asked her what the course had done for her:

*I realised after I did DOH102 I wouldn't have been able to write academic essays. In the other courses they just assume that you know how to write it. And here they tell us how to write. See if I didn't do it I wouldn't have known what was going on.*

Luzelle refers to the course as an essential ingredient for her progress at university.

Masopha refers to a number of courses as being important in his development as a writer:

*The first course is DOH 102, which is Language in Humanities. This course is teaching me how to use language not grammar, like all that stuff in high school but the acceptable language in the Faculty I'm in. And 101 which is Texts in Context, I'm taught to analyse like pictures in any form of presentation. Then there is DOH100,*

*which is Introduction to Social, and Critical thinking which explains the whole thing. I'm being introduced to how to think critically that means I say my own points about what is being said.*

Mdumiseni refers to the course as having a positive influence on him as a writer:

*Ja, there is a course called DOH101 which is the Language in Humanities. It's helping us to cope with academic writing.*

He sees the LiTH course as helping “us to cope”. He mentions coping as a significant survival strategy for all students at university.

Tumi refers to the course as being useful in helping her grasp academic writing conventions. She expresses the need for more assistance from her tutor in learning how to interpret readings in order to improve her marks.

*I think its because...I did not do my readings properly, I just did regular reading and not between the lines. I think my tutors should have emphasised on that that you should read between the lines and criticise.*

Tumi refers to a school practice of “regular reading” as opposed to reading at university that requires you to “read between the lines and criticise”. This skill is vital for students in the Faculty of Humanities, as essay writing requires one to be critical, analytical and show evidence of wider reading.

Nozuko’s disappointment at not being accepted for medicine clouded her perception of a different course offered in the Academic Development Program. She refers to the same course later in the interview as valuable in teaching her about “power and irony”.

*Because in Texts and Contexts DOH 101 course they taught us most of the things like power and irony.*

It is interesting to note that three of the first year students refer to the Language in Humanities course as providing assistance to them as a group of EAL students. A study of the pronouns in this section reveals how students show group membership to the course through the use of “us” and “we”.

Nozuko, although referring to another course, does likewise. Masopha, however, talks about the courses as helping him as an individual. The first year students, at this stage, are still dependent on the course as a whole to guide them in their writing. Its function is still to “bridge the gap” to accessing the discourse of the university.

My claim which stems from a comparison on the above analysis, is that third year students have developed a confidence in themselves as writers which allows them to be more critical of the course.

#### Third Years:

Maria and Siyambonga display this confidence in their speaking out against the institutional practices concerning the allocation of students to the Academic Development Program courses. They strongly reject the way the institution labels them as EAL or “disadvantaged” students. They refer to the LiTH course by a previous name, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or DOH 100.

Maria saw the course as “useless” and was confused about why she had to do the course.

*I found the DOH 100 course to be a useless course. Although it did help me or rather introduced me to University writing I felt that the course was very slow. I did not understand why I had to do the course as firstly I had a D for English and I found the test they used to assess as to who needed the course extremely easy.*

Maria, like Siyambonga, displays a negative attitude towards the course.

In his narrative Siyambonga criticises the course as a student who feels that it is designed to target and encourage inferiority complexes in black students at the university.

*I did the EAP at first year which I felt very angry about it because for the first time when I worked very hard to be at university. Someone could come and say/assume my understanding of the English language is poor... felt it singled out people particularly black students and categorised or labelled them which emotionally was not on.*

He, later in the interview, admits to it as a useful course “We explored a lot of things and they always motivated us” which suggests a double stance on the course. On the one hand it provides assistance, but on the other, it labels people, and students respond differently to this labelling.

Carolyn and Phumza saw the EAP as a useful course that enabled them to grasp the academic writing conventions of UCT. Both Carolyn and Phumza focus on their academic relationship with lecturers in this course, whose names will not be revealed, and mention this as an important reason why they succeeded as academic writers in the course.

Carolyn mentions the effect a particular lecturer had on her as well as the usefulness of the course content to describe her view of the EAP course.

*On the subjects that were acting as a support base was the ADP course. The lecturer [name] was more than teaching English she was acting as a mediator. She was concerned about our transition from school to varsity and gave the class the support base we desperately needed... Personally I found this class therapeutic.*

Phumza refers to the course as having a positive influence on her because of the help of a lecturer.

*My lecturer[name], she was very helpful. And she was very approachable.*

She also refers to her tutor as being helpful and in her narrative she refers to the EAP course as one of the courses that served as a good foundation for her future studies.

*The courses that I did [in] first year, were indeed a good foundation, especially English for Academic Purposes and Critical Thinking.*

The evaluative attitudes that third year students have towards the EAP course shows how they position themselves as critical thinkers who are prepared to challenge institutional practices. The attitudes expressed towards the course are useful indicators of how writing and attitudes towards it occurs in stages in a writer's development. These students in their writing exercise seem to be practising what Bartholomae (1985) calls "being insiders, ... granted a special right to speak". This 'right', however, seems to be acquired over a period of time.

### **Conclusion**

This section provides an analysis of the literacy narrative and interview of both first and third year students. The three themes namely writer identity, identity as EAL learner and academic support network are explored to provide answers to the questions I asked in Chapter One of this study. The questions required students to reflect on their past, present and future as academic writers. This may be the reason for them looking toward the future and in turn fulfilling the literacy myth in their prioritising proficiency in the English language as a worthwhile incentive for academic and material gain. I also focus on an aspect of narrative structure by examining students concluding paragraphs to look for the effects of the literacy myth in student writer identities. The literacy narratives in this study also illustrate how narrative can highlight writers multiple identities that they bring with to the act of writing, and how these identities are constantly shifting and changing over time.

The themes arose from the principal ideas in the literacy narratives and interviews. They provide a description of students' perceptions of their transition from school to university, and raise interesting issues which I will cover in detail in the next chapter.

In the following chapter I will discuss my research findings.

## Chapter 5 - Findings

### Introduction

The aim of this research is to see what literacy narratives when used as a research method reveals about the literacy practices of EAL students' in their transition from school to university. My intention is to explore how educators can 'bridge' the gap in school and university literacy practices and thus explore what Victor Turner (1980), *in* Soliday (1994), calls "liminal" crossings between worlds.

The study highlights issues that characterise EAL students' experience in their transition. The literacy narratives highlight first and third year students' perceptions of the challenges they encountered in their school and university-based writing practices. The issues and challenges they expressed in their writing and the interview constituted four principal ideas. These ideas were grouped into four themes for analysis. The study is also a comparison of first and third year student perceptions of their transitions, and of the extent to which students accommodated to or resisted academic writing conventions. I looked at Gee's (1990) formulation which suggests that students are either, in, out or 'colonised' by discourses.

To introduce my discussion, I begin with a definition of the term 'literacy narratives' given in Chapter One. A literacy narrative is a first person account of an individual's journey or process of "becoming literate". They foreground issues of language acquisition, depending on the framing of the task, whether spoken or written, and almost always focus on the transition from home to school or from school to university.

In the next section, I shall attempt to answer the questions I set out to ask in Chapter One.

## 5.1 What can literacy narrative accounts tell us?

According to Lieblich *et al.* (1998), an important aspect of narrative analysis is to look at the context in which it is narrated: for research, for example to participate in a study, the nature of the “audience” and the relationship between writer and reader is significant. Questions such as, do they share the same cultural background or are they of the same gender? become important. The literacy narrative as a text for research, reflects the writer’s identity which is constantly in flux. It contains evidence of the possible constructions of writers’ life experiences that they relate according to specific momentary influences. This thinking is influenced by the constructivist approach I use in my methodology, which claims that by studying narratives we can access not only individual identity but also the writer’s cultural and social world.

The data in first year students’ concluding paragraphs shows how students align themselves with “Western” social and cultural values. Kapp (2000) presents a convincing argument on how the language attitudes and practices of students are embedded in complex and sometimes contradictory processes of identity construction which are influenced and constrained by the school and socio-economic contexts (2000:230). Most EAL students come from relatively poor, working class, rural backgrounds as indicated in some of the first year students’ introductions. The students express a strong determination to succeed at university to transcend the boundaries of these backgrounds as Mdumiseni wrote, “I must say it is demanding but worthy at the end of the day”. This determination to succeed is linked to financial gain and social recognition which shows evidence of the “literacy myth”.

Thesen (1997) and Kapp (2000) found that the choices students make about how to position themselves in particular contexts of their environments can be contradictory but are nevertheless conscious and strategic. I also found evidence of this in the data. An example of this is when a student who is progressing slowly at academic writing, introduces themselves to the reader by writing, “I’m struggling very much to pass...” and concludes by saying, “... I’m going to strive till I get it right, till I get a first class, In my assignments and essays.” This demonstrates how writers can convey contradictory impressions of themselves in writing.

It also reinforces the idea that writing is a social act whereby we make a statement about ourselves and the multiple identities we bring to it can affirm those values, beliefs and practices which we want to keep, and resist those we see as harmful.

The literacy narratives also give accounts of first year students' positive school experiences. They carry status symbols such as, "dux student of the year" and "the most excellent pupil in all my classes" which highlights their academic status in school. This may indicate that they have not developed a critical awareness of the sorts of social constraints which may be responsible for any difficulties they have with acquiring particular discourse types. A frequent pattern is that they blame language, as a medium of instruction, as one of the main reasons for their difficulty. As stated previously, we cannot ignore the fact that most of the students in my study come from ex-DET schools where English was not used as the medium of instruction. If this is done it places EAL learners at a disadvantage. Their "voices" at present are subdued in educational institutions. This could be a consequence of the way institutions still perceive literacy, as "autonomous of social context" (Street, 1991). This privileged form of literacy does not consider the culture of schooling and the social processes that go with it. The 'New Literacy Studies' theorists such as Gee (1990), Street (1991 and 1993), Prinsloo & Breier (1996), Heath (1983) give weight to our thinking that literacy skills are bound up with context-specific social practices and that we need to understand the acquisition of academic literacies in the context of individual disciplines. School experiences in under-resourced settings do not prepare students for university.

Most of the first year students are having difficulty in taking on the cloak of the mainstream discourse practices. They are still in the process of acquiring a number of skills associated with using language in expository talk or text known as "essay-text or essayist literacy". (Gee 1986:731) Skills such as the ability to analyse, summarise, manipulate texts in new contexts are valued and developed. In the academic setting non-mainstreamers do not acquire the necessary composition skills to transfer their creative and verbal abilities to a form that the teacher or lecturer will recognise or accept.

Heath (1983) in her study gives a "Detailed description of what actually happens to children as they learn to use language and form their values about its structures and functions tell us what

children do to become and remain acceptable members of their own communities". (1983:8) Her analysis of the bedtime story routine shows how parents, in this case Roadville's, begin to socialise their children into the literacy practices with which they will need to be familiar at school.

Similar to Heath's (1983) study, this study also highlights the need for continuity between patterns of socialisation and language learning in the student's culture and those practised at educational institutions, to improve their chance of success.

## **5.2 What differences are evident in first and third year students' accounts of transition?**

In this section I discuss the school to university transition of both first and third year students' to highlight the differences between experience.

My focus on writing and identity, in particular, reveals that third year students' responses are examples of how students' perceptions of themselves as writers can change over time. They do not see academic writing conventions as a threat to their writer identities. They show academic maturity in their views on academic conventions, as in, "one has to be structured in what he does" and "your voice must come through". They show more ability to critique because they have a better understanding of 'voice' used in academic writing. They demonstrate this maturity further in the realistic expectations they have of themselves as academic writers, they have spent a longer time at university and as a result have had more exposure to critical thinking (Igglesden 1999), and more of a basis for comparison.

First year students are, in general, still intimidated by academic conventions. One of the students described plagiarism as a criminal offence by saying, "you could be taken to the university courts", which echoed the general feeling of most of the students. They are having difficulty with drawing the line between 'plagiarism' and taking on the voices of the academic discourse community. The notion of 'voice' according to Bartholomae (1985) is that student writers have to, when writing with the discourses of a community, speak not only in another's

voice but also take on the identity of a member of that community. By choosing another voice to express themselves, writers give the impression that they accept the values and beliefs which are associated with that voice. First year students', as apprentice academic writers, are still grappling with how to select and arrange these voices.

Their approach to academic writing conventions is with a sense of powerlessness, "You don't understand why.." and "...they make me not say as the way I see things" The first year student experience of academic writing has been limited to one semester, and to rely on the voices of others is expected.

A significant difference between third and first year students is with regards to the students' sense of "self as author" which is useful in answering the next question.

### **5.3 In, out or 'colonised'?**

The writers' sense of authorial presence in their writing concerns the extent to which they have legitimate authority to represent the identities with which they feel comfortable in writing. Where a writer does not feel authorised to establish their presence in the text they may relinquish authority to other named authorities, to abstract impersonal sources or to the reader. Drawing on the "self as author" model, I wanted to find out if literacy narratives could give an indication of whether students are constrained as writers to a subordinate role.

The background knowledge for this section is from interviews conducted on first year students in a research project by the Department of Academic Development (Igglesden 1999). The project reveals diverse challenges among the so-called "disadvantaged groups" with regard to transition from high school to university. Gee (1990) points out that as learners take on Western style literacy, they are socialised into its discourse practices and value system, and this will usually involve an identity shift. For some learners this is threatening and they will resist it.

This act of resistance was looked at in relation to how first and third year students' differed in their resistance to academic writing conventions. Gee's (1990) concern with the insider, outsider or 'colonised' status did not appear to be a concern of first year students', most of whom did not articulate the desire to develop strategies to resist the conventions of the university discourses. Masopha was an exception, he seems to have reached a stage in his writing where he can establish his own identity against the odds, as for example he says that sometimes he "forgets to reference" and "write my own opinions". Masopha subconsciously resists academic writing conventions by expressing a comfort with using his own opinions in writing. I use the term 'resistance' as meaning an alignment with or an "accommodation to less privileged" secondary discourses rather than a wholesale dismissal of one discourse (Clark and Ivanic 1997: 93). He is aware of the importance of referencing but he also establishes his authority as a writer by valuing his own opinions in academic writing.

First year students reveal in the interview, that at this stage of their academic careers they have not been fully equipped with the learned meta-knowledge, otherwise termed critical thinking that provides strategies to resist being "colonised". They are experiencing shifts in identity.

