

**THE INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC SKILLS/SUPPORT PROGRAMMES
INTO UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT STRUCTURES: A CASE STUDY
IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

THESIS

*Submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the Degree of*

MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

of Rhodes University

by

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February 1993

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the extent to which the Rhodes University Academic Skills Programme (ASP), now known as the Academic Development Programme, is able to act as an agent of progressive change within Rhodes University. In so doing it concentrates on the potential of the strategy of integrated academic development for dealing with the academic needs of university students within the context of South Africa as a society in transition.

The candidate considers the inability of structuralist educational theory to account for the potential of human agency at the site of formal education. It is shown that structuralist theories provide deterministic and pessimistic accounts of the role of institutions of formal education. In support of this contention this study explores the history of ASP at Rhodes University, demonstrating that significant change in student academic development has already taken place. ASP has contributed to change within the said University through challenging traditional notions of academic development.

This thesis suggests that the non-structuralist critical theory of Jurgen Habermas provides a more holistic account of ASP than do structuralist theories of formal education. Through the incorporation of Habermas's theory of communicative action a process of critical integration is explored, showing that a strategy of integrated academic development has the potential to involve all those who have an

interest in university education through a process of rational discourse.

This potential is strengthened by the fact that many students and staff have expressed an awareness of the need for an integrated academic development strategy. This thesis subsequently explores the possibility of there being a process of democratic and rational discourse which could lead to a progressive integration programme in the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

This thesis stresses the contested nature of the integration process within departments. It is indicated that Habermas's critical theory is able to account for the changes which have taken place in the past and which are presently under way. It is argued that it not possible to predict future outcomes, but that if ASP pursues a process of rational discourse, it will indeed be able to stimulate a critical integrative approach to academic development in the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, my appreciation goes to the many friends who helped me in various ways through what has been a challenging yet trying period of study! Your emotional support and encouragement with this thesis, as well as your friendship despite this thesis means a lot to me.

Secondly, I am especially grateful to my two supervisors for their patience, guidance and advice in their combined academic support! I express my gratitude to Jan Coetzee who provided a caring and concerned form of supervision which has made our working relationship a meaningful one. I am also aware that the overall structure and thoroughness of this thesis would not have been possible without Jan's direction and criticism. I am also very thankful to George Carter for his part in influencing my interest in integration, and his encouragement throughout this research process. George showed a faith in my abilities which I hope will someday be justified! I am extremely fortunate to have been able to be supervised by two people whose contributions I respect, and who have always made an abundance of time available to me to discuss issues and share their knowledge, understanding and ideas.

Thirdly, I wish to thank all those ASP/ADP and Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology staff members who played a part in the formulation of some of the arguments in this thesis. I am also appreciative of those people who allowed themselves to be interviewed by me for the purposes of this study, and to the many students with whom I have had contact

over the years, and especially to those who have provided me with important feedback on issues pertaining to academic development.

Fourthly, the financial assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council (Centre for Science Development) is gratefully acknowledged.

Finally, my special thanks and appreciation goes to my family. I am especially indebted to my mother who has always encouraged and supported my quest for higher education, and to Fiona and Jessica who inspired me right to the end!

Michael Drewett

January 1993

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1	CONTEXT AND GOALS OF THIS STUDY	1
1.2	METHODOLOGY	3
1.3	ACADEMIC SUPPORT/SKILLS PROGRAMMES AS INSTITUTIONS OF FORMAL EDUCATION	5
1.4	THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASS ANALYSIS IN ANALYSING FORMAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA	6
1.5	A CRITICAL APPROACH TO ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT AT RHODES UNIVERSITY	11

CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURALIST THEORIES OF EDUCATION

2.1	INTRODUCTION	18
2.2	STRUCTURALIST FUNCTIONALISM	18
2.3	THEORIES OF EDUCATION AS SOCIAL REPRODUCTION	22
2.3.1	Structuralist Marxism: Louis Althusser	22
2.3.1.1	The focal importance of production	23
2.3.1.2	Formal education as the most central Ideological State Apparatus	26
2.3.1.3	Criticisms of Althusser's structuralism	28
2.3.2	The economic reproductive theory of education: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis	34
2.3.2.1	The political economy of education	36
2.3.2.2	Criticisms of Bowles and Gintis	39

2.4 THEORIES OF EDUCATION AS CULTURAL REPRODUCTION:	
PIERRE BOURDIEU AND BASIL BERNSTEIN	43
2.5 CONCLUSION	46

CHAPTER THREE

THE NON-STRUCTURALISM OF CRITICAL MARXIST THEORIES OF EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION	48
3.2 THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL: THEODOR ADORNO, MAX HORKHEIMER AND HERBERT MARCUSE	48
3.2.1 Domination	49
3.2.2 Instrumental reason	50
3.2.3 Culture	51
3.2.4 Dialectical thinking	53
3.2.5 Depth psychology	54
3.2.6 The dialectics of formal education	56
3.2.7 Criticisms of the Frankfurt School	56
3.3 THE CRITICAL THEORY OF JURGEN HABERMAS	58
3.3.1 The centrality of language and communication	59
3.3.2 Legitimation crisis	60
3.3.3 Legitimation crisis in formal education	62
3.3.4 Overcoming structural determinism	64
3.4 CONCLUSION	65

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RHODES UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC SUPPORT/SKILLS PROGRAMME IN THE 1980's

4.1 INTRODUCTION	67
4.2 THE EFFECT OF RACIAL LEGISLATION ON ACCESS TO UNIVERSITY EDUCATION	67
4.2.1 The Extension of University Education Act	68
4.2.2 The Bantu Education Act	70
4.3 1979-1982: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAMME AT RHODES UNIVERSITY	72
4.4 1982-1984: THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF RHODES UNIVERSITY ASP	74
4.4.1 The initial policy of the Rhodes University ASP	75
4.4.2 The experience of black undergraduate students at Rhodes University	77
4.4.3 The Rhodes University Administration's involvement in academic support	78
4.4.4 The Universities Amendment Act	80
4.4.5 The liberal universities' inadequate response to the Universities Amendment Act	81
4.5 1985-1988: YEARS OF GROWING COHERENCY IN RHODES UNIVERSITY ASP POLICY	84
4.5.1 ASP consolidation based on past experiences	85
4.5.2 Continuing Rhodes University Administration scepticism	88
4.5.3 ASP and the broader community	90
4.5.4 The need for ASP to recognise the inadequacy of South African school education in general	92

4.5.5 The potential for ASP to bring about progressive change within the university	94
4.5.5.1 ASP: Tinkering or transforming?	94
4.5.5.2 ASP: Missionary or agent of change	95
4.5.6 The need for a clear ASP blueprint	97
4.6 1988 AND BEYOND: RHODES UNIVERSITY ASP MOVES TOWARDS INTEGRATION	98
4.6.1 ASP as a contested terrain	99
4.6.2 James Moulder: The call for the abolition of ASPs	99
4.6.3 The importance of a strategy of integration in student support	103
4.6.4 Integration as both short and long-term solution	104
4.7 CONCLUSION	107

CHAPTER FIVE

INTEGRATION AS A STRATEGY OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION	108
5.2 1988-1992: RHODES UNIVERSITY ASP'S MOVES TOWARDS A STRATEGY OF INTEGRATION	108
5.2.1 The placement of ASP tutors in individual departments	109
5.2.2 The impact of political and social changes within South Africa	111
5.2.3 The shift towards integration in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology	115
5.2.4 The History Skills Workshop (HSP)	116

5.2.5 The importance of continuing research into integration	118
5.2.6 The Independent Development Trust's support of the integration process	120
5.3 INTEGRATION WITHIN THE RHODES UNIVERSITY	
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND INDUSTRIAL SOCIOLOGY	121
5.3.1 The structure of courses and tutorials	122
5.3.2 Lecturing as critical discourse	125
5.3.2.1 Critical thinking defined	126
5.3.2.2 Thinking sociologically	127
5.3.2.3 Critical thinking as a means to critical consciousness	130
5.3.2.4 The importance of critical education	130
5.4 CONCLUSION	140

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION	143
6.2 METHODOLOGY	143
6.2.1 The critical interpretive framework	144
6.2.2 Multiple triangulation	146
6.2.3 The student survey	147
6.2.4 The staff interviews	148
6.2.5 Preliminary discussion	149
6.3 STUDENT DIFFICULTIES IN SOCIOLOGY	151
6.3.1 Sociology-specific skills	154
6.3.2 Writing sociologically	155
6.3.3 Deeper level difficulties	156
6.3.4 Critical and sociological thinking	158