Third year students, as mentioned earlier, are more familiar with the institution and have had more sustained encouragement with critical thinking. The way they position themselves is not fixed or constant (Ivanic 1998).

A thorough enquiry using both the literacy narrative and the interview data reveal that it would be more useful to look at students academic essays to look for evidence of how students control the discourse and are thus seen as "colonised". This is thus a limitation of the research.

#### **5.4 Other important findings**

The identity dilemma that students are faced with especially in their first year of study, is largely a result of the fact that a change in their discourse practices means a change in identity. These changes in identity are a consequence of the differences in language usage, secondary

discourse practices and school and university writing. The students' perception of school and university is that they are separate, different worlds that need to be crossed in their transition.

A theoretical finding is that non-mainstream students who move from a predominantly oral conversational context at home, to a predominantly written textual context in school are making a transition from contextualised utterance to autonomous text. The 'New Literacy Studies' theorists show that people in "western" literate societies, such as ours, have access to a range of discourse types, in oral and written forms, which changes in their autonomy from context.

The work of Scribner and Cole (1981) suggests that the argument for attributing an improved ability to reason to the acquisition of literacy can no longer be accepted. Instead textual autonomy and the reasoning or analytical skills that accompany it appear to be relevant to Western-style schools.

Students' access to writing conventions was primarily through the Language in Humanities course or previously referred to as the EAP course for third year students. The objective of exploring this theme in the interview was to get an idea of student perceptions of academic writing conventions. First year students', in particular, show a strong reliance on the Language in Humanities course to help them acquire writing skills and thus develop their writer identities they say, "helped me a lot ... introduced us to what is expected of us...". Third year students', some of whom took a critical view of the course, see it as a means of providing students with the necessary tools to equip them in acquiring university-based discourses.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to see what literacy narratives reveal about the writing practices of EAL students. The main perception they have of their transition is that their situations will improve. As a result this perception encourages the idea that literacy equals future success and thus perpetuates the literacy myth. Even though students narrate experiences of difficulty in English as a medium of instruction, they are optimistic that they will achieve success as academic writers.

On the issue of identity to which this research draws attention, Gee (1990) points out that as learners adopt Western style literacies, they are socialised into its discourse practices and value system and as a result a shift in identity is inevitable. The resistance that students take to these practices was explored by looking at whether students accommodated to or resisted academic writing conventions.

Third year students, as indicated in this study, and by Vikki Igglesden (1999), are more likely to take up resistant positions, being both more familiar with the institution and having had more exposure to critical thinking. There is the general expectation by both students and lecturers that by third year, students will be equipped with the necessary tools to master academic discourses.

The common themes that arose in the literacy narratives and the interviews provide the focus for discussion, which culminates in a number of issues in the exploration of the challenges that students encounter in transition from school to university.

An evaluation and implications for curriculum and teaching writing will follow in my concluding chapter.

## Chapter Six - Conclusion

This study has been directed at raising an awareness of the value of using literacy narratives to 'bridge' the world of school and university. Literacy narratives focus on moments when the "self" is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social and emotional development. Literacy narratives then become sites of "self-translation" where students are given the opportunity to articulate, in writing, the meanings and the consequences of their passages between language worlds.

Heath's (1983) detailed ethnographies of communication provide a useful way of showing how students and teachers can 'bridge' their different ways of knowing.

My narrative study explores the literacy narrative as a methodology to 'bridge' the gap in school and university literacy practices and shows evidence that we, as educators, need to redirect our thinking of what may be involved in the process of acquiring academic discourses. The acquisition of these discourses is involved with issues of identity and their relationship to social and cultural environments. The student cannot simply attach a new discourse to an existing identity. The literacy narrative allows students to put into words their 'liminal' crossings between worlds and educators could use this as a starting point for discussion in bridging the gap.

To move away from the autonomous view of literacy, as my research aimed to do, it is recommended by Ballard and Clanchy (1988) that we recognise the fact that students' primary discourses are remote from their secondary (university) discourses. This is where literacy narrative accounts were useful as they highlight the students' experience of their transition from high school to university. It can also make us aware of different discourse contexts, which are meaningful to students. The different literacies must be recognised if we are to allow students to develop their own writer identities.

Literacy narratives are intended, at least in part, to offer “other” images of literacy with the hope that these images would help us to understand and conceive of literacy in ways that value and honour difference rather than erase it. The use of literacy narratives plays a significant role in developing understandings and also insights into other realities and outside school experiences of non-mainstream students. An example of such an issue such as writer identity as revealed by Clark and Ivanic (1997), however, still needs intensive research in order for us to gain a deeper sense of identity construction.

Tied to identity, the discourse practices of students from non-mainstream cultures in South Africa still need to be researched so that these can be practised and valued in all South African educational institutions of learning, in order to address the issue of disadvantage or detriment which non-mainstreamer students experience.

I will attempt to suggest some specific implications of this research to enquire into the issues that this study on literacy narratives as a research method has addressed.

The overarching implication is that the literacy narrative could be included in any program of study concerned with academic writing. It allowed the students and me, the researcher, to discuss writer identity as an act of writing in the context of the writer’s past history and of their position in relation to their social context and possible futures. The issue of identity cannot be ignored in the learning and teaching of writing and this can be achieved by using narratives for communicative purposes. The literacy narrative allows the writer to reflect on their writing experiences in different contexts and thus raises an awareness of writer identity. It also provides a relatively safe environment in which the student has the opportunity to explain, or make sense of contradictory elements.

The literacy narrative is evidence of the value of listening to student writers’ own perceptions. This value needs to be recognised not only as an effective research method but also as a pedagogic practice. We should not be assuming that we know what students need to be taught about academic literacy but rather listen to what they say about their experiences and about the challenges they face as EAL students.

The university needs to recognise the prior discourses of EAL students as resources for both the student and university. The problem of plagiarism in writing has to be addressed through a systematic programme, which aims at addressing academic writing within the curriculum (Angelil-Carter *in* Leibowitz et al, 2000).

Most EAL students have little formal or informal experience of English despite the fact that it remains the sought after medium of instruction. The effects of national language policy changes are still likely to take a long time before they are felt. We need to consider this fact and take it into account in our teaching methods and assessment of 'disadvantaged' students. We can start by giving students the option of expressing themselves in their primary language in tutorial or classroom discussions. Since English as a language is highly desired by ex-DET students we need to ensure that EAL students are not placed in a position where they become observers rather than participants in the academic world because their access has been restricted by inappropriate policy and curriculum development. Teachers and lecturers can probe language learning difficulties by asking specific questions where students are given the opportunity to express themselves in a literacy narrative to raise concerns related to readings or points of confusion, and the teacher or lecturer responds in writing to what the student has written. It can raise an awareness of the student's learning process.

Educators need to review the education curriculum that aims to assist students to live meaningful lives. We should provide them with tools to "learn to read and write critically so that they can carry out the tasks of their lives with some control" (Daniell, B 1999:401).

The narrative approach is more suitable for some purposes than others; reading and interpretation can be conducted in a number of ways. As an approach to writing, the literacy narrative as a tool can enhance learning in the school and university context. Its success as a methodology and as a pedagogic device lies in the fact that it is a familiar writing practice to many students and educators. So it can be used as a starting point from which to engage with academic literacy.

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University of Cape Town

**APPENDIX (A)**  
**(Photocopies of Literacy Narratives)**

University of Cape Town

*First Years*

University of Cape Town

My name is Luzelle Adams. I am a first year student at the University of Cape Town and I am studying social work. I matriculated last year at Steynville Secondary School, in Piketberg. I am from Piketberg. I was the duce-student of ~~the~~ our school last year.

During this year I found out that the way we write essays at school and the way that we write it here, is very different from each other. I find it very difficult to achieve good marks here at University, because of the fact that English is my second language and I know that I am not so good in English. Sometimes it is difficult to express myself when I am writing, because I know I would have done it better in Afrikaans (my first language). I found out that all my tutors have specifically a problem with my grammar. But for me it is very strange, because the way I wrote at school is still the same as ~~the~~ now. And at school I achieved high symbols and now everything is just the opposite. On matric level my symbol in English higher grade was a B. And I thought that my English is good enough to go to an English university. And now I have second thoughts about it.

I still can't understand why my English stayed the same while on the one hand (at school) the teachers were encouraging me because of my good marks and ~~the~~ now, at university, my tutors are having problems with my way of writing. According to them it is not good enough. Sometimes do they not understand what I am trying to say. I think this is the reason why I am not ~~achieve~~ getting such high marks.

On the other hand do I not want to be so strict on myself. I think that I must not make such an issue about it. Maybe it will change over the years.

I hope that I will improve because I plan to study for a very long time at the University of Cape Town. And because this university is English, will it only be a burden for me if everybody is having problems with my way of writing.

University of Cape Town

Dandisane

15/05/00

TRANSITION FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO UNIVERSITY

My name is Dandisane Cabangana. I am 18 years old and currently a Bachelor of Social Science student doing Gender & Women's studies at the University of Cape Town. I was born in the Eastern Cape in Umhlati 18 years ago. I am the youngest daughter of M.D. Cabangana who is a teacher. In this piece of writing, I shall be telling how I went through transition from high school to University.

I did all my lower classes in the Eastern Cape and for all these years I was with my mother.

There was no other way but to perform very well since I was inspired by my mother.

I did not experience any difficulties academically and otherwise. I started to know which direction I was moving to when I was doing standard six at one of the local schools around. It was there I discovered that, God had mercy on me, and gave skills to show in my school work.

As a result on that year I became the best student for year 1996. This prepared me to move to a high school level, where it was believed to be the most difficult place in as far as school was concerned. I went through all that by achieving a lot of things, I won three prizes for different subjects in Standard eight and I was so pleased with myself.

As I moved further to other classes, I also did the same thing. Although in Standard ten I had problems here and there only in the beginning of the year and thereafter I managed to write my final ~~examp~~ examinations and got my matric exemption.

The only thing I thought about was the University and that was the University of Cape Town. Things started to change as I got familiar to the fact that I am now in a very different institution. I cannot lie, i.e., I did experience a lot of problems and basically with my language. As I am an <sup>English</sup> second language speaker, I found myself ~~se~~ trapped because the lectures here are Whites and of course the medium of instruction is English. This put me through a lot, but I can say I'm still surviving.

Another problem I experienced was the work that I had to use on a daily basis. The assignments and essays did make me want to change my mind and quit school, but I thought again, Everything is possible and patience is a ~~virt~~ virtue. That is what keeps me alive at this place. Although these problems existed, I am determined to do very well, study hard and get everything I wish to. Fortunately the situation is understood because there

are extra classes offered for students like me and I am so into them as they help me. Amongst the classes that are helping me is the DOR102 class, language in the humanities. For these reasons, I believe that I will manage to succeed as other people do. It is true that life ~~from~~ at Highschool is totally different from that of Varsity and this can be seen in cases like mine.

I believe that one day, I will be something, in this world even if I went through hard times. Being positive at all times is the only thing that will help me go through everything ahead of me. I see myself as one of the very strongest women in South Africa fighting for our rights.

---

My name is Mdumiseni Lusoseni. I am 19 years old. I attended my high school at Luhlaza. English is my second language. And as an academic writer I find many problems because English at tertiary is crucial. The way I write my Essays and Assignments at university is different from that of high school. There are many rules in academic writing that I am not familiar with.

I can say in high school as a writer we are taught the basic skills of approaching an Essay. For example, in an introduction we were taught to write what we are going to talk about in our Essays and how we are going to structure our points or facts and in the body of an Essay, one has to state the points or facts of the question. In the conclusion that is where the writer's point of view is constructed.

But here at university we do not do that. It is different here because there are rules that need to be followed in each and every discipline. The way we structure our Essays is totally different from that of high school. As an academic writer I have to say clearly where I stand in a Essay question. If I have to agree with the statement, I must

say that clear in my introduction and vice-versa. And in my Essay body that is where I introduce my argument but my argument must not contradict with the author's argument, if I agree with the statement. And even if the argument come from my own mind I have to give reference should the author state or the say opinion or argument as mine. These kind of things are new to me. And they make me not say what I want to say as the way I see thing. There is no too much freedom as an academic writer.

The rules I am talking about are:  
the referencing  
Bibliography and  
the way I structure my Essay.

All of these are important in the Essay.  
Also my argument is very important.

All these thing are new to my knowledge of writing and they make me confused.

There is a lot of improvement though. Because now I am getting used to the academic writer. I must say it is demand but worthy at the end of the day. One day I see my self as a professional academic writer because even the job that I want needs a good writer.

I want to be a journalist.

University of Cape Town

I am Nozuko Matakata and was born in the Gauteng region in a town called Vereeniging. I started going to school when I was seven in a 'black' school called Phameho primary school. In this school I did all my classes from grade one to grade eight. While I was in this school I was always the most excellent pupil in all my classes and I remember that I did not do grade five, I moved from grade four to grade six. When I arrived in grade six I continued to be the best student and there was always a gap between me and the person who was number two (as in our progress reports we were ranged this way).

I left primary school and I went to a school called Esokwazi secondary school which was also a 'black' school. Here I did my grade nine but because my mother bought a house in Port Elizabeth I had to move to another school in Port Elizabeth. I went to a school called Lungisa high school. This school was the best school for me, the education here was very amazing although it was not a 'model c' school as they are called. Here I did grade ten to grade twelve.

My subjects in school were Mathematics; Physical Science; Biology; English; Afrikaans and Xhosa. I chose to do these subjects because I enjoyed doing them and they were my best subjects. When we had to do experiments in Physical Science we did them and also in Biology too. Our teachers insisted all that was in the syllabus and they also strived by involving extra classes. They did their work willingly and voluntarily. I am happy when it comes to my education because it was

the best. I also did well in this school I continued to be the best student and when I was in grade 12, matric, in our trial, September exams I was the top student in all my subjects. I passed my matric very well.

When I finished school I applied to study in the University of Cape Town because I know it was the best university in South Africa. I wanted to do medicine here but because in my form I included my second choice which was Psychology, I was put in Psychology and they explained that there was very much competition in medicine and many applicants, so if one had a second choice they put him or her in his second choice. I was very depressed and did not know where I was going as an academic but I accepted it and lived with it. I am trying to decide now whether I must apply for Medicine next year or I must continue with my Psychology and be a clinical psychologist after all my years of studying? But I hope the answer I come up with will be the best and fulfilling.

As the University of Cape Town is like a world in one environment, it is very difficult to interact with one another due to different languages, customs, race and some strand of culture. I can speak Xhosa, Sotho and Zulu (English) and I can also speak a little bit of Tswana and Pedi (South Sotho). I enjoy speaking other people's language as I value them equally to mine. And as an academic write I enjoy writing in English because it is a language that is understood almost by everyone. Writing is a very interesting string of academia although most of the times it is difficult to do a writing task, unless one has to choose his or her own topic. What makes

writing difficult (be it writing essays, theses etc.) is that, there are correct and incorrect ways of doing it (and that has its purpose for being like that) whereas if people had to write things or about things as they flow in his or her mind it would be more interesting and enjoyable.

As I have mentioned earlier that University is like a world in one environment, I am faced with many challenges according to my education because I always wanted to be the best. But here my dream seems to be shattered as I get fifties too here which I never got previously. This is very frustrating for me as I tend to be more than serious about my results. Because here, we come from different places and countries it will always be 'impossible' to remain in the first class all the times.

If I decide to do medicine starting next year, I shall try to do my best as a writer because I find writing exciting and challenging. I shall strive to do the best in all my subjects. And I have learnt how to present my arguments.

If I decide to do Psychology I will also do my best in writing theses and essays as an academic writer. I hope that I will be what I have to be when I finish my studies at the University of Cape Town.

I hope I have done and mentioned all the things you are doing a project on. If not I will try by all means to meet your requirements.

Tumi

The transition from high school to university was a very stressful one well it still is because one has to cope with all the changes in a couple of days. But the most difficult one is the academic situation.

This transition is very difficult because one is used to <sup>the way I mean teachers, notes, etc.</sup> different ways of teaching but the worst thing is when one writes assignments. Writing assignments at university is definitely different because at school one reads the article and rewrites it in his/her own way but at university one has to question everything and becomes difficult to cope with cause one doesn't learn this at school. It's really confusing.

Academically I'm striving to cope, one has to read stuff & pass, compared to school, where everything was very easy I'm struggling very much to pass, but the wise thing to do is doing all your readings, and ~~reading~~ following all the instructions, and when submitting the assignment/essay <sup>you've</sup> ~~got~~ feeling very confident and then when results come, ~~you've~~ got the lowest mark. This definitely discourages me.

I'm not going to give up, I'm going to stick till I get it right, till I get a first class. In my assignments and essays.

WHO AM I IN THE ACADEMIC  
WORLD (CULT TRANSITION)

I started going to school when I was five years old. Having grown up in rural areas where education opportunities are not abundant due to a number of factors including a lower financial status, my parents struggled for my education. In the primary level, I encountered no problem and I could even write an examination without even studying.

In high school, there was a slight difference. The academic work was more than at a primary level. I had to re-write many text books which were given more than at a primary level. After the lessons, we would have compulsory studies in the afternoons and evenings. At that time, most students, including myself, took the compulsory studying as a punishment.

In high school there was also what we were made to understand as homeworks. Almost all of these homeworks required us to write of either what we were thought or what we were told to read. Our task was to re-tell what we were told or read in our own words. So, there was no much difficulty. Even the examinations were just like that. The only slight difference was that we could not write examinations at our

places just like homeworks. To explain this better I can say all examinations were "live".

It is at high school that I started thinking of my career. At standard eight I already knew what I wanted to be. However, I was not doing the subjects relating to my career only. I also had to do subjects which had nothing to do with what I want to be. I think this is the weakness in high schools.

When I came to UCT, things were totally different. Instead of being teachers, people who taught teach us here are known as lectures. What we used to call lessons, here it is tutorials. At high school I could not write with a pen or a pencil but here I also use the computer which was not available at high school. In high schools our teachers also seemed to be our parents. Here, no one pushes me behind, all the responsibility is in my hands.

However, there are two major academic changes I have encountered beside those listed above. First one; here I am doing subjects (known as courses) relating to my career only. It helps me to focus seriously on my goal. One other change is that instead of writing ~~only~~ what I was taught only, here

have to write my own opinions about I have been taught. Instead of dealing with what other people think, I am trained how to think. Here I can argue what another person has written.

All in all, the university seem to be more than what I expected when I was still at high school. With things being totally different, I think it will take time before I mastermind a total academic adaptation or ~~acclimatization~~ acclimatization to UCT. Now, I feel that I am still in the midst of transition.

University of Cape Town

*Third Years*

University of Cape Town

Name: Phumza Mado

MORRHOOL

Transition, school → University

I did not engage in any academic writing at school, as I did here at University. Writing in school was very limited in the sense that even the historical essays, that we wrote, were just a mere continuation of the cramming of facts, dates and events. There was no critical writing, critical analysis, as is the case in University.

Where do I come from?

I come from a hard period of battling in writing academically. My first year was the most challenging, new environment, new ways of studying, reading and most importantly and crucially, writing. Writing in academia, needed practising, a lot of hard work and it was difficult for me to quickly adapt. Reading and writing in academia go together as far as I am concerned, for you write critically, what you have read critically. Reading academic work was another area, that needed to be clarified, especially for pupils/students out of high school, needed to be told to look at documents with a critical eye, question the author's views, agree or disagree with them, then after all the above have been done, it's then you put it on paper.

Where am I now?

I am getting there, I can say I am being groomed, a into an academic writer, who is able to be critical when reading academic material, who is able to select important facts and material from the readers, construct a clear strong argument, not to mention cohesion and coherence in the document itself, structure is also crucial in keeping the form of the document, in order to keep the reader of that document in touch with the material on the essay. As an academic writer I ~~am~~ have indeed improved.

Where Am I going?

Journalism is where I want to go to, I am involved in the newspaper, writing articles for the sports column. My academic writing has assisted me in excelling in this newspaper. It has especially in areas of writing, reading and analysing documents, even what people say, when being interviewed. Listening is also of crucial importance, especially in the arena of newspaper and History. The courses that I did first year, were indeed a good foundation, especially English for Academic purposes and Critical Thinking.

My name is Siyambonga LIMANI, I was born in Transkei in a small village at Nqate Township (Qmama). I started my schooling at the nearby school called Mhlobo J.S.S. We used English and Xhosa textbooks, we were taught in English by Xhosa was used mostly, to interpret everything to us.

I moved to Umtata for my Senior Secondary schooling, and I was lucky to be in a school where the medium of communication was English. As a boy from rural areas I struggled a bit in that strange, or rather new environment. I became exposed to, but with hard work I pulled through.

When I moved to UCT I already had a confidence in the language (English) which obviously isn't my mother tongue. I became determined to succeed despite the challenges - complexities of it. At school we were taught very differently in terms of academic writing. So when I was in first year I couldn't adjust easily. The form of writing was too tightly, precise, objective and procedural. I struggled with finding an identity as my

brain started to be flooded with  
Western schools of thinking. Despite this  
fact my academic writing was fine

I did the EAP at first year which I  
felt very angry about it. Because  
for the first time when I worked  
very hard to be at university 'Some-  
one could come and say / assume  
my understanding of the English  
language is poor. I needed' some  
what ever. Because I felt it singled  
out people particularly black students  
and categorised or labelled them  
which emotionally was not ok.

But thank you I did it, because  
through writing academically, my  
insight was sharpened and again I  
learned the fact that I could use  
this form of writing to repair my  
identity and not lose it.

At second and third year I didn't  
have any severe difficulties in  
academic writing but obviously  
the fact that English is a second  
language will still be a fact and time  
will make it up someday. I have  
a dream of publishing one day.

# Maria Mangope

My name is Maria Mangope. I am 21 years old and I am doing my last year in Psychology and Industrial Psychology. I was born in Johannesburg but my early childhood was spent in Botswana with my grandparents. I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> born out of 4 girls. I am an outgoing, talkative and enthusiastic individual with great determination to achieve and a positive attitude towards life. Although my mother tongue is Setswana, I consider English to be the language that I am highly knowledgeable of, as I can read, write and speak it better than all the 5 languages I know.

My early schooling started in Botswana and in 1990 I came to South Africa where I attended a 'coloured' school for a year. The primary language of instruction was Afrikaans. The next year in 1991 I attended Winchester Primary which is a multiracial English medium school. I completed my std 4 and 5 there and in 1993 I started std 6 at yet another multiracial school called Mandear high school. Mandear was a very good school which placed high emphasis on academic excellence and all round development. It is there where I feel I learned the skills of being a writer.

At high school I was one of the top students in most of my subjects. This was a very good achievement especially for a non-English first language speaker. I did though, use to get D's for English and I consider it to have

been my weakest subject. I think the reason this was so, is because I lacked the ability to be creative. I think that English required one to be creative. I was though, very good in history and it is this subject which I feel equipped me greatly with the <sup>basic</sup> necessary writing skills that helped me at University. I feel that the only difference between history and University writing is that one has to research and reference. In a way, I found University writing easier as one just had to research and from then on construct an argument. I feel that I did not have a problem grasping university writing quickly and the fact that I was on the Dean's merit list serves as evidence that I coped with university writing. This is so as most of my subjects used essay writing as a means of assessment.

I found Doh 100 course to be a useless course. Although it did help me or rather introduced me to University writing I felt that the course was very slow. I did not understand why I had to do the course as firstly I had a D for English and I found the test they used to assess as to who needed the course extremely easy. Although I didn't put too much effort in the course as I saw it as an insult to my intelligence I got the class

medal for the course.

Currently, I feel I know what is required of me with regards to writing at University. I am still coping well with my academics. The reasons my standards have dropped from first year are such as laziness and lack of time management.

Lastly I attribute coping the transition from high school to University to the fact that I was used to the teaching style. I also have the ability to learn quickly and I always strive to do my best at whatever task I put my heart to.

*This essay will focus on where I come from and where I am hoping to go. I will give a brief overview of my family and my hobbies.*

*Firstly, I am 20 years old and my hobbies are reading and writing. I come from a family of five. I am the second eldest. I have one sister and one brother. I come from a very close knit family. I was born in 1980 at the Somerset hospital in Cape Town. I grew up in Langebaan and Plettenbergbay. My father's job entails a lot of travelling thus we as a family had the opportunity live in different provinces. We moved to Cape Town when I was in standard three. I thus completed my schooling in Cape Town. I attended Blossom Street primary school and Athlone high school. I was very involved in extra-mural activities at school. I was a prefect in primary school and during high school I was involved in a life skills program. This life skills program helped me tremendously with shaping what I wanted to do when I leave school. It also gave me confidence to tackle the world head on. I matriculated in 1997 and I decided to register at UCT for my BSOCSC degree.*

*My first year at UCT was a difficult one. I found lecturers intimidating and the institution as a whole I found threatening. One of the subjects that were acting as a support base was the ADP course. The lecturer Stella Clark was more than teaching English she was acting as a mediator. She was concerned about our transition from school to varsity and gave the class the support base we so desperately needed. She illustrated that UCT need not be threatening because we made it through the door because of our academic capabilities. This made a huge impact on me. Personally, I found this class therapeutic. Why you may ask? Because at UCT you thrown into this new environment with no emotional support. I found it difficult to adjust but with time and equipped with the right attitude and support I started to like the studying atmosphere UCT projects. My second year was a tough ride emotionally as I went through some personal obstacles but my third year is challenging and exciting. This excitement is reflected in my enthusiasm to get involved in the activities that UCT has to offer. As a result I am an aspiring journalist for varsity news. I got involved with the newspaper as a journalist the beginning of 2000. Attached to this essay is a copy of my recent article. The reason why I enjoy being involved with Varsity News is that I enjoy writing. I now make a point of raising issues that concerns the varsity community and I investigate it and I voice my opinion and the opinion of the students. My*

*articles thus far had a positive impact and a positive response from students.*

*I will now turn to my future plans. My future plan is to do my Ph.D. in gender studies. I will be registering for my honors next year. The reason for this is because I am passionate about gender issues. I am an advocate for women's issues but also an advocate for equality between the sexes. Thus I will be specializing in what I am passionate about. Hopefully I will be employed in the private sector as a gender trainer. I would also want to work for independent newspapers as a freelance journalist as I am passionate about writing. I am convinced that I crossed the ocean (uct is an ocean) and I survived my undergraduate days without major problems. I am swimming with the tide and enjoying it.*

*In conclusion, this essay gives a brief overview of my life. It demonstrates where I come from and where I am hoping to go. I hope the above will assist you in your quest.*

## **APPENDIX (B)**

*Symbol >> is used to represent the interview question*

*Interview questions are typed in bold.*

## First Year Students

**Interview- Luzelle Adams**

**(13:30 Wednesday)**

**>>In your literacy narrative you say you have difficulty in expressing yourself in writing as a second language English speaker. Do you feel that the reason for your achieving low marks is a result of this?**

Yes. I know what I want to say but when I explain it's not the same, its sounds different. I can't write exactly what I want to say. I don't use the words I want to use.

**>>So how do you deal with overcoming this difficulty?**

I was thinking about it but I really don't know.

**>>Have you spoken to your tutor about it?**

Ja and he and he suggested that I must have more discussions with people because they are really going to help me. Because I'm used to speaking Afrikaans, I think in Afrikaans. I don't know if its going to help me. But I hope it's going to help me.

**>>You mention that the way you wrote at school is the same way you are writing at university?**

I still can't understand it because at school my aggregate symbol was a B and so according to my tutors its good they not saying its not a B but it's the way I write here they all have a problem with and at school my teachers never have a problem with it. I don't know if there is a different way that teachers mark my papers, if maybe there is a different way here. But I know I'm still doing the same thing, the same way I did it at school.

**>>You have been writing at varsity for a full semester, do you think that you are doing something different?**

Ja my writing now is different from school. The way we use the language it's different. The structure and the way we use the language is different from school.

**>>You mentioned earlier that you had a problem because you were writing the same way as you had been taught at school.**

I know its still the same so I don't get the point why... what is the problem but I know there is a problem with my marks. I don't know how to overcome this.