6.3.5 Language as debilitator	159
6.3.6 Further general academic skills difficulties	163
6.3.7 Academic difficulties caused by differences in expectation?	164
6.4 STAFF AND STUDENTS AWARENESS OF AREAS OF STUDENT DIFFICULTY	167
6.5 PERCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATION	167
6.6 WHO SHOULD TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROBLEM OF ACADEMIC SKILLS TEACHING?	169
6.6.1 Broad educational responsibilities	169
6.6.1.1 The problem of South African school education	169
6.6.1.2 Inability of government to respond to educational deficiencies	171
6.6.2 The responsibility of the university	172
6.6.2.1 The university's involvement in educational research	173
6.6.2.2 The university's involvement in academic development	173
6.6.2.3 Which sectors of Rhodes University need to take responsibility?	178
6.7 IS INTEGRATION A WORKABLE SOLUTION?	180
6.7.1 Departmental tutorials as a vehicle for integration	181
6.7.2 The role of lectures in integration	183
6.7.3 Student responses to integration	184
6.7.4 Staff response to integration	185
6.8 THE ROLE OF LECTURERS IN ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT	186
6.8.1 The structure of courses	186
6.8.2 Staff training	188

6.9 REACTIONS TO CHANGES WHICH INTEGRATION MIGHT BRING ABOUT	189
6.9.1 Student reactions to possible changes	189
6.9.2 Staff reactions to possible changes	191
6.10 CONCLUSION	192

CHAPTER SEVEN

A CRITICAL APPROACH TO ASP AS AN AGENT OF PROGRESSIVE CHANGE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

7.1 INTRODUCTION	194
7.2 STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATIONS OF ASP	196
7.3 CRITICAL MARXIST CRITIQUE OF STRUCTURALIST EXPLANATIONS OF ASP	198
7.3.1 Legitimation crisis	199
7.3.2 Relative autonomy of ASP	199
7.3.3 Rationality crisis	200
7.4 THE RECLAMATION OF AREAS OF THE LIFEWORLD	202
7.5 OBSCURED BY CLOUDS: THE NEED TO SUPERSEDE INSTRUMENTAL SOLUTIONS	204
7.6 THE QUEST FOR DEMOCRACY AND EMANCIPATION: COMMUNICATIVE ACTION	206
7.6.1 Potential obstacles to communicative action	210
7.6.2 The need for accountability to the community	210
7.6.3 Communicative discourse	212
7.7 WHAT OUGHT THE CRITICAL INTEGRATION PROCESS ENTAIL?	214
7.7.1 The ideal speech situation	215
7.7.2 The problem of power relations in communicative discourse	216

7.7.3 Curriculum development	217
7.7.3.1 The negotiated curriculum	217
7.7.3.2 Potential obstacles to the negotiated curriculum	219
7.7.3.3 Rational discourse in curriculum development	220
7.7.3.4 Transmission of skills in the negotiated curriculum	222
7.8 CONCLUSION	224

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION	228
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APPENDIX ONE	233
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APPENDIX TWO	234
--------------	-----

REFERENCE LIST	240
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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and goals of this study

This thesis focuses on the issue of the integration of the Academic Skills Programme (ASP)¹ into mainline departments at Rhodes University using as a case study the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. The broad ideological spectrum which constitutes this debate is bonded by a specific concern: that Rhodes University be an effective institution in educating students for the needs of a future society.

The study which follows is an attempt to offer a critical evaluation of the integration strategy which is currently being pursued by the Rhodes University ASP. This first stage of this process of integration involves the combination of study skills and course content, in a way which avoids the teaching of skills in a vacuum. ASP are presently engaged with various departments at Rhodes University (including the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology) in the second stage of the integration process, which involves the integration of study skills into the mainline teaching programme of departments.

It is argued in this study that the Rhodes University ASP does have the capacity to bring about progressive change in the University, if this process of integration is followed-through

¹Academic Support/Skills Programmes, as a result of a joint decision made by all ASPs nationally, are now (as from the beginning of 1993) officially known as Academic Development Programmes (ADPs).

to a point where the type of instruction which students encounter is fully integrated, so that they receive what Paulo Freire (in Freire and Shor, 1987:33) refers to as "liberatory education" (cf. 5.3.2).

However, the realisation of this form of critical integration (cf. Chapter Seven) cannot be regarded as a foregone conclusion. Instead the Rhodes University ASP needs to be seen as a contested terrain which has the potential to bring about the progressive transformation of the University as a whole, with a particular focus on the ideas and practices which students experience at the site of instruction.

In arguing that the Rhodes University ASP is a contested terrain it is proposed (as has already been suggested) that they have the capacity to act as agents of social change within Rhodes University. Such an analysis necessitates the rejection of structuralist analyses of formal education (cf. 2.2; 2.3 and 2.4), given the overly deterministic nature of such theories. Rather, the non-structuralist position of Jurgen Habermas is accepted as a theoretical framework within which to situate the Rhodes University ASP. It is argued that Habermas's critical Marxist approach is able to account for the broad dynamics of formal education within a capitalist society such as South Africa, while at the same time being able to take cognisance of the importance of local circumstances at particular sites of formal education, such as Rhodes University (cf 3.3 and Chapter Seven).

It will therefore be argued that there is an important role

for ASP to play at Rhodes University. This study investigates the extent to which the Rhodes University ASP is able to facilitate changes within the University which are relevant to students' academic needs, through a strategy of integration with individual departments. In particular this study focuses on the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. It will attempt to research and analyse past and present ASP involvement at Rhodes University, consolidating the information gained, using it in an attempt at formulating and implementing a system of ASP integration which is most appropriate to this Department.

1.2 Methodology

This thesis is exploratory in orientation. For this reason no hypothesis was formulated prior to the research. Instead the research was approached bearing in mind the aim of investigating the extent to which the Rhodes University ASP has the capacity to act as an agent of change within the University, through the use of the integration strategy. While there has been some research done on the issue of this form of integration, the area is fairly new in South Africa and remains under-researched. For this reason it was seen as important to pursue this study through accumulating new data through the process of primary research as well as through reference to existing information.

The former was done in the form of "multiple triangulation" (Denzin, 1970:297), whereby a number of sources were utilised in the research process. The latter process was necessary because it was important to consolidate existing information

and combine it with the findings of the research undertaken, if a thorough analysis was to ensue. By interacting information gained with established theory, it was hoped that a new and immediately relevant perspective would be gained. This method of research includes powerful methodological tools which have been developed to assist the researcher in his/her research. Most notable have been Michel Foucault's "archaeology" and "genealogy". In this approach the researcher evaluates resource material from the following perspectives: as direct sources of data for evaluation; as products of a particular period of time; and to reveal through content and style much about relations of power in society (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982).

New data was obtained firstly, through a questionnaire conducted amongst Sociology 1 students in the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology in 1990. This was regarded as crucial to this research, bearing in mind Vusi Khanyile's argument that: "ASPs should realise that their programme can only be successful if they (ASPs) carry broad acceptability and legitimacy" (Khanyile, 1986:17). Secondly, for the same reason staff members of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology were interviewed in an attempt to ascertain their perceptions regarding ASP and student support. Thirdly, selected staff members of the Rhodes University ASP were interviewed, in order to obtain additional data regarding the history and future direction of ASP at Rhodes University. Finally, representatives of ASPs on the various liberal campuses (the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Natal)

completed open-ended questionnaires concerning relevant issues regarding past and present trends, and future direction in academic development at those universities².

A review of existing literature on integration as a strategy of academic development was conducted, and was located firmly within the context of theories of the Sociology of Education.

1.3 Academic Support/Skills Programmes as institutions of formal education

As has been noted (cf. 1.1) this study is concerned with the use of ASP's strategy of integration as a means to facilitating educational change at Rhodes University. Given that the process of integration involves the incorporation of what were traditionally ASP tasks into mainline departments, in this study ASP is regarded as part of the formal fabric of the university and of education in South Africa more generally. Although it could be argued that ASPs were originally non-formal institutions given that they were never officially sanctioned by the state, it is clear that the process of integration places ASPs into a position where they are routinely a part of the formal framework of the university. If not, it would be difficult to ascertain at what point in the integration process academic development would change from being non-formal to formal. It is for this reason that it is argued that academic development within the university, because of its very nature, needs to be regarded as an integral part of formal education, along with individual

²For a more detailed discussion on the methodology used in this thesis, and how it relates to the student questionnaire and staff interviews, see 6.2.

departments and the university.