**>>You say that "your English was good enough to go to an English university. Why did you choose UCT?"**

After I'm finish studying I want to go to overseas. And I know that they are not speaking Afrikaans there, English is the medium. And I thought well if I study in English and make

more use of English, I'll understand people better there and then in the Western Cape there is only UWC and UCT and Stellenbosch. And I don't want to go to Stellenbosch, UWC so UCT is good.

**>>At school what genre of writing did you enjoy? By genre I mean poetry, letter writing, short stories.**

Letter writing.

**>>And how can you link this genre of writing to your academic writing practices.**

Oh in letter writing it's like I speak to you. It's not, well I write to a person – I tell you something and in academic writing it's not the same.

**>>What is the difference?**

I'm explaining something, but it's not like, you telling someone something, but it's not the same.

**>>Do you feel that your school writing prepared you for university?**

No. Definitely not!

**>>So what didn't it do for you?**

Because I realised after I did DOH102, I wouldn't have been able to write academic essays. In the other courses they just assume that you know how to write it. And here they tell us how to write. See if I didn't do it I wouldn't have known what is going on. So I don't think the school helped me in any way.

**>>Let's look at how you wrote at school and how you write now, and what the course has taught you, what is different?**

No response.

**>>You say that in the DOH102 course you were taught how to write an academic essay.**

I learnt how to reference proper about good and bad introductions and opinions. Which is not the same as I learnt at school and the specific structure. And the words you suppose to use. There's certain words that express your feeling about things, if you try to say, if you don't agree with someone then you can say ... There's a word which I can't remember at the moment, "assume to" and that gives an indication that you don't agree.

**>>At this stage of academic writing, can you write in your own words?**

Do you mean on my own?

**>>Do you actually use the first person “I ” in your writing when you agree or disagree with a writer?**

You can do it but then you have to give evidence.

**>>So you feel comfortable with referencing in your own writing?**

We are supposed to reference, we can't say something, we have to give reasons why.

**>>If you have your own idea do you write it as your own?**

No!

**>>Why not?**

Because for me to agree with that person there must be some passage that I read for not agreeing with that person. If I didn't read somewhere that didn't give me an indication, then how can I write it down?

**>>So you'd have difficulty in writing an essay without referencing?**

Yes.

**>>How do you feel about academic writing conventions?**

I like it, its nice. I think I would have enjoyed it more if I learnt it at school.

**>>Do you have any problems with adhering to these conventions? Such as writing a bibliography....**

No. all of us read the orange book for DOH courses. Stella went through that and I think its nice to reference now. I like it. There's only one thing I hate and that's the introduction. I don't know. It's so stupid!

**>>What do you mean?**

Well my tutor in DOH101 said we are supposed to use 100 words. You only say what you want to say. It's not a whole paragraph, you can do it in one sentence.

**>>Is that what you did at school?**

Yes, definitely because at school you write only a few hundred words. And now you writing 1500 words or 1200 words. Sometimes when I wrote like 500 words then I don't know what to write anymore then I remember that oh Stella taught us that there's something more to add to what we wrote. But its that difficult and sometimes it is difficult.

**>>Do you have a problem with this i.e. the number of words or explaining.**

No not really. Sometimes when I have to write an essay, what I wanted to say ends on 800 words then it becomes difficult because I know I'm suppose to write 1500 words but in 800 I've already said what I wanted to say.

**>>So do you submit it as 800 words?**

No, no I usually read my paper over again or essay again until I can get 1500 words.

**>>Do you do a word count, where did you learn this?**

At school.

**>>That hasn't changed?**

No. Well it gives me an indication when I am finished. I say 100 words more, I'm finishing soon.

**>>Tell me more about how you adjust to the English medium of instruction at UCT.**

I read a lot.

**>>Is it books from UCT library or leisure reading?**

No, story books from the library – Rondebosch. I mean, I think that way I'll be more confident to use English. That's why I can't understand, I've done such a lot of readings and my marks are low here. I don't understand the reason why. I don't know.

**>>What would you consider a good mark at UCT?**

70%.

**>>So do you work to get that percentage?**

Well I can see by my marks that I'm getting better and better every time especially in the language in Humanities course. It's the first time today that I got 71%.

**>>Well done!**

In all my other courses its getting better. From 53, 63 only DOH101. It is not good! I don't want to go there.

**>>So you still working on that?**

I am working on it.

**>>So you are improving. Now think of yourself as a writer, do you see yourself going in a particular direction?**

I know I will improve because my marks are improving. I will get better.

**>>So do you look at your mark to tell you whether you have written a good essay or do you after reading it feel that it has the potential to be good?**

When I am finished I feel this is good according to me and when the mark is also good then I know its good. But I don't know why sometimes when I give in my paper then I feel I should change something.

**>>Do you feel its your own work and feel good?**

No sometimes I just give it in.

**>>Would you say that your ideas of yourself as a writer when you were at school have changed now that you are at university?**

What do you mean?

**>>When you were at school did you write the same way as you do now as an academic writer?**

I'm not sure. At school I was taught only to write what I feel and here before you start writing you discuss it first get your points of view, the other points of view then you think about it then you see both points of view. So it is different now.

**>>Do you use other people's point of view as well as your own?**

Other point of view, but its not like only mine is there. You have to look at both ideas.

**>>So where in the essay do you put your point of view?**

It depends if I feel strongly about something then I will look for evidence so that I can prove myself better.

**>>Do you feel that the ways of writing at UCT are important?**

It definitely learnt me to see other points of view.

**>>What about its importance to your career choice? What are you studying?**

I'm studying social work.

**>>Let's go outside UCT, is there anything that you can use your academic writing skills for?**

No.

**>>Tell me about your transition from school to university. Has it been difficult?**

Yes

**>>What did you actually struggle with?**

English. All my friends speak English. They don't understand Afrikaans sometimes I speak in Afrikaans in an office and then I see that the lady can't speak Afrikaans back. Then I just go on and you just have to struggle with Afrikaans because I refuse to speak English.

**>>So are you also improving in your arguments as a first person writer in essays? For example, you put the writers idea and then you agree or disagree following what you have written.**

In a way my essay is structured like that. But I won't give my point of view most of the time.

**>>How did you feel about writing a literacy narrative?**

It wasn't difficult. Its almost the same as we were taught at school.

**>>Did it make you think about yourself as a writer?**

That thing has always been on my mind. I did think of it because I always do.

*End of interview*

**>>In your literacy narrative you say “UCT is the only varsity you thought about” Why?**

Okay basically having heard what UCT is like I thought if I come here I would have the best education here. There’s no other reason, there’s varsities at home but I just wanted to come here.

**>>Did any influence your decision to come to UCT?**

I think it was my own because my mother didn’t approve at first. So I tried to convince her. It was basically my idea – no-one else did.

**>>What did you mean in your literacy narrative by “life at high school was different from that of varsity”?**

what I meant is here things are done differently. Here you have to do things on your own. You don’t like, you don’t have to get (like at school) everything is from the teacher, you will go out and find things on your own, which was not done at high school. We did have some things to research about but it was totally different. The life you lived was very much different.

**>>Tell me more about what you find different about the environment.**

Okay, first of all you all by yourself, there’s no-one, you do whatever you think is good for you. It depends on you. Even if you have relatives here, during school hours they are not here. Even when to do your assignments no-one is going to ask have you done them. And socially life is too fast- not that it wasn’t back home it was but my parents were there.

**>>You mentioned that the Language in Humanities course which you refer to as the DOH101 course helped you. How did it help you?**

It did help me a lot because it introduced us to what is expected of us here. First of all as I came here I didn’t know anything about referencing things like...it gave me the basics that’s how it helped me. Write an essay at school you write “my school”, whatever, here you have to critically think about whatever text you given. In that sense it did help me.

**>>Did you experience problems adjusting to the English medium of instruction and change in writing practices at UCT?**

Okay, first of all most unfortunately the school I went to last year, and the previous years, wasn’t a very good school. Like we were taught in English but the teacher was able to say this is what I mean in my home language which is Xhosa. So here everything is done in English, there is no time where you have to if you don’t understand in English then someone will translate in Xhosa. So in that way it was difficult for me, so you given something to analyse. When you look at it you see those big words which are not very easy to at first to think about. You refer to the dictionary, sometimes it will tell you something differently. It’s very difficult for me, it’s... pause no-one explains this is what the question means, fine some tutors do that

but not all so you have to find it on your own.

**>>What about the different academic writing conventions such as referencing?**

Ja, that was the problem but as I've mentioned the DOH102 then, one thing I like about that is it's the very first course I attend everyday so whatever I'm expected to write in the following period the tutor explains. So when I go there I know what to do but at first it was not easy. I'm still experiencing a few problems.

**>>Do you think that there is a way out from those problems that you are experiencing?**

I think there is. I believe everything is possible. The people doing their Masters degrees some have been through this so I believe if they succeeded then I may too.

**>>Let's go back to school writing practices. Which genres of writing did you enjoy? By genres I mean letter writing, poetry, short stories, essays etc.**

I think letter writing including essays because I can come up with my own ideas, sometimes even lie.

**>>Can you use those writing practices that you learnt in your academic or university writing practices?**

Well, I think they might help you in one way or another but what I've noticed here is you don't write about something. You critically analyse it, in all my courses that's what I've been taught. So now here you have to think, you don't just write.

**>>Would you say that your schooling prepared you for university?**

Well, it did, the fact that I'm here and still pass means I've gained something from high school.

**>>Now think of the writing you did in high school, did it prepare you for university writing practices?**

Well I think it did. Like now the problem of critically analyse writing something a text prepared me. Because I know how to write like an introduction, they never change. Like wherever you go you always told you write an introduction, body, conclusion so it's the same thing here.

**>>Do you use the first person "I" in your writing?**

At first I was afraid but as I went through my writings...I found that its one of the things that we are expected to do. The other persons view you write then your own, so you argue from your own point of view.

**>>How do you feel about academic writing conventions?**

To be honest with you this is my first time...so, so I don't know what they are preparing me for. It is possible that they helping me for something although sometimes it is hard. You think you writing in your own words or you have the same ideas with...only to find out you plagiarised but there is no problem except that it is difficult sometimes.

**>>What happens in a case like that when you have the same ideas, do you go ahead and write it as your own idea?**

Well, I do write it if it's quite similar to my own but I try and make some differences, but I try and write it in my own words which I think is not plagiarism.

**>>Think of yourself as a writer, have your ideas of yourself as a writer changed since you entered university?**

I think I have some foundation with the courses. So I think I can do more that I thought I could because I know about point of view, how to present yourself things like that. So I think I can be a good one.

**>>Can you actually see yourself developing as a writer? Are you going in any particular direction?**

Yes I do. Because at first I wanted to be a journalist so I see myself as a good writer.

**>>Let's go back to the literacy narrative, did you have a problem writing it?**

No, not at all.

**>>As you were writing it, what effect did it have on you?**

As I was writing I realised who I am. This is who I am at UCT and there is something waiting for me outside of varsity, I must make the best of it. As I was writing I know this is me. I didn't think, I just wrote what I think I true.

*End of interview.*

**>>You say that there is a difference in essay writing at university in comparison to school essay writing. Tell me about this difference.**

The difference is that the standard at university is high and the we are expected to follow certain rules in order to write. But in high school we were expected to memorise facts and write about facts only. But here we argue with the writer and find some faults.

**>>Do you always look to find faults when you do an essay?**

If you are a critical analyst, you need to state your facts critically, find faults with the author.

**>>You talk about the conclusion as the place where the writer's point of view is constructed. Is this where you put your point of view?**

No, just put your point of view after you have quoted what the writer is saying. Then you also reveal your argument.

**>>Is this different from school?**

Ja, it's very different. Because at school you just write facts about an essay.

**>>You also mention that the university is different because there are rules that need to be followed. Tell me more about these rules.**

The rules that we need to follow, if I say something and maybe the other author has said it before like in his writing so I have to quote her words because it will be called plagiarism. Maybe even though I didn't see the writer's point, it's just coming on top of my mind. And now I will have to say it's from so and so.

**>>If you have an idea before reading about it do you put it down as your own?**

You have to change your whole essay because it will be called plagiarism. We are told you could to be taken to the courts so we have to state that it's from the writer's point of view.

**>>In your literacy narrative, you say that you don't have much freedom as an academic writer. What is it that is "limiting" you as a writer?**

Because (pause) what I've just said like you have to quote other writers points. If you feel like you don't want to but you are forced to do that because if you don't do it then your argument is not valid.

**>>You also say that your writing has improved. How do you know that your writing is improving?**

Before I came here I didn't know all the things and then when I tried to write in the rules they have set for writing. I found it difficult at first but now I see that I can improve. Even my essays are getting better.

**>>Is it your marks that tell you whether you are improving?**

Ja, my marks.

**>>When you arrived at UCT did you have any problems with English as the medium of instruction?**

Ja, cause like I was doing it as a second language and here we use English as a medium. It's, sometimes the lecturer can make a joke and I won't hear the joke. I will just hear people laughing, it affected me a lot. Also the words that they use here at UCT are big words. I have to go to the dictionary to know them.

**>>Does the dictionary help you?**

Ja, it does sometimes but sometimes it doesn't.

**>>Why did you choose UCT to study?**

I chose UCT because like first its hear where I stay and because I was told it's the best university in Africa, so I chose to come here.

**>>Let's talk more about your schooling, did your school prepare you for university?**

No I don't think my school prepared me fully for university because like what we had done at school is totally different to this one. I should have come maybe like (pause). There is a chance that a person who never attended high school can also come to university and get good marks even though he didn't go to school. So I don't think school prepared me.

**>>Think about your writing practices, is there anything that you learnt in high school that you are still doing at university?**

No, I don't remember.

**>>What about the structure of essays, intro, body and conclusion?**

Ja. But it's different according to how do you write a conclusion.

**>>So the structure is the same but what you put in the intro, body and conclusion is done differently?**

Ja.

**>>When you were at school, which genre of writing did you enjoy? When I say genre I say genre I mean short stories, poetry, letter writing and compositions.**

I enjoyed writing essays because I'm good at memorising.

**>>Do you consider memorising facts as important for university writing?**

It's not important because you can't succeed in memorising theories, though it's good to read with understanding.

**>>What help are you getting with overcoming your writing challenges?**

Ja, there is a course called DOH101 which is the Language in Humanities. It's helping us to cope with academic writing.