1.4 The importance of class analysis in analysing formal education in South Africa

In considering any aspect of South African education in the light of radical theory the most immediate issue which comes to the fore is that of applicability. More specifically, of what relevance is class analysis to an educational setting in which racial differences appear to be the most manifest and severe of inequalities affecting those who wish to be educated?

Peter Kallaway (1984:8) succinctly articulates this question by suggesting that a "...particular challenge for those who would explore the nature of black education in South Africa is that they must distinguish analytically between the evolution of schooling for the working class in advanced capitalist countries and schooling designed for a specifically colonial context." This would suggest that the context of education in South Africa as a neo-colonial society is different to and more complex than that of advanced capitalist societies.

As Philip Altbach and Gail Kelly (1978:1-2) have argued:

"...colonial educational systems have certain characteristics that distinguish them from non-colonial educational systems....Schools which emerge in colonies reflect the power and the educational needs of the colonizers. While the educational systems that were established served some of the needs of the indigenous population simply as a result of the interaction between

those making policy, the colonizers and the colonized, schools were primarily designed to serve the needs of the colonizers."

These needs of the colonizers which led initially to imperialism and later to colonialism were primarily economic (Lenin, 1939). In pursuing these economic interests the colonizing country needed to ensure not only domination of indigenous populations in colonized countries but also some degree of assimilation, in order to foster the acceptance of harsh colonial rule, to create a local work force and to expand markets for goods produced both in the colonizing and colonized countries (Carnoy, 1974).

Through a process of territorial and colonial conquest a system of racism towards indigenous populations developed (see Peter Alexander, 1987:5-28). Racism can be taken to exist "...where a group of people is discriminated against on the basis of characteristics which are held to be inherent to them as a group"³ (Callinicos, 1992:6). While such racism has seemingly developed into an independent system of oppression, its roots were nevertheless grounded within the economic sphere which necessitated imperialism in the first place. As Callinicos (1992:16) has stressed: "Racism is thus a creature of slavery and empire, which developed in order to justify the denial to the colonial oppressed of the equal rights that capitalism tended to promise all of humankind."

³Although racism is often associated with skin colour this is not a necessary condition of racism. As Callinicos (1992:6) notes, Irish people were victims of racism in 19th century Britain, while modern anti-semitism is another case of racism which is not based on skin colour.

Within the South African context the subsequent development of racism has been closely related to that of the form of capitalism which has developed under colonialism, so that "...racial oppression and capitalist exploitation have come to feed on and reinforce one another" (Saul and Gelb, 1981: 9-10). The imposition of hut taxes, pass laws and the compound system are some of the racist mechanisms which were used to promote the interests of the South African economy.

Similarly, formal education played an important role in incorporating the indigenous South African population into the capitalist job market. Martin Carnoy (1974:43) noted that under colonialism a primary purpose of schooling was "...to incorporate people outside the advanced countries into the sphere of influence and control of these countries and their monopolies. Going one step further, the role of schooling as introduced by the advanced countries is to bring people into a social and economic structure in which they can be more effectively exploited by the advanced-country monopolies."

Indeed, this is true of the intention of the missionaries at Lovedale in 1878 who wanted to "...see the natives become workers" through a process of conversion to Christianity. They argued that the means to achieving this was two-fold: firstly the missionaries needed to create needs within the indigenous population, and secondly they needed to persuade them that these needs would be met through engaging in work for capital. They argued that:

"The speediest way of creating needs among these people is to Christianize them. As they become Christianized,

they will want more clothing, better houses, furniture, books, education for the children, and a hundred other things which they do not now have and never have had. And all these things they can get by working, and only by working. But Christianity also teaches the duty of working, and denounces idleness as sin" (Molteno, 1984:60).

While reference to such intentions of church and state functionaries underlines the role of formal education within the broad schema of the colonial system, it is not to say that educationists achieved the stated goals nor is it intended to elevate education to the levels which such statements might suggest. But there is no doubt that education was used to legitimate the brutality of colonialism by undermining indigenous cultures, and to create a semi-skilled workforce for the colonizers.

Carnoy (1974) refers to the use of education in this way as cultural imperialism. It is a process which entails "...the dehumanization of men and women to fit them into the colonial structure; the incorporation of all culture and history into the colonizer's view of culture and history; and the development of institutions that serve the colonizer, not the colonized" (Carnoy, 1974:69). Such degradation of the colonized constitutes a form of racism which totally undermines all that is associated with the indigenous way of life. This includes history, language, belief-systems and moral values. Formal education is one of the chief institutions involved in a process of cultural domination

whereby it is hoped that pupils will assimilate the culture of the colonizer.

As has been shown, this racial oppression is not aimless and independent of other spheres of life. It is directly linked to the colonizer's need to justify the harsh reality of imperialism and colonialism - of territorial conquest and subsequent attempts to force people off their land in order to incorporate them into an economy which undermines their very forms of subsistence.

Formal education has played a crucial role in this process. It has very definitely been used to degrade the very students who it supposedly educates, while simultaneously providing them with a level of education suitable to the perceived needs of capital⁴. H.F. Verwoerd and subsequent Nationalist educationist' attempts to use racist education policies in the interests of capital bear witness to this point. For example, Verwoerd (in Christie, 1985:12) stated: "There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour."

The issue which motivated this discussion was that of the relevance of class analysis in considering South African education with its predominantly racist appearance. The argument which has been presented here has attempted to show that racism has its roots in the economic realm. While David Welsh (1988:188) has "...declined to impute to capitalism the power that most Marxist theoreticians assume it to have", it

⁴This too is no doubt a form of degradation.

has been shown here that it would be difficult to comprehensively study South African education without at least some sense of there being a close relationship between the racism which has characterised formal education and the social relations of production of which such education is a part.

It is for this reason that Marxist theories of education are not only seen as relevant but are deemed crucial in studying a capitalist society such as South Africa, where racism has become deeply entwined with the dynamics of capital accumulation.

1.5 A critical approach to academic development at Rhodes University

In considering the past role of the Rhodes University ASP and in exploring its potential in the future, this study is committed to a critical approach to formal education.

Chapter Two offers an examination of structuralist accounts of formal education. A radical critique of structuralist functionalism is provided, yet many radical theories of education themselves fall prey to the determinism and overly functionalist traits of theorists such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons.

Within the radical structuralist tradition, ASPs could be criticised for supporting the general role of education as one aspect of state and ruling class domination within the university. While fulfilling the role of merely supporting

students who are not coping with the academic demands placed upon them in a band-aid manner, it has been argued that ASPs are guilty of perpetuating the ideology of blaming the victim (Ryan, 1976). In this manner the student is singled-out and labelled in the process. According to such structuralist analyses, this blaming the victim ideology obscures the inequalities and weaknesses of primary and secondary education in South Africa, as well as the inappropriateness and inefficiency of present university practices for dealing with students' academic difficulties.

It is argued that this pessimistic analysis of ASPs is overly deterministic and provides little, if any, space for the agency of individuals working within ASP.

Chapter Three considers the critical theory of the Frankfurt School and of Jurgen Habermas. The structuralist positions which were reviewed in Chapter One are superseded by non-structuralist accounts of formal education which provide greater scope for human agency. The critical paradigm of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse are briefly examined, but are found to lack in a thorough analysis of society. While these theories are indeed critical, they remain superficial and are too general to be of specific use in analyzing the role of ASP at Rhodes University. The Frankfurt School nevertheless provide a suitable general social theory which is adapted and developed by Jurgen Habermas. Habermas's critical theory is shown to be able to account for general trends within modern society, while still allowing for the intricate dynamics of local circumstances.

Chapter Four provides an historical account of ASP at Rhodes University. The underlying assumption of this chapter is that an understanding of the Rhodes University ASP's past, as well of important issues pertaining to ASPs on other campuses, is necessary if a thorough and critical analysis of the Rhodes University ASP's present and future role is to be possible.

For this reason a comprehensive context in which to situate the Rhodes University ASP is developed. In order to achieve such a context this historical overview embraces a number of issues including: the effect of state legislation on liberal universities; the reaction of these universities to such legislation; the origins of academic support programmes and their subsequent development, with a specific focus on the Rhodes University ASP; and a review of pertinent debates concerning the role of ASPs and their future direction.

The central theme of the chapter is the way in which the Rhodes University ASP grew in its ability to cope with student academic difficulties during the 1980's, as a result of experience, planning and discourse with other ASP educationists. The general trend which emerges is that of a shift from an approach which dealt with academic skills in a vacuum, in isolation from course content and formal departmental instruction, to an approach which integrates the task of academic skills transmission with course content and departmental teaching programmes.

Chapter Five proceeds with the issue of integration. It considers the motivation behind the integration strategy, and

examines the particular way in which the Rhodes University ASP committed itself to a policy of integration in the period between 1988 and 1992. The focus of the chapter is on explaining what integration is, and how it would affect a social science department such as the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

This examination includes a focus on the affects of integration on: lectures and lecturers; the tutorial system and tutors; the ASP staff member within the Department (formerly known as the ASP tutor, now known as the ASP specialist/lecturer) and on the ASP Centre itself. It is argued that all these areas need to be oriented towards an integration approach which encourages critical education. This would be achieved through developing a critical consciousness within students and by building a critical consciousness within the university more generally.

Chapter Six explores the perceptions of the staff and students of the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. This is done in an attempt at providing a general overview of these groups' attitudes towards the types of academic difficulties which students experience, and how best to overcome these. This empirical component of the study is guided by Norman Denzin's (1970) idea of data triangulation (cf. 1.2) in which a number of sources were approached in the research process. Staff and students were approached in order that those who are centrally affected by the proposed integration of ASP into the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology would have, in one way or

another⁵, been consulted in an attempt at eliciting their views concerning important issues relating to academic development, for example staff development and ASP-oriented departmental tutorials.

It is argued that the general attitude of both staff and students is one which favours the idea of academic development. The general perception of these two groups certainly provides reason to believe that the process of integration would work, were it to be fully established within the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

Chapter Seven provides a critical Marxist account of the process of integration at Rhodes University. Using the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas, a non-structuralist framework, in which academic development needs to be situated, is established.

It is argued that the strategy of integration must be regarded as a contested terrain. As such its implementation need not necessarily be conducted in a critically progressive manner. While staff and students have expressed a general acceptance of such an approach to instruction in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, there is no guarantee that the consequent implementation of integration will occur along the lines of critical education, which is crucial if a truly democratic and critical approach to teaching sociology is to develop.

⁵Either through interview or questionnaire.

Using Habermas's theoretical framework, it is argued that the current legitimation crisis (cf. 3.3.2 and 7.3.1) in formal education has led to the need for changes in the university. A situation has developed at Rhodes University, and in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology in particular, in which communicative action (cf. 3.3.4 and 7.6) between a number of concerned groups (such as ASP, administration, mainstream department staff and students) is taking place in various forms.

It is argued that if the various groups who are interested in academic development enter into discourse with one another and establish a common "pre-understanding" around the interests of the community, an ideal speech situation (cf. 3.3.4 and 7.7.1) will result. In this situation all participants are able to influence the course of events, and are thus able to exercise their ability to do otherwise (Giddens, 1982:30).

It is the contention of this thesis that only when this form of communicative discourse (cf. 7.7.1 and 7.7.2) is ensured will it be possible for a critical form of integration to evolve. There is no definite course of events which can be predicted, nor is there a way of knowing the nature of the outcome of this communicative discourse. Only when it is allowed to take place can we know that a democratic and critical implementation of integration will ensue.

Chapter Eight concludes with a brief summary of the arguments presented and a discussion of possible future research which needs to follow from this contribution to our understanding of

integration. The need for integration of academic development into mainstream departments is urgent. Every year which passes sees students battling with courses which do not cater for their particular difficulties. It is hoped that future research into the process of integration will take place, so that an increasing number of departments become involved in rational discourse which leads to the fostering of critical consciousness in university departments throughout South Africa.

CHAPTER TWO: STRUCTURALIST THEORIES OF EDUCATION

2.1 Introduction

The South African education scenario in which Academic Skills Programmes (ASP) need to be situated is a difficult and complex one. ASPs were a response to the burgeoning apartheid-induced education crisis being experienced by the traditionally English liberal universities in the late 1970's. The extent to which ASPs actually were and continue to be an effective response to this crisis is an area of much debate. While some (such as Moulder, 1988) argue that ASPs are merely a liberal attempt to fill in cracks in a rotting apartheid edifice, others (such as Lazarus, 1987) have suggested that ASPs can indeed not only be effective, but that they can bring about fundamental change within the university.

It is important to trace the theoretical roots of these arguments, if an adequate analysis of ASPs is to be conducted. In this opening theoretical chapter, therefore, the development of traditional theories of education will be briefly considered, leading to a more detailed account of radical theories of education. It will be argued that all these attempts have been overly functional in their approach to the analysis of formal education, and that a more context-specific and less functional approach is needed if the current educational scenario is to be successfully dealt with.

2.2 Structuralist functionalism

A predominant focus in much formal education theory has been to consider the function of such education. Traditionally this functionalist stance accepted as its basic premise the idea

that analysis of formal education must necessarily focus on education as one part within "the integral system of culture" (see Malinowski in McCarthy, 1984:214), and as such it needs to be assessed according to the manner in which it relates to other components within the system. This system in turn operates in relation to broader physical surroundings. Ultimately, the functionalist view insists upon the principle that formal education "...fulfils some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole" (McCarthy, 1984:214).

Emile Durkheim (1961) initiated this approach through considering the manner in which formal education teaches the values and norms of society as a whole. Following from this, he considered the extent to which formal education, through this process, instills a tendency towards order and patterned routine within educational recruits. Without this order, it is argued, society would not be able to function smoothly, if at all.

Talcott Parsons, the father of modern structural functionalism in sociology, refined Durkheim's approach with his theory in which he argued that the social system is a functional complex of institutions "...within which cultural values are made binding for action" (McCarthy, 1984: 216). Parsons thus viewed formal education as an institution which, in conjunction with other institutions in the social system, operates to "give coherence" to the different norms attached to the cultural system (Craib, 1984:42).

It does this through the process of secondary socialisation which follows from primary socialisation in the family. For Parsons, formal education has two underlying functions which are firstly, to socialise individuals, and secondly to allocate them particular roles in society (McKay and Romm, 1992:32). In this way formal education transmits the culture and accepted traditional values of society: it teaches knowledge, language, skills, and methods of evaluation and judgement, it selects pupils for different roles in society, and thereby acts as a form of social control. For Parsons, all these functions of formal education mean that it affords social mobility "...so that children attain improved occupational status and the prestige which goes with it" (Nobbs, 1983:188).

Parsons maintains that the institution of formal education fulfils these functions in a meritocratic manner. He argued that education is firmly entrenched in the logic of technocratic rationality and that it is anchored in a discourse which attempts to find universal principles of education that are rooted in the ethos of instrumentalism, or in other words, self-serving individualism. As such, he views the process of education as impartial and as a microcosmic form of society, merely instilling necessary but neutral (free of class, race or gender bias) social norms.

Given this meritocratic base, the functionalist approach does not take into account questions of the relations between knowledge, ideology and power. In effect, it ignores those principles which shape the inequalities within the existing

social order, especially within deeply segregated societies such as South Africa. Indeed, the very existence of ASP emphasises the existence of serious inequalities in South African schooling. These inequalities have very definitely shaped the lives of black scholars in a detrimental way, especially for the majority who drop out of school without matriculating. In ignoring these inequalities functionalists view formal education institutions such as schools and universities merely as instructional sites. In this sense, ASPs exist only to provide extra-mural lessons for students who, despite being given an equal chance in a meritocratic environment, are not able to succeed without academic support. The possibility of these sites of education also being political and cultural sites is ignored, as is the notion that they represent arenas of contestation and struggle among differentially empowered economic, political and cultural groups.

Despite these obvious shortfalls in the functionalist approach to education, it has remained a dominant school of thought throughout this century. Nevertheless, it has not gone unchallenged. Various, more radical accounts of education have been advocated. These begin by questioning the notion that the goals of social systems can be empirically and unambiguously determined in the way that functionalist theorists outline. But following from this stems the most crucial point of departure for radical theory - that the functionalist theoretical framework harbours a conservative bias, as it tends to be accepting of, rather than a challenge to, existing power relations in society.