**>>The course, I'm told teaches you about academic writing conventions. How do you feel about these conventions?**

I feel like I know more as a person because you know many terms that are used in different essays.

**>>Have your ideas of yourself as a writer change since entering university?**

Okay, I think they have changed but there's no big change in writing. But I think it will change as I go on.

**>>Do you use lots of references in your essays?**

Yes

**>>Do you get better marks when you reference more?**

I get better marks when I reference. Because like I just say my point without looking at other writers

**>>How do you see yourself developing as a writer?**

Writing is still difficult for me. But I think will progress as time goes.

**>>When you wrote your literacy narrative, did you experience in difficulties in writing it?**

No,

**>>What effect did writing the literacy narrative have on you?**

It made me think much more about what I got from the high school and what I'm doing now. I am improving in writing.

**>> Tell me about Lungisa school that gave you an “amazing education”**

It's just that because sometimes in black schools when you have to do experiments and some things that are connected to the course, they don't do that, they don't experiments. They just concentrate on what is in the text books so in my school it was not like that we went to the labs. We did all the extra murals. So ja that is why we referred to it as amazing. And most pupils or students from model c schools they tend to think that in black schools they like teach more ( pause ) disadvantaged.

**>> Why did you decide to do this course?**

I didn't decide –they asked me why did I want to do medicine. And I said I wanted to work with people so they told me that that's another alternative for me- its okay if I can do Psychology. I just put Psych. I had to have a second choice but I didn't know what Psych was all about. And I was told I was going to do it. Ja, so they told me that because there's too much competition in medicine I can also go to Psych.

**>> Why did you find “fitting in” at UCT difficult?**

Because as I've mentioned in my thing, UCT is like a world in one community, because there are people who come from other countries, people with different races so it was difficult for me. As I was always first class in my school. Like in matric, in my trial exam I was the top student. So it's difficult for me to be like that as I had expected because here there are many people who came from different schools, there's too much competition.

**>> Do you feel that other students have more of an advantage?**

Ja. There is more of top students. So I have to compare myself with other top students. Instead of like in school I was the only top student and I knew that I would do my best and there's was a gap between me and other students. So now here there are like more of us.

**>> Did you experience any difficulty in using English as a medium of instruction at UCT?**

Ja, I did a little even though they always encouraged us to speak English in school because everything was taught in English except for Xhosa ja. So everything was taught in English even in Afrikaans when they tried to explain things they used English because people, most of the people who taught us even though they were coloured people, most of the people who taught us were Xhosa so sometimes they used Xhosa to explain. So it was like difficult because we were not used to it.

**>> Did you have any difficulty adjusting to the writing practices?**

We used to write essays and assignments so I was used to it. My problem was that there it was more advanced because we knew that we had to write the introduction, body and the

conclusion but some words are critical analysis stuff. The critical means balanced argument, it doesn't mean to criticise, so most of things like that concepts, ja.

**>> How did you adjust to the academic writing conventions?**

I wrote drafts and then I gave them to my tutors early before the due date.

**>> What about things like referencing, bibliographies, amongst others. Were you used to doing this in writing?**

No. I was used to doing bibliography. It was not strict like here you have to reference everything that is not from your own view.

**>> Did you write in your own words?**

I do not have problem writing in my own words but it's just that in some essays you have to reference, you have to research to collect information.

**>> Do you get better marks when you reference more in an essay?**

Ja, I think it does because somehow they can see that you've done more readings and you've done some research on the topic.

**>> What happens when you have an idea and after doing research you read it in another author's work. What do you do? Would you rather acknowledge it as the author's?**

it's a bit of a problem because sometimes you didn't know that someone has written that idea. You wouldn't have read all the books so you would think it's your own idea, and then somehow they say you have to reference so as not to plagiarise.

**>> What is your understanding of the word "plagiarism"?**

I think plagiarism means you take someone's ideas and you copy them down as your own without acknowledging the person.

**>> Why did you choose to study at UCT?**

Because when I graduate I want to be recognised like in terms of finding a job. Because I know that UCT was referred to as the best University. And like most of the people from outside, from countries like overseas they come here. And I wanted to know more about other cultures.

**>> Are you learning more about other cultures?**

Ja, a bit.

**>> Going back to schooling, which genre of writing did you enjoy? Genres like poetry, short stories, essays, letter writing.**

I enjoyed poetry. But we didn't have to write poems, we just had to analyse poetry. I enjoyed it in English most of all because they taught us about figures of speech, so I was more interested in those figures of speech.

**>> Are you able to use your poetry writing skills in your academic essays?**

Ja, I am able to apply them because in Text and Contents DOH101 course, they taught us most of the things like power and irony. So we have to see that in some of the titles that use alliterations to make them sound better. They made examples of advertisements.

**>> Would you say that your schooling prepared you for university writing practices?**

Ja, I would say so, even though it was like in disguise.

**>> Are there any school writing practices that you are bringing to your academic writing practices?**

I already knew from school that in an essay you have to have a body, introduction and conclusion. Like the word "I" you can't use it more. your essay has to be formal.

**>>The use of the word "I" which is the first person pronoun do you use it in your academic writing?**

I thought that I have to do it. Because they advised us not to use the first person. So I always say like one can deduct, one can.

**>> Tell me do you consider the ways of writing important for your future career or interests?**

Ja, I consider them important as like I saw when we were doing some writings on Ramphele, so I saw how she wrote because she didn't do a degree in Education but she did medicine, she knew how to write so I thought it's important to learn how to write.

**>> Think of yourself as a writer, have your ideas as a writer changed since you entered university?**

They've changed because I didn't believe that I could write let me say professionally. I would just write friendly letters stuff like that. But how I know that I can write a thesis. I know that I didn't need to use colloquialism. So I know how to be objective.

**>> Are there any other challenges that you are faced with in academic writing?**

In academic writing my difficulties were that in Texts in Context ja, we were writing an assignment on District Six so we had to analyse some photo. So we were doing a visual analysis. In that photo there was a man so we had to, and it was said that time it was the sixties and District Six was to be declared as a white area. So people were being chased out, Coloured, Jewish, Blacks. So now we had to analyse that photo in terms of that knowledge. So I used more of like thus implies that, it symbolises that but I got 50% because they told me I don't have to say that, I have to assume. I have to show them that I'm not sure. Because I didn't see that person who took that photo and asked him so I couldn't be sure what it means.

**>> Do you understand where you went wrong?**

Ja, how I do understand.

**>> How do you see yourself developing as a writer?**

I don't think I'll be doing much of writing.

**>> Is this because of your career choice?**

Ja, because of my career.

**>> Do you see yourself doing postgraduate studies at UCT?**

I see myself doing like honours. But I want to finish up undergrad.

**>> So, coming back to the literacy narrative. Did you have any problems writing it?**

No, cause it's about me.

**>> What effect did it have on you as a writer?**

While I was writing I was thinking back so I remember everything. It made me remember what I've gone through. I've just seen that I've taken a long way to like stop now, I have to proceed.

**>> Do you see yourself going through first semester successfully, ready to face the challenges of the second semester?**

Ja, I do.

*End of interview.*

**>>Tumi in your literacy narrative why do you describe your transition as “strenuous”**

Well I did that because that's how I felt. I thought I couldn't handle it because in high school everything was made easy for me whereas here you do more courses and everything is demanding. You have to prepare everyday for tuts, you have to read otherwise, my goodness it's really hectic.

**>>Tell me more about the differences you experienced in writing at school and writing at varsity.**

Oh okay. At school all you had to do is rewrite whatever from the comprehension, answer the questions. Get straight to the point. Whereas here you have to really read between the lines and have to understand, and actually put your own opinion about it, you have to criticise, you have to say if you agree with it or not. Does it make sense to you, so ja that's the difference.

**>>You mentioned that you found the low marks very disturbing, what do you think could be the reason for you getting low marks at UCT?**

I think it's because what I think for me to get low marks, I did not do my readings properly, I just did reading regularly and not between the lines. I think my tutors should have emphasised on that, that you should read between the lines and criticise. Well the readings some of them are very difficult to understand. English for me is my second language so it's hard, even the dictionary sometimes it (laugh) doesn't work. The dictionary actually confuses me more. So ja...

**>>You said you have to criticise, what about agreeing with the writer?**

Ja, your opinion also matters. If you agree you actually have to have your own reasons you know and support them very well with the tutor, the one who's gonna be marking.

**>>In your literacy narrative you say very little about your school background. Tell me about this background.**

Okay. At school umm I used to hate school (laugh) but I did very well. I did six subjects and I thought there were demanding then but I did very well. I, I used to get first class you know, it was actually exciting. And I was you know cooperative in class. Never shy, you know, just say my opinions what you think. It was actually easier, the teacher to you becomes a mother, can talk to her easily whereas here ha, ha (laugh) it's so difficult, because there are a lot of races, you know. I don't know somehow white pupils, children, from their school are used to this kind of environment, raising your opinion. Whereas for me I was attending a private school but it was only Blacks because it was in a local school in Diepkloof Soweto. So ja I don't know, some of the things that they say you just don't understand. Well the tutors are like ja, ja, ja, and I say no, no I don't understand (laugh) I had difficult with a tutor in this other course that I was doing for this semester, the 101 one. The is not originally English so she has this thing that English is just like this and... cause probably it's my second language I had a lot of difficulties with it and whenever I went to her she did not really help because she would say

“you not supposed to worry about that, worry about your next essay” but I followed every instruction, how come I got such a low mark? She would say “go, go prepare for your next assignment and do your very best” because I was really, I wanted to know my weak points and I wasn’t helped. Ja.

**>>Tumi how did you adjust to writing in English and the writing practices?**

How did I what?

**>>How did you experience problems with adjusting to now writing in English all the time...**

Okay, well... the things is the first and most biggest problem I experienced was understanding every word, what you supposed to do...like...I can’t find the word (laugh) it was very difficult. Sometimes you think you know what you supposed to write, and when you read it, it doesn’t sound the way you want it to sound. Then you actually have to write it over and over again so ja expressing yourself and understanding that was difficult.

**>>What impact do you think your school writing had on your university writing? Did it influence your university writing in any way?**

In a way ja it did. It, it introduced the basics like an essay has an introduction, a body and a conclusion. That was basically it. And it was fine for high school because okay it did not actually matter okay it did because you had to introduce the whole thing the whole assignment essay whatever you writing and then the body talk about it, and then the conclusion summarise whatever. Whereas here what you gonna do, the introduction, you write introduce whatever you gonna write then the body you write all about it then conclusion. Well here you have to raise your opinion, you say I disagree with it and these are why blah, blah, blah. Then or I agree with it you know this is why I say language and stuff or whatever. Ja.

**>>When you are writing where do you choose to agree/disagree? Do you do it only in your conclusion?**

Well, it depends on the question. Because sometimes they say hmmm Read three texts and then compare and contrast umm your opinion, what you think about that so you gonna tell the reader in the introduction that you gonna compare and contrast and about the three articles. And whereas probably when you go along, you should raise okay probably say the reader says umm I think English should be the only official language and you’d say writing it, you’d probably say the “reader claims that you know... So by using claims you actually umm leading the reader to think that okay by using claims you not actually agreeing to that statement and you can make something like that throughout then at the end you can really say, or you can actually in the introduction say and these are the reasons why and then write your conclusion.

**>>Where did you actually learn how to do this?**

In this class the DOH102. That’s the one they actually introduce you to such things.

**>>Still staying at school, which genre of writing did you enjoy? By genre I mean poetry, short stories, letter writing, composition.**

Well, we used to do letters and compositions and then poetry I'm not a poetic person. It's not really my thing...

**>>So which one did you enjoy?**

Letters because they were easy for me just go straight to the point. They used to say "go straight to the point" don't say "how you doing my friend" just go straight to the point, I'm writing this letter because this is it and then er....

**>Just the essentials. Can you actually use these practices in academic writing?**

Because you have to stay focused to the point of what you are writing about and just don't drift away you know talk about irrelevant things.

**>>Do you think that your schooling prepared you for university?**

In a sort of way it did but not really. I think they should actually start probably a new way of from probably standard nine to introduce you to critical thing where because when you come here it is really a problem. You get confused and you don't understand, "how am I supposed to criticise" because at school you taught that you suppose to agree with it (pause) the text you given all the time, you have to just talk about what the main point is and how he raises the main point you know. Whereas here you know, I think that they should really try putting that more often in the school to be a critique.

**>>Why did you choose to study at UCT?**

(laughing) first I need to be as far away from home as possible (laugh) I needed my space because I just felt I've never been to boarding school, it's fun and you know my brother graduated here so I was actually interested.

**>>Do you have any regrets?**

I used to have because you miss home, your bed too and everything. But now I'm adapting to the whole thing at once. Now I'm fine. I chose it how I have to live with it.

**>>Do you consider writing practices at UCT important?**

I think they are because they actually make you... consider your opinions matters, and how the text was produced- why did the writer writes this? It's to convince you. You get exposed to such things.

**>>Where are going with your degree? Will this type of writing practice help you in the workplace?**

Let me think, I wonder! I want to be a counseling psychologist probably it will. I don't know.

**>>How do you feel about academic writing conventions as a writer?**

At first it was hectic, you don't understand why you should do it, you know. Sometimes with plagiarism sometimes you wrote this sentence and it's your and then you realise oh my gosh it's in the text and you have to change it. But I understand why we have to do it, but at first you have to get used to it after practicing over and over again.

**>>Would you say that at this stage of the semester you have no problems with writing conventions?**

I would say no it's fine ja.

**>>Think of yourself as a writer, tell me how your ideas of yourself as a writer changed since you entered university?**

Well, ja. I can...now I know how to convince people and if I want sympathy at home I write a letter.

**>>So you have learnt to be persuasive?**

Ja.

**>>Can you say that you write in your own words?**

Ja, I try to most of the time to avoid plagiarism.

**>>Do you have any difficulty with writing in your own words?**

Ja, sometimes you want to say something and you have it in your own language, Sotho. But at time goes on I get it.

**>>How do you see yourself developing as a writer?**

Well probably becoming a persuasive writer.

**>>Do you see yourself going in any particular direction with your writing?**

Ja, I see myself as somebody successful. I can actually express myself in a more academic way, if I can say so. People you know like lecturers understand. When you get your results you see I've done well. It encourages you.

**>>What do you mean by "express myself in an academic way"?**

You can, how can I say this, you see English is gone now (laugh). You can (pause) I have to think about this. Did I actually say that?

**>>Well how do academic writers express themselves?**

They try to make a point, to make you aware of things, to make you understand things.

**>>Do they do this through the use of arguments only?**

Ja.

**>>What effect did writing the literacy narrative have on you? Firstly did you have a problem writing the literacy narrative?**

No. It actually made me aware that high school was easy and I thought it was difficult. What made the transition difficult is that I wasn't introduced to such things. Here you mind broadens. You actually have to be creative and express yourself.

*End of interview.*

University of Cape Town

**>>In your literacy narrative you think you talk about “compulsory studying period” what did you actually do during this period.**

In high school what, we do is you read when there is something like you supposed to write a composition, supposed to write an exam that is the only time you study. So all the other time you just read if you feel like, so what we did in high school, everyday, from the beginning of the year there will be studies. And those studies would be compulsory, you go there sit there for two hours. Actually we were forced to read.

**>>Why do you say you were “trained to think” at varsity?**

(Pause) You see what happened in high school we were taught things like to make an example in science they tell you what Newton said, so here I cannot be asked what did Newton say on a certain theory. What I’m asked here is what do I think on what Newton said like my criticism. Here I’m being asked my own opinions. Not to write again what someone said.

**>>At school was it done the same as varsity?**

No. in school you had to retain what you were told. High school students they memorise things cause you asked the same thing you were taught.

**>>How do you feel about arguing on what someone else has written? Are you comfortable doing this?**

Basically I can say I am comfortable. My ideas are what comes from me. Because I cannot forget my ideas, I cannot forget what I feel. But in high school if I am asked to tell what someone said then I may forget that’s not my point it’s the other persons point.

**>>You speak about the differences at varsity in comparison to school. Tell me more about these differences.**

First of all in high school, just like I said, the main differences is that in high school you write what you have been taught, what you are asked to write not what you think. So you don’t write your ideas as such, that’s why memorising is what is working in high schools. Actually they test your memory, here they don’t test your memory, they want your ideas,

**>>In your literacy narrative you say you are “still in the midst of transition”. What do you mean by this?**

That simply means that I stayed in high school for three years and this is my first year at varsity, so I’m still not used to the system of education here. I’m still used to the system of high school because I stayed there most of my years, like here if I go to an exam I was expecting that they would ask me like there readings about Shaka, King Shaka. I read those readings. I expected they would ask me the years, when did Shaka do this. I didn’t expect that they would ask me that what do you think is being said about Shaka. That’s why I’m saying it will take time to adapt to this, it’s just that I’m still in the midst of transition just like I said.

**>>Are there any other difficulties that you are coming to terms with at varsity?**

The only difficult is that like at high school you cannot miss a class you will be punished or what you see. Because at school the teachers were acting as our parents so here no-one pushes you from behind, you see. You have to drive yourself.

**>>So you are saying you need self-discipline?**

Ja,

**>>And are you gaining this self-discipline?**

I am gaining it. It is gradual.

**>>Tell me how did you experience adjusting to the English medium of instruction and the change in writing practices?**

In the English medium, English being used as the medium of instruction actually I didn't experience any problems, why the school I was studying in they, we were forced to speak English, like you could speak your own mother-tongue, even in hostel you could be punished you see. Ja I can say I am privileged to have studied in the school I was studying. But most of the schools where I come from actually the students and the teachers they communicated in their mother-tongue not in English. So I'm sure that only few schools good students can adjust easily in the usage of English as a medium of instruction.

**>>What difficulties did you experience in the writing practices?**

I didn't experience any difficulty because saying my ideas is not difficult for me. Because just like when we are chatting you just have to apply the formula of writing. Like let's say if you are writing a, how can I say, dialogue. I can't write it the same way as I write an essay. Those skills of writing of differentiating an essay from ordinary writing so I know how an essay should be so I have no problems. It's even better because I write my own ideas.

**>>So would you say your school actually helped you build this foundation?**

My school helped me a lot.

**>>What did you learn at school about academic writing?**

I was taught how to write an academic essay. Like I'll make an example of letters. There's a formal letter, there's an informal letter. When you write to a friend you use any form of language like English you twist it and do whatever like use slang and all that stuff. But in academic writing slanging is not allowed you have to write formal. This is what I learnt from school and it's what I apply here.

**>>So you are saying you learnt to structure an essay?**

Yes

**>>At school, what genre of writing did you enjoy? Genres such as poetry, letter writing, compositions...**

Actually at high school I was good in poetry but I preferred essay form of writing.

**>>Why did you prefer essays?**

Essays you see like most of our essays they would ask you to narrate a story and all that stuff. I like that but even poetry I was good in that. In high school there was not much to write about poetry.

**>>Tell me can you actually use those writing practices in academic writing practices?**

Of course. If my course allowed me to write poetry I could do my best here.

**>>Do you feel that your school prepared you for university?**

It prepared me a lot. It helped me a lot. The school I was studying in was a good school.

**>>Why did you choose to study at UCT?**

Before I came here I had an uncle who was studying here. Like he told me all about this varsity, The discipline and all that stuff. I know that myself you see, so if I go to university like Wits I have a lot of friends there. They are bad company so maybe if I went to Wits I wouldn't still be around at this time. So far I take it as the best institution of education in SA.

**>>In terms of what?**

Discipline..... even the standard of education.

**>>Do you consider the ways of writing at UCT important for you in life?**

Yes, they are very important of course. Because now I want to be a lawyer and I know you won't believe it from this time. I've been here from February up to now and I can see that my way of thinking is changed a bit. Even last year I couldn't lose an argument with friends. Now if I argue with someone I have a more fast way of thinking. I know how to supplement my argument, so which means the courses which I'm doing are preparing me for my career. In high school it was not like that.

**>>Is there any course or courses that are helping you?**

The first course is DOH102 which is the language in Humanities. This course is teaching me how to use a language not grammar, like all that stuff in high school but the acceptable language in the faculty I'm in. And 101 which is Text in Context I'm taught how to analyse like pictures any form of presentation. Then there is DOH100 which is Introduction to Social and Critical Thinking which explains the whole thing. I'm being introduced to how to think critically that means I say my own points about what is being said.

**>>In your writing at UCT are you doing this?**

I'm very comfortable with it.

**>>What about academic writing conventions are you also taught this in your courses?**

That is what I'm being taught in fact all of my courses I'm doing now, they work hand in hand.

**>>Do you have a problem with referencing, bibliography.....**

Because all of them tackle that question I don't have any problems.

**>>With regards to your personal writing do you reference more or do you add your own ideas?**

Actually referencing is what you should apply to all you writing I feel more comfortable with writing only cause sometimes I even forget to reference. So referencing I'm not used to it that much. Cause I only write my own opinions.

**>>How does this affect your marks?**

Actually I get many marks from my writing but I have to reference that's why I don't get better marks.

**>>So are you saying referencing earns you better marks than writing your own ideas.**

I get better marks.

**>>And if you give your own ideas then your marks aren't that good?**

Ja but then I'm still like in DOH102 Stella, my tutor, used to praise me that I know how to write. The only weakness she saw, my referencing was not good.

**>>Think of yourself as a writer, have your ideas of yourself as writer changed since you entered UCT?**

They've changed a lot. In high school when I wrote I knew how to write an essay and all that stuff. But I just wrote the way I think things. Like...just using the form of writing. But have I know how to think, how to put my points, how to analyse. So it has changed my way of writing.

**>>Are you comfortable with using the first person I in your writing?**

I am very comfortable with that.

**>>And when you do, do your marks improve?**

Ja, they improve a lot.

**>>What you are saying then is that you write more in your own words?**

Ja

**>>How do you see yourself developing as a write?**

These courses I'm doing you see, they help in the development of my mind and they the ones that determine my writing, so I'm improving a lot, day in day out.

**>>Do you see yourself going in any particular direction with your writing?**

I can see the direction. I can see now I'm racing towards my career. Like, last year I'm sure I couldn't enter into court or do procedures of court like. But now at this stage I have an understanding. I can stand in court and present my case.

**>>If you were asked to write the presentation, would you be able to do that, would you express yourself as clearly?**

Ja, ja I could do that. For example, now I could write a book this year. Last year I wrote a book on poetry but I just kept it. I don't know what to do with it.

**>>So you enjoy writing for leisure as well?**

I enjoy writing.

**>>Going back to your literacy narrative, did you have any problems doing it?**

Actually I wrote it within 15 minutes.

**>>What effect did it have on you?**

This made me to be aware of how my mind is developed cause if I didn't write this I wouldn't have recognised that my mind has developed so much you see. Now this helped me. When I need it I saw that no, no this comes from a developed mind. It helped me.

**>>Do you see yourself as an EAL learner?**

English is an additional language to me but I feel more comfortable like I feel being strange. I'm comfortable using English.

**>>Any questions before we end the interview?**

Actually I only have comments. The comments are that the people here are... the relationships as such there is no unity as such. There are different races here as if it is very difficult for them to come together, that's the only problem I encountered.

**>>Is this a personal experience problem or what you have seen?**

Generally, what I have seen. The races can't come together.

**>>In your tut groups do you express your ideas...say how you feel?**

I don't have any problems expressing myself but the surrounding environment the races are hostile towards one another, that's the only problem.

**>>You are still trying to adjust?**

Ja, I think I will leave here without the races coming together.

*End of interview.*

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## Third Year Students

### **Interview -Phumza**

**>> In your literacy narrative you don't give much background about your schooling. Tell me about it.**

I was in Cape Town in Langa township. It was very different from where I came from because I was in Port Elizabeth. And I had been in a different environment in a different school. English was the first language because it was a multi-racial school. So I came down to Cape Town. It was very difficult for me to get used to the kind of environment that they had. But the one thing that was different was how they wrote. Because I'm very passionate about History, and the way that, it was different from the way that I was taught in the other school and the same goes for writing essays. We were very restricted, you couldn't actually put in your own views. So in that sense it was sort of the same. At the moment I am studying Social Science majoring in Politics and History.

**>> Is there any thing that you learnt from your school writing that prepared you for university writing?**

Totally nothing. I don't even want to try and think, nothing!

**>> How did you overcome any difficulties you might have had in your academic writing at UCT?**

My lecturer, Lucia, she was very helpful. and she was very approachable.

**>> Which course lecturer are you talking about?**

This was English for Academic Purposes. This was one of the courses that was really concentrating on our writing skills. So you could actually go to her and approach her. And my tutor Donovan, he was also helpful. Those first few weeks, those first three essays! They were terrible but they were there for us.

**>> What did the course focus on?**

It taught us how to read documents actually. And to find the point of view of the authors. And how to pinpoint what is the central point. How to read. Also we were told that we can actually, agree or disagree with the authors view, just don't go with the flow, you know. It doesn't mean that because the person wrote they are good in their field. You might hold different views and other people hold different views. So you have to be aware of such things. And going straight to writing which was like okay. We went straight to writing and it helped us in reading and writing ja, basically.

**>> Tell me about your second year at varsity?**

Oh second year! I improved in my writing.

**>> Do you have any time period to say more or less when your writing improved?**

First year, first year second semester definitely! I had struggled the whole first semester. Second semester went by very quick. What happens in first semester, we were doing the foundation course and second semester we were doing the real thing. So I was very glad when I saw that, okay because the first semester courses weren't courses that we were supposed to do at varsity. So we were doing things like Sociology, Politics. We were writing essays and getting 60's and 70's. I was over the moon. And I knew what had helped me. I knew.

**>> What did you use to measure your assessment?**

Besides marks (laugh). Marks was one of them. Because I remember when I got 24% in this essay, I nearly died (laugh). So getting a 60 a 60 something was brilliant. I had a problem with reading. What is the document saying, you know. It was nice for me to get my essay back and to read a document that says you pinpointed what the author is saying. It was good for me. I was really, really struggling with that. That's why I said in my script that reading was very important.

**>> What do you think was the reason for you getting 24% in an essay?**

It was reading. I mean I was introduced to certain concepts that I didn't understand. And I think the tutors thought we knew what was happening. I remember it wasn't only me who got low marks almost everyone got low marks. The concept of genres and all that, what was that. And you come straight from high school and English is my second language, and I tried as much as possible to speak English, it was very difficult. The tutors weren't clarifying certain concepts to us. And you know we were still lazy from high school. So ja the new environment, the change, the concepts, the language that was spoken.

**>> When your writing improved were you using the academic writing conventions that you were taught in the EAP course?**

Yes, I did. Because everyone knows there's an introduction, a body and a conclusion. But what you do in the introduction is you briefly tell all that is going to happen in the whole essay. You make the reader curious, you give them a bit of flavour of what is going to happen. There's certain tricks that we were told that we should do. And how to structure the essay, the essay has to go in certain steps and you have to see if you doing that. And there's cohesion, it's very important in terms of structure. And in the structure there's a few tricks that you have to follow as well. And the conclusion, what you supposed to do in the conclusion. And try and keep your essay, if you say 6 pages, try and keep 6 pages as well.

**>> This is what you were taught in first year. In third year are you still following those conventions like you were taught or have you developed your own style of writing?**

Second year I used more of what I was taught in first year. But in third year I noticed there's a call for me to be more developed. To go about new ways of doing certain things especially in Politics. But for History I don't have any problems. I'm doing two different courses and it shows in my writing. Because I'll get 70's in my History and 40's in Politics, and I'll have to rewrite the essay. There's a difference in courses you can't use the same strategies for two

different courses. That's what I've seen and seriously I've been struggling in Politics for a very long time. And I had to go back to Lucia, you know. She said you have to change your tactics, know what they want in Politics. Don't be rigid, do what they want.

**>> Would you say that the different disciplines having different ways of writing is a problem for you?**

Definitely! Some people told me about that and until it happened to me I knew it was true. It's so true. I'm only doing my majors History and Politics. They are totally different. The way you read documents is different. You can't write the same way you write in History and Politics.