It is argued that the functionalist paradigm is more an ideology than an empirical theory (McCarthy, 1984:217), in that it tends towards description rather than analysis. The descriptions which were formulated by Parsons accept rather than question the goals, values and functioning of the social system. Radical theories of education focus on the extent to which formal education functions in the interests of the existing social order, rather than simply as a neutral sub-system within society.

2.3 Theories of education as social reproduction

In a general sense, initial radical theorists took as their concern the issue of how formal education functions in the interest of the dominant class in society. Arguably the most influential of early radical theorists was Louis Althusser, a structuralist Marxist, who influenced later theorists such as Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), Alex Callinicos (1977), Nicos Poulantzas (1978), Paul Hirst (1979), and Stanley Aronowitz (1981). Althusser has also been an important influence on South African theorists (cf.7.2) such as Harold Wolpe (1975), F. Johnstone (1976), Peter Buckland (1981), Penny Enslin (1984), and Mervyn Hartwig and Rachel Sharp (1984).

2.3.1 Structuralist Marxism: Louis Althusser

In opposition to Parsonian functionalism, structuralist Marxism claims that:

"...the experience we have of being authors of our own action is in some sense mistaken or 'ideological' and

that what really happens is that underlying social structures determine our actions, work through them and that our actions serve to reproduce and maintain these structures, or on occasion, to transform them through revolution" (Craib,1984:123).

While Althusser opposed the very foundations of Parsons' structuralist functionalism, he nevertheless similarly provides a generalised theory which attempts to develop concepts that are able to grasp both societies and agency. Unlike Parsons, who started with agency, Althusser began with society and subsequently attempts to link society to agency, through the concept of 'structural causation' (Merquior, 1986:151), which ultimately can be seen to be a form of social over-determination, whereby the economic structure (infrastructure) determines, in the last instance, the superstructure of politico-legal and ideological institutions (Althusser, 1971:134-5).

2.3.1.1 The focal importance of production

For Althusser, Marxist philosophy is "...the theory of the history of the production of knowledge" (Althusser, 1970:56), which is indispensable to the science of historical materialism. Given that Althusser argues that dialectical materialism is the cornerstone of historical materialism, it follows that "...the theoretical future of historical materialism depends today on deepening dialectical materialism" (Althusser, 1970:77). It thus becomes clear that Althusser was concerned with defending "the theory of the history of the production of knowledge" through elaborating on

the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

Central to Althusser's understanding of dialectical materialism is the concept of practice or production (Geras, 1972:5) which is defined as:

"...any process of transformation of a determinate given raw material into a determinate product, a transformation effected by a determinate human labour, using determinate means (of production). In any practice thus conceived, the determinate moment is neither the raw material nor the product, but the practice in the narrow sense: the moment of the labour of transformation itself, which sets to work, in a specific structure, men (sic), means and a technical method of utilising the means" (Althusser, 1969:166-7).

Althusser's definition of practice (or production) can therefore be seen to include politics, ideology and theory "...as well as economic production in the narrow sense" (Geras, 1972:6). Thus for Althusser, it is not simply the economic mode of production which combines elements of the material production process within specific relations of production, but also, for example, "the mode of theoretical production" or "mode of production of knowledge" (Althusser, 1970:27).

In considering this interplay between various components of production, Althusser subsequently emphasised the need to "...renew the means of production if production is to be possible" (Althusser, 1971:127). In other words, any social

formation, if it wishes to ensure its survival, must necessarily ensure "the reproduction of the conditions of production" (Althusser, 1971:127). Given Althusser's definition of production it is clear that the reproduction of the conditions of production entails more than simply reproducing the means of production. There is also a crucial need for the reproduction of labour power (Althusser, 1971:130). Unless labour power is reproduced simultaneously to the means of production, a social formation will not be able to ensure the reproduction of its conditions of production.

The way in which labour power is reproduced is two-fold: firstly, it is ensured through the payment of wages, so that labour power has at its disposal the material means with which to reproduce itself (Althusser, 1971:130). However, it is not enough simply to ensure the material conditions conducive towards the reproduction of labour power, if it is to be reproduced as labour power. This is because secondly, labour power needs to be competent. This means that it must be "...suitable to be set to work in the complex system of the process of production" (Althusser, 1971:131). It is crucial that there be a unity between the means of production and labour power, so that the forces of production exist as a homogenous force. This situation is only made possible if labour power is sufficiently skilled to be able to meet "...the requirements of the socio-technical division of labour, its different jobs and posts " (Althusser, 1971:131).

2.3.1.2 Formal education as the most central Ideological State Apparatus

Althusser argues that under capitalism, unlike previous social formations, this process of equipping labour power with appropriate skills decreasingly occurs at the site of production (for example, through apprenticeships) and instead is replaced with an increasing tendency to take place outside production: within the formal education system, and to a lesser extent other "instances and institutions" (Althusser, 1971:132).

This formal education system teaches future labour power both the skills necessary to fill posts within the labour market, as well as the rules which must be obeyed if effective production is to be possible. As Althusser argued, the reproduction of labour power requires:

"...not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class in words" (Althusser, 1971:133).

By emphasising the essential nature of ideology in this manner, Althusser provided a reconceptualisation of the Marxist doctrine of ideology. It no longer is regarded merely as an 'illusion' and 'prop' which serves bourgeois interests, but it becomes a powerful 'social cement' which nevertheless

continues to serve ruling class interests (Merquior, 1986:151). In fact Althusser argued that the capitalist state has at its disposal two interconnected apparatuses which function to ensure state power. These are the Repressive State Apparatus (which includes the government, army and police) and the Ideological State Apparatuses (such as education, media and the church). The latter is regarded as the most dominant of the two within modern capitalist society (Althusser, 1971:153). He argues that every society, regardless of the mode of production which governs its particular epoch, depends on ideology in order to survive and function effectively, since people are ideological animals by nature (Merquior, 1986:151-2).

So it can be seen that Althusser elevated ideology to the forefront of state power in his refined version of Antonio Gramsci's dominant ideology thesis (see Merquior, 1986:152), and then subsequently argued that in capitalist society the formal education system in turn, is the dominant Ideological State Apparatus (Althusser, 1971:152-3). Althusser argued that the bourgeoisie has placed education in the all important position of being the dominant Ideological State Apparatus which, as such, is installed with the task of ensuring future workers, technicians, petty bourgeoisie, managers and capitalists who will meet the needs and serve the interests of the capitalist state (Althusser, 1971:154-155).

In the Althusserian analysis of formal education, ideology contains two crucial elements. Firstly, it has a material existence in the rituals, practices and social processes that

structure the daily workings of the classroom or lecture hall. For example the housing of separate departments in separate buildings and in the hierarchical relations between lecturer and students inscribed in the lecture hall where "...the seating arrangements - benches rising in tiers before a raised lectern - dictate the flow of information, and serve to neutralize professional authority" (Hebdige, 1979:68). Secondly, ideology neither produces consciousness nor a willing passive compliance (indeed, Althusser argues that the ideological state apparatuses are a site of class struggle). Instead, it functions as a system of representations, carrying meanings and ideas that structure the unconsciousness of students. For Althusser, therefore, the effect of ideology within the education system is to ensure the domination of the ruling class through inducing in students an imaginary relationship "...to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 1971:162). In the South African context AZAPO argue that this is indeed the case. The Educational Secretariat of AZAPO (1991:223) noted that South African education is used by the state to create "...an impression and an illusion that white values, culture, norms, etc., are superior." In this way education "...characterises the ordering and structuring of society" (Education Secretariat of AZAPO, 1991:227).

2.3.1.3 Criticisms of Althusser's structuralism

Quite ironically, yet somewhat inevitably, Althusserianism has incurred similar criticisms to those which have been levelled at Parsonian functionalism. While it is true that Althusserian structuralism does challenge the neutrality and

conservativeness of Parsonian functionalism, it nevertheless fails to avoid falling into the interconnected traps of over-functionalism (formal education necessarily and inevitably functions in the interests of capital), and over-determinism (the social relations at the site of education being determined by the economic base, inflicting knowledge on a passive learner who is perceived as manipulated by dominant mechanisms and social formations outside her/his control). It will be useful to look at these criticisms of Althusser in further detail because they are the most central issues which guide the exploration with which this thesis is primarily concerned, in the sense that they have to do with the extent to which ASP is able to act as an agent within the broader education system.