**>> Another writing strategy is the effective use of the first person pronoun "I" which is the voice of the writer. Are you using your own "voice" in your writing?**

Let me start off with Politics. For Politics you definitely not supposed to. You can in the conclusion but also in the conclusion you must restrict yourself because they don't really want to know what you think basically. It's an academic paper and they don't have any interest in what you saying. You can come out in the sense that maybe you agree with the writer and you have to structure it in a different way. In History you can, the history that I'm doing Historical Approaches. Even in second year you can do it as well. That's the difference.

**>> Your writing improved in the second semester. Did you decide to use a strategy that works for you?**

The thing in first year is that I didn't know myself then I was still dazed. It takes a while to get used to UCT. So in the whole of first year I just used what I was taught basically. I think I decided to try new things in second year. In first year I was sticking to what I knew. I didn't want to mess up. The thing is, you know, exams is very different. The way you write in exams and the way you write in you essay differs. Because in the essay it's more about what you think. That's why I like exams more. I enjoy the exams in UCT because in the exams I can actually voice myself out.

**>> Why did you choose to study at UCT?**

My first preference was Rhodes. I had applied to Rhodes and UCT. Rhodes came back to me two weeks before UCT opened and I didn't have res. In Grahamstown. I didn't know anyone in Grahamstown. And I knew in UCT there was going to be a journalism course.

**>> How did you adjust to English being used as the medium of instruction? Did you have any problems with it?**

No.

**>> Is this because of your schooling in Port Elizabeth that offered English as a first language?**

Yes. I didn't have a problem.

**>> Do you consider the ways of writing at UCT important?**

Yes, definitely especially for what I want to do. I don't think it's only about writing. It's about critical thinking. So the essays that we do, I used to ask myself why are we doing this because this is punishment. And I actually saw that they were just preparing us for when we go into the working world. Because it teaches us to look at things critically, it's all about problem-solving. You have about ten authors and you have to choose which one is best and say why you didn't choose the others. You have to bring that point out.

**>> Let's revisit your schooling days. Which genre of writing did you enjoy at school?**

Compositions.

**>> Were you able to use that writing skill at varsity?**

Not really. Because our compositions were about what you want to be in the future. Things like that. You really don't have to think you know. Then you come to UCT and you're required to, you're given a thick reader you have to analyse and read. And poetry, we used to be given a short piece of poetry to analyse. And it took me like 15 minutes to do that. So it really didn't help me.

**>> Did you have a problem writing the literacy narrative?**

No.

**>> What effect did it have on you as you were writing it?**

I had actually forgotten that reading is very important when you write a piece. I read, and read I actually forgot that you have to absorb everything. Because most of the time you know how students are, we never really understand what we are reading. I just realised that I don't read. I just glance through things. And also coherence and cohesion in the document, that is another problem that I don't really focus on in my writing.

*End of Interview*

## **Interview- Siyambonga**

### **>> How different was your school writing to academic writing?**

Basically in a school setting more especially where I come from, you are not critical to start off with. You live by what other people know. You accept whatever has been given. I didn't really say there was a specific structure in terms of how you should write. And I think the purpose was to spill out what you had been given without any sort of process of learning what you, yourself (pause). Actually it didn't develop your capacity and I wouldn't say from such an experience one would have mastered the skill of writing.

### **>> You say that the medium of instruction was English. Did the teacher sometimes translate something into Xhosa for the class to understand something?**

Okay, let me explain this. My high school was like a semi-Model C school, but had no white people. In junior secondary school it was a sort of diluted kind of a thing but you would assume it was a rural setting so mostly, that's why I said, we used Xhosa.

### **>> What difficulties, did you have in adjusting to the English medium used at UCT?**

It's a bit of a new thing. I wouldn't really single out language. It also goes to a way of doing things, you know. It was more, language was not the issue but it's the thinking behind the language, the philosophies that kind of thing. Obviously the standard, I mean I wasn't exposed to that standard you would assume that was very high. You'd understand it's very complex. You know articles with wit, such as jargon, you can't pass two words without consulting a dictionary.

### **>> Why do you say your brain started to be flooded with Western school of thinking?**

Okay, well it's something that I'm still struggling with because here most people that I come across they will tell you about the studies done in America, and obviously the theories for example look at the theory which is developmental, the likes of Freud, Erickson and things like that. Take Erickson for example, he talks of 8 stages of development. You look at those stages you think how the hell can I relate it to my culture? Imagine now I'm going back to implement this in my area where I'm coming from. Is it real? Does it fit in? Is it bounded to what I was exposed to or can I generalise it? Can it be generalised? Sometimes it just came to me, not to say, I'm buying other people's way of thinking no. I am very open. But it's a matter of really how can I contextualise it, that's what I think.

### **>> You mentioned the DOH100 course in your writing. You feel that it "singled out black students". Did you feel singled out as a black student?**

I did. I did very much as a matter of fact I have written that I was very angry. To me you know, they didn't really, they didn't really portray me. Okay, the methods that could have been used to test, I wouldn't say really they were effective in a way. I didn't understand.

**>> So you were questioning the criteria they used?**

Yes, basically. I mean for that matter you know I was even doing better than other students that were not chosen for the whole thing. So I mean the confidence that I had really, it was really in a way hit and run by those sort of things.

**>> I understand that you were angry about being as you said “singled out”. But is there anything that you took out of the course to help you in academic writing?**

Well, I would really (pause). You see when I did it, I had an option in the middle of it. Should I do it or choose another thing? I preferred to stay which for me means it was the empathy of the likes of Lucia and all of them to understand the background of where I came from. It became more than a course than just a course. It also helped me to really try to identify, to figure my identity. Hence I could use the same weapons which I had difficulties to grasp with them. To use them to promote my same identity because the themes that we did, the identity we did, it was intensive. We explored a lot of things and they always motivated us. The anger part of it was sort of consoled at the end of the day.

**>> How did you feel about academic writing conventions taught in the course?**

Basically it's very obvious that it's essential. We can't really do without it. I think that it does define any writer to validate his source of knowledge. What I mean is that all learners in the field of development learn from how other people think. In other words we are not islands. No man is an island. You learn from the wisdom of others and from all kinds of things. And also, I mean one has to be structured in what he does. I think the coherence part of it, those are the things which are essential.

**>> Tell me about your second year at varsity. Did your writing improve?**

How would you measure that? That's my question to you. For lack of better words I would say it did in the sense that, you pick different words from here and there. You pick confidence, just like developing as a child, you take the first step, you are eager to take the other step. I would say you broadened, the more you write, the more you identify your mistakes, the more you want to learn from them. And it's quite logical that you should take your step forward and in short words I would say I learnt a lot.

**>> Most students use their marks to assess their performance. What role do marks play in your assessment of yourself as a writer?**

Okay, I always struggle with the marks. But I always live by what Lucia said in class. People were looking at their scripts, she basically made a comment that the marks, you can move beyond that. They don't portray you. You can either be above them or you can either be below them. That's how I interpret them. They don't portray you. In other words if I gave you a script, with an 80% you might conclude that, you know and that could not be the case. Imagine a student with a 49 and you conclude and say that it's not you know. But, at the end of the day you'll find out that person further down in life. It becomes something that you never expected. I am simply trying to say sometimes they don't portray who you are. I don't buy them. I just accept whatever comes and remains to be seen.

**>> How would you distinguish a good essay from a poor one?**

A good essay would be an essay which I know that I have tried my best. In terms of covering all the aspects that are needed and doing the best I can. And one cannot, should not always overlook the fact that like me as a student when I write, sometimes I'm not objective. You have your own philosophy, you have an ideology that guides you. Like also lecturers, I feel they are not objective, they are very subjective. When they feel like they don't buy, not the standards, the way that you write, what should be looked at, you know. They are sometimes bound by their own subjectivities and ideologies which I feel if they conflict, they are on the upper hand. So they can intentionally mark you down.

**>> My study looks at the way students either accommodate or resist academic writing conventions. Where would you place yourself as a third year student?**

I feel in certain contexts to kind of follow certain thoughts. Like when example, the fact that I mentioned earlier people are obsessed in their ideas. I mean one would argue in terms of identifying the sources because you draw from other people to develop your own knowledge. But also I think there has to be a way which is also liberal. Which is really not (pause), which really captures the personality of the person in terms of writing. Like I would write in a more sense if I was to write loose, you know. I'd be free in putting ideas to paper. I'm not bound by anything. I'm not quantified precise do this, do this I'm just writing. One can draw a lot of valuable facts. What I'm trying to say, sometimes it makes sense for me to write the way that we like and still make sense to any person that can read it.

**>> Do you feel that the literacy narrative is a type of writing that you would prefer?**

Yes. Ja, I mean basically it's easy. You make it easy for the reader. You make the person to be at ease. I mean what you are interested in a person at the end of the day is to know the thinking of that person, to know who that person is.

**>> Can the literacy narrative do this?**

Yes, if used correctly it can. Perhaps if I could also have made drawings in the thing just to show. You know there are lots of ways of expressing yourself. I understand that (pause). Ja I think basically it can.

**>> Why did you choose to study at UCT?**

I was accepted and offered financial assistance. So I had to come.

**>> Did you know this before you arrived?**

When I arrived. I mean they actually informed me in letters.

**>> Are the writing practices at UCT important for you as a writer?**

Yes. The way I see it there is no one way of writing. So I appreciated the fact that whenever I

have to write in a structured way, reference it's okay because it fits a particular context. I also feel there has to be a time when everything has to be more liberal, more accommodating, more free, for a person to feel more comfortable you get more ideas from the person. I've been exposed to highly structured, I've been exposed to school writing.

**>> What writing practices did you learn at school that you can use at UCT?**

Without my school I wouldn't have been around. It was very convenient for me, it was essential. Something that pushed me to succeed. So I would say the fact that it put me here is something, you know.

**>> Is there anything else that you did in your school writing that is the same as academic writing?**

No.

**>> What about the structure of the essay, introduction, body and conclusion? Anything else?**

Ja. One history teacher told us that there is a table of contents to guide your reader, that sort of thing.

**>> Which genre of writing did you enjoy at school? By genre I mean poetry, compositions, letter writing, short stories.**

I was very much in love with history, essay writing.

**>> Do you use that style of essay writing you learnt at school in your essay writing at UCT?**

Yes, I do. More especially you have to use phrases to portray the way you think. I think I'm too poetic in my writing (laugh).

**>> Do you think it's not good to write poetically in the academic community?**

Ja, in certain contexts, I mean it should. Because once I publish my own book, I will be able to write poetically.

**>> Do you feel you will have gained all the necessary writing skills by the end of this year? Or do you think it requires a longer period of time?**

Basically I think I'm equipped to sort of put my thoughts onto paper. But again you know different publishers, different editors would want you to write in a certain context. But as far as really organizing facts, and promoting some kind of thinking whatever it is, I think I can next year.

**>> Do you think the writing practices at UCT are preparing you for publishing?**

Yes, obviously yes. Because I mean, look like now I'm making use of materials which are being written by others which I, the way I see it, it basically resembles how they teach us how to write. So ja it does.

*End of interview*

University of Cape Town

## **Interview- Maria**

**>> How did your history writing help you with regards to essay writing?**

Taught me how to structure essays.

**>> What similarities are there in your history essay structure and your essay writing at UCT?**

When you write the essay you are given a certain topic and you just have to discuss and state everything that they taught you. So I just thought it to be the same because you state the facts. It's not really just stating the facts because now you are formulating an argument type thing. I don't know it made it easier for me. Because I felt like I was forced to say something with my essay writing, that's why I just thought ja maybe history. For some people, like let's say some students maybe from high school that studied Science and Biology, and things like that, they are never really given the chance to write essays. I feel that they wouldn't enjoy essays as much. Because I'm used to writing essays. They do teach you ja, there are certain ways of writing essays and I think that from History I learned. And I use to enjoy writing essays which made the transition easier.

**>> In your literacy narrative you describe the DOH100 course as very slow. Was this your perception of the course while you were doing it or after you did it?**

No because when they told us at the beginning of the year that this course was for people who are struggling and I thought I don't fall into that category. And I had written the entrance test and I found it very easy. They say that if you did English but got an E you had to do it. Well I had done first language English and got a D. And I found the test to be easy. And I couldn't understand. I went to the class and the things that we used to do! But some people are struggling with English, these are the people that should be in this class. But I was just, I don't know. You know in class sometimes they asked questions. I knew the answers because Roschelle used to say "anyone beside Maria". So I just found it slow. Because in the beginning I even went to her and I asked why am I in this class? And she said because of your marks. I just couldn't believe it, I wanted to see the results for myself. I wrote the test at home and I was thinking maybe something happened to my marks or something. But it was just not for me.

**>> What did you learn from the course?**

Okay, you know in high school we didn't do stuff like that. We did like critical thinking. They did also teach us how to reference. I think it was only DOH100 that concentrated on like referencing. But had I not done the course they would have taught me elsewhere. There are some people who didn't do DOH but they were also taught how to reference. So I think I could have gotten the skills from somewhere else. And you know I used to like it because in the second term students not doing DOH had to take an extra course. I didn't have to take it. But I don't know, I remember before handing in my essay, we would hand in the draft. And I remember I used to write just anything so that I can fix the draft. And I don't know, I just thought it was a waste of time.

**>> Did you experience any difficulty in adjusting to university?**

No, no I had a positive adjustment.

**>> Did you cope with the transition because of your history background writer knowledge?**

Everything was nice. I had planned to come to UCT. You know independence. If you have a positive attitude, you make it for yourself. You enjoy it because even you make friends quickly. But I'm just that kind of person, where if I go anywhere and I decide that I'm going to have fun, I have fun. I didn't have any problems.

**>> Why did you choose UCT?**

I don't know. I just wanted to run away from home. Do it formally. I didn't want to go to Wits. Because it's either I could go to Wits, if I stay in Jo'burg. I mean really my mother would come and visit me everyday. With Rhodes I was thinking 5000 people, I don't think so I just wanted to come to UCT.

**>> Tell me more about your second year at university.**

In second year things were even much more easier you know. I think in second year I relaxed a bit because I said that you know that first year I was on the Dean's merit list. But first year you think you know everything. Because I don't know, first year I used to sit and do my things on time. Second year I started getting lazy but you know I think the writing improved. You understand what they want from you.

**>> How did you assess your improvement? What instrument did you use to measure your progress?**

In terms of marks, you know. The feedback they always tell you ja you do understand the topic and you argued. But even in first year I coped. Even now that's why I'm saying maybe that's how I know that I did improve because they are telling me I'm doing the right thing.

**>> Do you see yourself going in any particular direction as a writer?**

Obviously writing skills are very essential for any person. Like in Engineering you have to write out reports and stuff like that. That requires writing skills. In every single career you do need writing skills so I do think that, you know this has helped me. For example if I do decide to become a psychologist you have to research all the time. So it does help for the future to be able to write. I'm not really sure about what I want to do. I don't think I want to do Psychology. I know that writing is important and that writing does help in any career.

**>> After spending three years at UCT, do you still regard yourself as a second language English speaker?**

I wrote there that English is the language that I speak, I write or read well. Anyway, from the beginning how would you define a second language speaker?

**>> I would say that if English is not your mother-tongue or home language then it is a second language or an additional language.**

I know even from my friends, I got one friend from Venda, and one is Xhosa, and I'm Tswana. So most of the time we speak English. Even my boyfriend is Tswana. But we, and we don't do it consciously, like we plan to speak English all the time. But with my friends I'm forced to speak just English. So at home I mix everything. So I wouldn't call myself a second language speaker. Even at home before I came here, Tswana wasn't my dominant language. So it's bad to say you don't consider yourself an English second language speaker because in a way you are saying you are an English speaking or something. But I can't really say I see myself as a second language speaker.

**>> When you arrived at UCT, did you see yourself as a second language speaker?**

I know these other languages but English is the top language. Even in an interview setting, they will ask me which language I want to be interviewed in. And I will ask to be interviewed in English because my Tswana I mix with everything else. So that's why when I was filling in this thing you said in your research question second language speakers. And I was thinking maybe I should call her, maybe I'm not the right person. I wrote a draft of this and I said I consider myself to be a 1 and a half-English speaking but I don't know if there is anything like that.

**>> I think a way of finding that out is if I asked you what is your mother-tongue. What answer would you give me?**

I don't know the politically correct definition of mother-tongue. To me my mother-tongue is what your grandmother or your mother speaks. I don't know. It's just confusing. I always understood mother-tongue. I don't know.

**>> Another term for mother-tongue is home language. So when you fill out a form for example you will put Tsetswana as your home language. So that is the reason why English is seen as an additional language.**

That's better. Mother tongue to me has always been Tswana. Because at home I speak both Tswana and English. At home I'm forced to speak Tswana. If you say in that way like home language who speaks it, at home your parents or at home you? That's another thing.

**>> Well we will use you as the primary subject.**

University is my home setting now, so does it come into play as in ja I speak English and at home when I'm with my mother. So it's very difficult, I don't think it's a black or white thing.

**>> How did you improve in your writing practices? Was it a gradual process?**

I just think somebody said you should do this and this and I understood. And I started doing everything they were telling me. I started at first doing everything that they were telling me. I was struggling and now I'm at that point. In first year someone came and told me, what you do is research the stuff, create your argument there and support it. And you know I started from there, you know. But it's a difficult question, such things you never really think about them. So when you try to trace where you started it's difficult.

**>> So you basically improved in your first year on the skills you had acquired at school. Did you get better marks in second year?**

I don't think so in terms of my essay writing. Because in first year I got really good marks. My marks did go down right but I wouldn't say it's because of my writing skills because I did mention here laziness and time management. There are other factors. I can't really say that the other variables that influenced you know why I wasn't getting the marks that I was getting in first year. So that's why I'm saying I never really thought about it.

**>> So are you still doing what you were told to do in first year in your writing?**

I don't think I've changed anything and I don't think the marks have changed. So for my essays the marks are still good. I also found in a non-exam setting I get better marks. I think it might be something that is influencing the marks. For example, in class I was writing a test and I wrote this essay, and I was sure that if I was marking that test, I would give myself 95%. When it came back they had given me 65%. So there are other things, maybe the markers. So it's not necessarily just the students. In an exam setting they don't like write as good.

**>> When you get good marks for an essay, is it because you referenced more or gave your own opinions and argued effectively?**

In Industrial and Psychology, you not allowed to use "I". But if you feel something you have to support it. You must give evidence for it. They don't really give you ground to say, "I think".

**>> How do you feel about academic writing conventions?**

I think it makes sense. You can't just write anything. And referencing is all about avoiding plagiarism. In high school you could write about anything, even the teachers didn't have to reference. You think these teachers are so clever. They know

everything. I know now in future that I wouldn't want anyone to be using it, and it's my hard work. It's just to acknowledge, referencing doesn't mean that you pay that person one cent for using them, but it's just to acknowledge. Anyway I think using evidence, it gives your argument more credibility. It makes it richer in a way. It's not like opinion which makes it more factual. So I think it's more factual.

**>> If you have an idea before you read about it, do you prefer to leave it as your own or do you reference it?**

I found that sometimes I thought about it too. But no this plagiarism thing, I've always taken it very seriously. Even though you feel it's not fair this is just general knowledge and someone put it down on paper, they get the credit for it. But I don't mind.

**>> When you graduate this year, will you leave here seeing yourself as an academic writer?**

Ja, I think I'm better in relation to other people. I do think up to date a lot. For example my boyfriend does Engineering and when he has to write things like CV's he's always saying you the good writer. So in a way I've gained skills that Engineering students haven't. I still think I could learn more, I don't know what else can I learn, in terms of writing.

**>> Did you have any difficulty writing the literacy narrative?**

No.

**>> What effect did it have on you?**

I don't know maybe it required me to think. I didn't have a problem. But most of the time I was trying to understand it from your view, what are you looking for. But at the end of the day I wrote it according to how I understood it. You do have to think along the way. I was reading the question all the time, just making sure ja.

**>> Did you learn anything from it about yourself as a writer?**

It's something I don't think about a lot but I guess it's understandable because you don't sit there and think of myself as an academic writer. Maybe it was a reality thing. I just think I know the basics. They taught me the basics and to get excellent marks is up to me. I was thinking you learnt so much and you could have used it to your own advantage, you've let others influence you.

*End of Interview*

## **Interview-Carolyn**

**>> In your literacy narrative you talk about being involved in a life skills program. Did this program entail any writing activities?**

It did. We were exposed to comprehensions, careers. They exposed us to different fields, what is available at university levels. We went on camps. We visited institutions like UCT, Stellenbosch, things like that.

**>> You also mention your arrival at UCT. You say you found the lecturers extremely intimidating and the environment very threatening. Tell me more about this.**

Okay. Firstly, the buildings were extremely intimidating. It was threatening. I felt like I don't belong here. I'm not going to cope. The environment itself was over-powering. I was not used to going to lecturers, the class size, the lecturers standing in front and just lecturing, not making eye contact, it's not very sociable. I felt like a baby coming to school for the first time. I wasn't used to the grown-up environment. I was seventeen when I left school, turning eighteen. So I was very babyish. Trying to find my place in the world, trying to come to terms with why did I come to UCT? Why didn't I travel for a year and try and find my feet first. But okay I decided I wanted to get my academic life over with, start work and you know the plans we have. I felt like a fish in a small pond. I was trapped. UCT can be very intimidating.

**>> Why did you choose UCT as an institution of learning?**

Good question! Well I had the option of going to Stellenbosch. I thought that UCT is the best and the scenery man! UCT is conducive to studying. The environment is not only intimidating but its relaxing as well.

**>> Did your school experience prepare you in any way for this?**

No! Not at all! School is much more relaxed. You not spoon-fed but the teachers interact more. Here you on your own. You come to lecturers, lecturers don't care whether you do your readings or not. They just there to give their lecture and it's up to you, it's a personal effort you know of committing yourself to your work and doing the readings. Going to classes that's another effort that we don't have a support base for.

**>> So it's all about self-discipline, independence?**

I never had that. Self-discipline I never had that. Self-discipline and me, I don't think we friends at all.

**>> Now that you are in third year have you befriended self-discipline?**

Yes. Self-discipline is my mate. I had to learn that you have to make a choice. Your choice is that you want to get you degree, you want to go forward and self-discipline

and independence is my middle name, you know. I'm glad I've mastered the art. I think it's an art, you know self-discipline. It doesn't come easily. Especially in your first year, you have all these elements to cope with. You have UCT to cope with. You have all the activities to cope with, and I think your identity as well. You need to find yourself and I found that very difficult to adjust but I'm here coping.

**>> You talk about the ADP course as a 'support base'. What did you learn in that course and take away with you?**

Okay, that's a good question. Firstly, I need to speak about the lecturer Stella Clark who was very approachable. She actually opened my eyes. Lecturers don't need to be intimidating. Maybe they just act this way because they need to. She actually illustrated that a lecturer is concerned about what, about what you putting in, and they are concerned. Let me re-phrase that, how can I say? They are worried about what you doing and so they are concerned about your performance. It's not as if they are here to pick up their monthly cheque or something. There is some consideration for students and Stella illustrated that. Ja, within the course English which was the main function you know of how to write, how to comprehend because academic writing is very different from I was used to at school. As you most probably know school writing is different to UCT.

**>> Tell me more about the difference.**

Let me see. The basics are the same but the way you have coherent arguments, the way you have premises to support a valid argument. At school you didn't have that. Your arguments, you would make a claim and you would not elaborate that vastly on it. At UCT you have to have evidence for your argument. If you make a claim you have to have valid premises and I had a difficult time to contend with that. The ADP course actually taught me how to set out my argument. You have to have premises, valid conclusions, a conclusion that the argument supports. It actually opened my eyes a bit.

**>> You talk about having adjusted, when would you say you adjusted in the first or second semester?**

At the end of the second semester when I completed my ADP course. It gave me confidence. My academic writing improved drastically. It's actually amazing how if you could have looked at a piece of writing at the beginning of the year and at the end off the year. There's a vast difference.

**>> Tell me more about you're your second year at UCT.**

Second year. Okay, in my second year there was a lot of obstacles but I coped. I met the requirements. My second year was a lot easy going I would say. I wasn't getting lost anymore, like looking for buildings. My first year was hectic. I got lost, I was looking for lecture theatres and stuff. In my second year I was much more confident in tackling my subjects, and in tackling the whole environment you know. I made new friends and stuff like that. My second year was much more easy-going.

**>> With regards to your writing, was there a noticeable improvement?**

Yes, yes there was. From first year level to second year level you could actually see the improvement.

**>> What did you use as an assessment indicator for this improvement?**

My marks improved drastically. Lecturers gave me more positive feed-back. There wasn't any negative comments in my essay writing like your bibliography is not up to scratch and stuff like that. Oh, we get that continuously. But ja during my second year I never had any negative complaints about my writing.

**>> And in third year? Is there consistency in your progress?**

There's consistency and there's improvement as well.

**>> You write for UCT newspaper and your article is very interesting. Are the writing practices at UCT important for your future career in Gender Studies and journalism?**

Yes, yes it is. I find it easy to write a story, you know. Some people would find it difficult. Because I have that background of essay writing, doing research for assignments and projects. So that's actually assisting me in my newspaper articles. I can conduct interviews confidently and report back on the most important facts. I can subconsciously, I eliminate or include the important facts. It's second nature already. It's actually difficult to explain. It's like a tool and UCT has a major role in that improvement. Because of the facilities available, the Writing Centre, the lecturers with their feedback and stuff.

**>> Let's look at your schooling. What genre of writing did you enjoy at school? By genre I mean letter writing, poetry, essays, short stories, etc.**

Short stories. I write short stories in my spare time. It's still in rough drafts.

**>> Are you able to use the skills you have from this type of writing in your university writing?**

Yes but not all of it like the emotional side. I like making generalisations. Oh we are so good in doing that at school. I still do that. I have to be careful, as an academic I can't generalise anymore. So ja, 50 maybe 30% of the time I will use those skills.

**>> How do you feel about academic writing conventions?**

I think it's good. As an academic writer I would say it's a positive direction that we all take. And you can make wild accusations, your accusations must be backed-up. So ja I think it's good.

**>> My interest as I explained to you is to see whether you as a third year student regard yourself as accommodating to or resisting the academic writing conventions at UCT. Where do you place yourself?**

I think I would place myself in the middle. I will accommodate the writing skills that I've learnt and voice. My voice does come through in my writing. I make a point thereof, in my essay writing as well. Even in my newspaper articles as well I cover my own voice and the voice of the students. I think without my voice my piece of writing would be useless, you know. Even in the exam as well it's not just the author's opinions it's mine as well and I explore that.

**>> Do you think this is one of the reasons for your marks improving? Do you think that the lecturers prefer this?**

Yes, they prefer your own voice. Your voice must come through. They don't want to read a book on authors or other authors ideas. They don't want to hear too much of that, they want to hear your own voice as well.

**>> Did you have any problems adjusting to the English medium of instruction?**

Oh gosh ja! In my first year I had to sit with the dictionary. From my first year onwards I am coping. It's like you fall into the stream, you have to survive the tide.

**>> How different is your school writing to university writing?**

It's very different. School to varsity, there's a vast difference. Firstly the length of your essays, it's much shorter at school. And at varsity you have to sit with an essay. I think that's the most difficult part of varsity life, is to write your essays, find resources and you must be very careful of using authors ideas. At school I wasn't bothered. I think my lack of referencing. I'm actually surprised that the teachers didn't lecture me and ja that's the main difference I would say.

**>> Is it the ADP course and your willingness to learn that developed you as a writer, or was it the course alone that helped you?**

I think it was the ADP plus my own initiative.

**>> Did you have any difficulty in writing the literacy narrative?**

No. I finished it in about 20 minutes.

**>> Did it have any effect on you?**

It was interesting to reflect back on my life. I never thought about reflecting back. It was a calming effect to reflect back on where I come from and where I am now. I find it interesting and there is some improvements I'd like to make in my life at UCT. I'd like to get more involved in activities, maybe the SRC or something not just Varsity News. This piece actually made me realise I'm not doing that much. I suppose to

incorporate more activities you know, for self-development.

**>> When would you prefer to have done this type of writing? In your first year or third year?**

In my first year. In first year you are trying to get over a lot of emotional issues You are trying to find yourself. You are trying to figure out what you are going to do with your life. I think a piece of writing like this would shape the ideals you have and would shape the stuff you would like to acquire, especially from an academic point of view. So I am glad you asked me to write something like this. I'm glad you did.

*End of interview.*

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