To begin with, Merquior (1986:152) argues that "...ideology, as a necessary, universal social glue was as functionalist as any concept." Althusser's argument that the Ideological State Apparatuses bring about an imaginary sense of being a subject through affecting the structure of the subconscious is not dissimilar to Parsons's notion of "status role" (Craib, 1984:144). Just as various statuses and roles await people before birth and do not allow them to escape their determinant hold over them, so too the Ideological State Apparatuses exist before the person is born and map out his/her life for him/her. A person's sense of being a subject and many other aspects of his/her ideas stem from the practices and actions which await her/him and which s/he is compelled into performing (Craib, 1984:144).

Althusser argued that the formal education system reproduces the conditions of production. However, his analysis of how this is achieved is wholly inadequate. In describing the interconnectedness between the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses he fails to provide a sophisticated account both of the reproduction of labour power at the site of education, and the nature of political activity surrounding this process. As Erben and Gleeson (1977:80) maintained:

"It is characteristic of Althusser's functionalist tendency that the vocabularies of meanings associated with individuals in particular situations are neglected; and the potentials of such situations for political activity missed. The basis for politically available situations is by-passed and any possibility of a weak link denied. There is a contradiction therefore, between his functionalist description of the school, and his argument that the reproduction of the social relations of production can only be a class undertaking, realized through a class struggle."

Indeed Althusser provided very little basis for hope amongst "...those teachers who, in dreadful conditions, attempt to turn the few weapons they can find...against the ideology...in which they are trapped" (Althusser, 1971:157). Even these opponents of the system are treated as puppets by Althusser, who argued that the majority of them are unaware that despite their attempts to flaw the system, they are nevertheless operating in the interests of the system "...which is bigger than they are and crushes them" (Althusser, 1971:157). In Althusserian terms ASPs, even though they might attempt to

change the university system, can thus be seen to be mere puppets within a formal education system which serves the interests of the state. It does this by papering the cracks of inequality within the university and for this reason must necessarily be viewed as a strategy for avoiding organisational change (see Moulder, 1988).

But in arguing along these lines, Althusser overly stressed the power of social structure in determining the actions of individuals. He strips individuals of any power over their own lives which they might have (despite the theoretically informed nature of such individuals or groups, or the local circumstances in which they are situated) and further weakens their position by arguing that power is situated within structures that both determine human behaviour and deny "...the very efficacy of human agency" (Giroux, 1983:129).

By situating power within these structures Althusser clearly opposed a subject-centred understanding of society. He argued that the course of history follows a dialectical pattern in which contradictions emerge between the modes of production and the social relations of production. "When this imbalance becomes sufficiently acute, it leads to changes in the relations of production, such as the division of labour, with resulting shifts in class structure, changes in class or property relations, emergence of new classes or decline of old ones, or other kinds of related social changes" (Johnson, 1981:127). According to Althusser therefore, persons are subject to social constraints which are the result of the materialist conditions of their society. An understanding of

society is thus achieved, it is argued, by focusing on the structures in which persons and events are situated rather than by studying persons and events themselves. Accordingly, history is not seen as the resultant of the projects of conscious subjects because "...the cultural systems within which historical action is performed are prior to and independent of the projects of the individual actors whose very subjectivity they constitute" (Benton, 1984:13). It therefore follows that "...whatever meaning and movement history displays is imported or endowed not by historical actors, but by the totality of rule systems within which they are located and enmeshed" (Benton, 1984:13).

In defending his structure-specific analysis of society, Althusser argued that theory precedes application because of the need to overcome the false consciousness of subjects within the historical process. In other words, because of at least a partial subconscious acceptance of the dominant ideology within society, the subjective view of the historical actor will reflect the view of the dominant ideology. However, if Gramsci's notion of hegemony is accounted for in the form of theoretical abstraction then the distortion of history can at the very least be lessened if not eradicated. This distortion is the result of subject-specific analyses which tend to accept the initial object or raw material of theoretical practice as the reality itself (Geras, 1972:8).

Geras (1972:8) noted that the process of abstraction serves to "...disengage or extract from the real object its essence, to eliminate in the process everything inessential or incidental

which obscures that essence." This then allows for the direct observation of the essence of the object so that it can be "...seen, grasped and possessed. The sight and possession by the subject of the essence of the object is what constitutes knowledge" (Geras, 1972:8).

However, in appealing to "...the sight and possession by the subject of the essence of the object", Althusser tended to conceptualise the human subject in terms which are transhistorical in nature and universal in character. In other words, it seems as though the human subject is dissolved in a theory of domination and determination which allows them no leeway for self-creation and mediation. Benton (1984:203) asserted that Althusser demotes human agents "...to the status of mere bearers or supporters of social structures amounts to a denial of the possibility that human actors may play a part in the making of history, but (more importantly) it also denies them a role in the making of the understanding of history."

In this manner, human agents are regarded simply as the effects of structural determinants whereby they, by necessity, act as role-bearers, constrained by the mediation of structures such as formal education systems, and in which they respond predominantly to an ideology which functions in a nonreflexive fashion. Giroux (1983:136) argued that this perspective therefore discounts the notion that "determinations" and the "incorporative powers of ideology" are able to produce resistance, struggle and contestation at the site of education. In this sense, Althusser paid scant

attention to the significance of the historical conjuncture at which human subjects living in determinate social relations "...not only reproduce but challenge the conditions under which they live" (Giroux, 1983:136).

Aronowitz (cited in Giroux, 1983:137) therefore concluded that Althusser's structuralist theory of reproduction and determination is "...only part of the algebra of revolution." If the role of human subjects and local circumstances are not to be neglected altogether, then Althusser's structuralist theory must be regarded as a useful, but not accurate, contribution to our understanding of the role of formal education within society. Firstly, the abstraction of the essence of events results in an approach which overly concentrates on ideology, and which consequently loses sight of the "complex interweaving" of real and ideological elements which constitute experience (Hall, 1981:383). Secondly, this pre-occupation with ideology has led to an overly determinist approach which allows the subject little scope for mediation and resistance. And thirdly, in outlining this type of determinism, Althusser assumes a functionalist framework for the formal education system which is viewed as always carrying out specific functions, regardless of the intricate dynamics of local circumstances.

2.3.2 The economic reproductive theory of education: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis

Bowles and Gintis (1976) attempt to refine Althusser's overly structuralist theory of the role of education in capitalist society. In agreement with Althusser, they claimed that formal

education fulfils two functions in capitalist society. Firstly, it ensures the reproduction of the labour power necessary for capital accumulation. Secondly, it facilitates the reproduction of those forms of consciousness, dispositions and values necessary for the maintenance of capitalist relations of production.

However, Bowles and Gintis differed quite significantly from mainstream Marxist theory in that their theory does, to an extent, diverge from some of the basic concepts of classical and more recent Marxism. They maintained that both humanist Marxism, as developed by the likes of Lukacs and Gramsci, and structural Marxism are misdirections (Sarup, 1978:156). On one hand, the former focuses too specifically on the activity of relatively free individuals within the superstructure, and so succumbs to the weakness of philosophical idealism: Bowles and Gintis contended that it tends to neglect economic factors. On the other hand, the latter (as has already been substantially argued) rejects this humanist approach as ideological, and instead concentrates on a form of determinism which stems from the economic infrastructure.

Bowles and Gintis interestingly reverted to Marx's early emphasis on production as being the most central variable in human society. They emphasised his argument that there cannot be change in distribution without there being corresponding change in the mode of production (Marx and Engels, 1967), and because exploitation occurs at the point of production, the central issue in capitalist society is control of work relations (Sarup, 1978:156). In advocating a theory of

political economy as an alternative to humanist and structural Marxism, Bowles and Gintis stressed the importance of production rather than ideology or agency. It is within this context that they put forward a Marxist theory of education.

2.3.2.1 The political economy of education

This theory of the political economy of education, as has been mentioned, shares some of the basic notions of Althusser's theory of education in capitalist society. The emphasis though is on production instead of ideology. Education produces the work force (supplying this work force with both the necessary skills and consciousness) and thereby supplies the capitalist system with a crucial component of its lifeblood. However, the theoretical vehicle which is employed to ensure this function is not the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses, but the correspondence principle. Bowles and Gintis (1976:132) argued that:

"Different levels of education feed workers into different levels within the occupational structure and, correspondingly, tend toward an internal organization comparable to levels in the hierarchical division of labour."

According to this correspondence thesis therefore, the hierarchical structure of values, norms and skills which characterise the social relations within the workplace are mirrored in the social dynamics of the site of formal education. The fundamental contention of this principle is that "...classroom social relations inculcate students with the attitudes and dispositions necessary for acceptance of the

social and economic imperatives of a capitalist economy" (Giroux, 1983: 84).

Within the South African context the notion of a correspondence between the the needs of the workplace and formal education has been noted by the likes of Pam Christie (1985) and Peter Buckland (1981). Buckland (1981:137) in fact argues that: "Certainly such a thesis is supported by the contemporary demands of industrial leaders for a black middle class and for Africans with managerial as well as technical skills."

For Bowles and Gintis the notion of the hidden curriculum was an important one, for it is through this that appropriate attitudes and skills are instilled within students. They contended that the education system is an institution which is incorporated by the state as a means of disciplining students in the interests of producing a docile and subordinate workforce. This is achieved through a system in which both teachers and students have become mere objects who have to follow a set curriculum according to stipulated procedures. These authoritarian characteristics are very much a part of the social relations within the site of education, yet they are not taught formally through the curriculum. In this sense these characteristics are taught through a hidden curriculum. It is in this hidden curriculum that the correspondence between the site of education and the workplace is evidenced. For example, in the same way as workers do not control the means of production, nor the process whereby they apply their skills to their tasks, nor even, what skills they can apply to

their work task, so too are students alienated from their work task: they have no control over their syllabus, nor over the process whereby they are taught this syllabus, nor are they encouraged to embrace creative or critical faculties which they might possess. All the while the emphasis is on docility, passivity and obedience: whether in the workplace or within the site of education.

This point was borne-out by Ernest Mandel (1972: 17), who noted that shifts within the university towards the "...overspecialization, functionalization and proletarianization¹ of intellectual labour are the objective manifestation of the growing alienation of labour and they lead inevitably to a growing subjective awareness of alienation." Mandel went on to argue that "...the feeling of losing control over the content and development of your own work is as widespread today among so-called specialists, including graduates, as among manual workers" (Mandel, 1972:17) and that the anticipation of this alienation among students in conjunction with the authoritarian structure of the university is felt very much by students in the academic context of the university (Mandel, 1972:17). Extreme emphasis on meritocracy in the learning situation, the impersonal and rapid production-line type approach to lecturing and marking of assignments and exams, together with the increased functionalization of research in the interests of university

¹. Mandel (1971:16) identifies a process of the proletarianization of intellectual labour. He argues that "proletarianization does not mean primarily (or in some circumstances at all) limited consumption or a low standard of living, but increasing alienation, increasing subordination of labour to demands that no longer have any correspondence to the special talents or fulfilment to the inner needs of men (sic)."

subsidization or subordination to specific projects of private companies and government departments, are but a few aspects of university life which correspond to the work situation. For Bowles and Gintis this type of correspondence was therefore clear.

2.3.2.2 Criticisms of Bowles and Gintis

However, critics of their approach argue that this correspondence thesis is both too simplistic and over-determined (Giroux, 1983:84). First of all, the correspondence principle is clearly functionalist. It treats education as the medium of supply of an educated workforce, and implicit to this thesis is the argument that the education system is structured so as to be compatible with the needs of the workplace. However, Hussain (in Demaine, 1981:104) stressed that it is a mistake to treat education simply as a supplier of educated workers. Although educational qualifications do serve as a basis for selection for occupations, the education system itself does not channel individuals into occupations. Rather, "...the volume, categories and the terms of employment are determined not inside but outside the education system" (Demaine, 1981:104). Yet this is precisely what Bowles and Gintis did argue.

A central part of the problem confronting Bowles and Gintis is that while they successfully indicated the existence of, and aptly portray, a close correspondence between the workplace and the formal education system, their theory is totally lacking in analysis of this correspondence. With this lack of analysis comes a misconception which led them to misconstrue

cause and effect, thereby incorrectly asserting that the formal education system is a deliberate construct of the state/economy which has been set up to secure the economic needs of capitalist society.

Even if the formal education system does appropriately prepare students for the job requirements of some sectors of the job market, Bowles and Gintis failed to stipulate the mechanisms through which this correspondence is secured by the economy. Quite obviously there is a relationship between the two, in that economic factors do affect the form of education which individuals receive, but "it is not at all clear that this influence of the economy amounts to a strict form of control such that the economy secures its needs" (Demaine, 1981:105).

Demaine (1981:105) contends that in capitalist economies there is no strict mechanism of control of education which would ensure the needs of the economy. The most important reason for this is that educational institutions are limited in their ability to match the supply of labour with demand. As Hussain (in Demaine, 1981:105) accurately pointed-out, students "...decide which courses (to) follow and the educational institutions do not necessarily tailor the numbers entering different courses to the requirements of the labour market."

In their own defence, Bowles and Gintis would argue that "...no mechanisms other than normal operations of the economy need to be supposed" (Demaine, 1981:105). Their argument considers the extent to which structural inequalities within the economy lead to the systematic distribution of students

into the various areas of the labour market. For Bowles and Gintis, individuals do not have a choice over the standard of education which they receive. They contended that the poor have no choice but to attend poor schools which subsequently provide them with an inferior education to those who attend higher quality schools. School thus becomes an initial selection agent, ensuring that many students never qualify for university education. Those students from poor families who do manage to qualify for tertiary education are nevertheless unlikely to afford university education, and thus once again are victims to an unequal education system.

However, this attempt to overcome the criticism of their theory is not entirely successful. The correspondence theory nonetheless remains poorly analysed and overly determinist. Bowles and Gintis did not provide a coherent theory of the mechanisms of the alleged relationship between education and the economy, whereby the economy is able to secure, through the educational system, its workforce needs. Like Althusser, they endeavoured to provide a theory of education which accounts for the way in which the forces and relations of production within capitalist society are maintained. Given this objective, they commit themselves to proving that the education system performs the function of reproducing the entire capitalist system. It is quite evident that education does not work as such an omnipotent and determinant force. The system is reproduced at a number of levels within a variety of institutions, each of which does not function as smoothly as Bowles and Gintis suggested. While they do tack-on a chapter entitled 'Education, Socialism and Revolution' which puts

forward the case for agency within the education system, this chapter does not follow logically from their previous overtly structuralist analysis of education in capitalist society.

While Bowles and Gintis did overcome some of the problems encountered by Althusser in his emphasis on education as part of the ideological apparatus, they failed to supersede his approach in a fundamental way. They too stressed social reproduction at the expense of cultural reproduction, thus mystifying rather than explaining how people resist, escape, and change the determinist nature of the existing social order (Giroux, 1983:86). They ignored the possibility of the education system being a site of struggle between the dominant and oppressed classes in society. Giroux (Giroux, 1983:86) argued that:

"By ignoring the notion that dominant ideologies and social processes have to be mediated rather than simply reproduced by the cultural field of the school, social reproduction theorists exempt themselves from one of the central questions in any theory of reproduction, i.e., the question of explaining both the nature and existence of contradictions and patterns of opposition in schools. *The existence of such patterns suggests that dominant educational values and practices have to be viewed in such a way that their determinate effects can neither be guaranteed nor taken for granted.*"

For this reason, further attempts at providing an acceptable theory of the sociology of education must necessarily make provision for the complex interplay between reproduction and

resistance which characterise the formal education system as a site of struggle. In this way positive steps can be taken to overcome the interlinked traps of determinism and functionalism.

2.4 Theories of education as cultural reproduction: Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein

Theorists of cultural reproduction embarked with their attempts at advancing educational thought exactly at the point where these theories of social reproduction began to experience the difficulties outlined. The most prominent proponents of this approach have been Pierre Bourdieu (1977)² and Basil Bernstein (1977). While they were also committed to studying the manner in which capitalist societies are able to produce and reproduce themselves, their central focus was on an analysis of the principles underlying the structure and transmission of the cultural field of the site of education, and how the culture of the site of education is produced, selected and legitimated (Giroux, 1983:87). Their chief concern, therefore, was with the mediating role which culture plays in reproducing class society.

Bourdieu and Bernstein contested the narrow economic determinism of Althusser and Bowles and Gintis, by outlining a theory of the sociology of education which saw institutions of

²Although Pierre Bourdieu's theory is being considered separately here, it is important to note that he worked along with Jean-Claude Passeron in one of the works to which reference is made in this thesis, i.e. Reproduction in education, society and culture, 1977. Given that this is not the only of Bourdieu's contributions being considered here, it was decided to refer specifically to Bourdieu, although Passeron's contribution is taken note of.

formal education as relatively autonomous from the direct influence of more powerful economic and political institutions (Giroux, 1983:87). Bourdieu argued that each class possesses its own cultural framework which is initially learned through socialisation into the family. This 'habitus'³ shapes the way in which individuals interpret and give meaning to their everyday experiences. Although one culture (specific to a particular class) is not intuitively better than another, the power of the capitalist class capacitates it with the ability to impose its cultural framework on the other classes, so that its culture becomes the only one which is accepted as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1977:144). The site of education is one of the most central areas where this form of hegemonic control takes place.

According to Bourdieu, the habitus of students from the dominant class works to their advantage in an education system which appears to operate along neutral lines. This habitus acts as a form of 'cultural capital' for upper class students, because of the way in which it translates into academic success within educational institutions that function in accordance with the dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1977).

In this sense it can be seen that educational institutions do

³ In precise terms, according to Bourdieu, the habitus refers to the "...subjective dispositions which reflect a class-based social grammar of taste, knowledge, and behaviour inscribed permanently in the body schema and the schemes of thought of each developing person (Giroux, 1983:89). The habitus, therefore, acts as a mediating link between structures, social practice and reproduction in such a way that the dominant culture (the culture of the capitalist class) does not automatically and systematically impose itself on the oppressed class. Instead, through the process of mediation, it is partly reproduced by them.

not simply mirror the economic relations within society. Instead they are seen as part of a "...larger universe of symbolic institutions that, rather than impose docility and oppression, reproduce existing power relations subtly via the production and distribution of a dominant culture that tacitly confirms what it means to be educated" (Giroux, 1983:87).

The argument of the culture reproductionists hereby attempted to disentangle the reasons underlying the oppressed's participation in their own oppression. The site of formal education becomes a crucial arena for arbitration between ruling class interests and those of subordinate classes. But within this arena an equal struggle does not ensue. Instead the relative autonomy of the site of formal education "...enables it to serve external demands under the guise of independence and neutrality, i.e. to conceal the social functions it performs and so to perform them more effectively" (Bourdieu and Passerson, 1977:192).

Despite the valuable contribution made by cultural reproductionists, in introducing the notion of contest to the question of ruling class domination over the oppressed at the site of education, they nevertheless have not managed to overcome the functionalist and determinist traits which were the undoing of the theories advanced by Althusser and Bowles and Gintis. Similarly to their predecessors, the likes of Bourdieu and Bernstein succumb to a theory of education which regards the institution of formal education as a site of domination which, even if relatively autonomous, perpetuates an invulnerable cycle of reproduction. Despite the contest

between cultures which takes place at the site of formal education, social actors are not considered to be able of overcoming the influence of the dominant class. The possibility of them becoming successful agents as part of a counter-hegemonic struggle is totally undermined in the face of an omnipotent and overbearing capitalist class (see Giroux, 1983:98). Veronica McKay and Norma Romm (1992:40) emphasise this point when they argue that such an approach fails "...to account for the way in which people may mediate ideological content in the schooling process." They conclude that: "The implication - as with the correspondence theory - is that people are not equipped to participate in redefining taught material" (McKay and Romm, 1992:40).

In the end it is apparent that theorists of cultural reproduction, while advancing a more complex and intricate theory of education than do theories of social reproduction, fail to overcome the core criticisms which they attempted to transcend: their analysis remains over-determinist and functionalist.

2.5 Conclusion

Structuralist functionalists, Althusser, Bowles and Gintis and cultural reproductionists all attempted to provide theories of formal education which they hoped would explain the dynamics of such education under capitalism. But it was shown that these theories provide a view of individuals who are too passive to overcome the overbearing structures which confront them at the site of formal education.

It is the contention of this thesis that the university needs to be regarded as a site of contest in which individuals are regarded as being able to impact on the education which they receive. The overly structuralist and functionalist theories which have been considered in this chapter provide little hope that ASPs would be able to act as agents of change meaningful within the university. It is for this reason that the focus of the next chapter is on critical Marxist theories. It will be argued that these theories have more successfully avoided the pitfalls of structuralism and functionalism than did the aforementioned theories which have been considered in this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: THE NON-STRUCTURALISM OF CRITICAL MARXIST THEORIES OF EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

In providing a theory of formal education which allows ASPs the capacity to initiate change within the university, it has been shown (in the previous chapter) that structuralist accounts of formal education must necessarily be transcended. It is the contention of this thesis that the site of tertiary education is a contested terrain in which ASPs are not determined and restricted by overbearing structures which exist outside of people's consciousness. Instead it is argued that "...any 'structure' must always be related to consciousness. 'Structures' depend on the way human subjects experience them. They therefore have a precarious character because of the ongoing 'meaning-making' activity of humans" (McKay and Romm, 1992:46).

This meaning-making is subject to the intricate dynamics of local circumstances which have the ability to either constrain or enable ASPs in their attempts to foster change within the university. It is argued in this chapter that the critical Marxist approach of Jurgen Habermas (in particular) provides an understanding of the university which allows such scope for agency in the everyday activities of ASP and those with whom it interacts.

3.2 The Frankfurt School: Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse.

A crucial shift away from the theoretical stance of orthodox Marxism arose with the emergence of the Frankfurt School in

the 1920's¹. Although it cannot be said that this entire school of thought espoused a fully articulate philosophy which they shared unproblematically, these theorists can be seen to have shared a critical theoretical perspective which initially attempted to assess the forms of domination which exist in capitalist society (Giroux, 1983:7).

The early or classical Frankfurt school, under the predominant influence of Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse was characterised by a commitment to dialectical materialism. For these theorists, thought was critical because of their belief that "...philosophy is the attempt to consider everything from the viewpoint of redemption" (Adorno in Merquior, 1986: 111). And although they did not possess a positive theory of a redeemed society, they did argue that society, in its present form needed to be redeemed (Merquior, 1986:111).

3.2.1 Domination

While the Frankfurt School was originally set up to conduct research on the German labour movement, under these aforementioned theorists this focus shifted to cultural criticism more generally. This new focus was concerned especially with domination. These theorists were interested in the way in which the social system dominates "...with the ways in which it forces, manipulates, blinds or fools people into ensuring its reproduction and continuation" (Craib, 1984: 185).

¹The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research was founded in 1923 as a centre for socialist research (Craib, 1984:183).

3.2.2 Instrumental reason

At the same time they were concerned with what they termed 'instrumental reason', which refers to a way of looking at the world which justifies the domination of people over each other and the system over the people. It is a logic of thought and a way of perceiving the world which is based on, yet more extensive than, Lukacs' idea that "...the economic level of capitalist society is such that human relations come to appear as relations between things, that people come to see themselves and others as objects and the social world comes to seem a 'second nature' as unchangeable and independent of our actions as nature itself" (Craib, 1984:186).

The term 'instrument' is two-fold in that it applies to a way of perceiving the world on the one hand, and a way of approaching theoretical knowledge on the other. In terms of the former, the world can be viewed as an instrument whereby its elements can be used as tools with which we can achieve our ends (Craib, 1984:186). With regard to the latter, knowledge can be seen to be an instrument which can be used to further our understanding of the world, through dealing with conceptual problems which science might encounter (Craib, 1984:187).

Ultimately, instrumental reason is concerned with the practical purpose of "discovering how to do things" rather than with formulating ideas about "what should be done" (Craib, 1984:187). Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse saw a close correlation between instrumental reason and capitalism. In fact Adorno and Horkheimer almost concluded that capitalism is

a product of instrumental reason rather than that the latter is the product of the former (Craib, 1984:189). The ultimate conclusion of all three theorists is that capitalism needs to be superseded in order for instrumental reason to be surpassed. For them the capitalist system is integrally linked to instrumental reason, and is not able to adapt itself to any form of resistance without being fundamentally transformed.

It can be argued therefore, that critical theory, in coming to terms with instrumental reason, is critical because it shows that existing society is both irrational and oppressive through the way in which it "...takes away or destroys basic features of human life" (Craib, 1984:189). However, critical theory also outlines the fact that we are able to transform our own environment and make collective rational choices about our own lives. As Ian Craib (1984:189) concludes, "...it puts our present society and views back into their historical context, showing that they are not fixed for all time, but part of a long and difficult process in which we are still engaged."

3.2.3 Culture

Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse can therefore be seen to have provided forms of historical and sociological analysis which outline the promises as well as the limitations of the existing dominant instrumental reasoning which has developed during the capitalist era. For them, the pre-condition for resisting the dominant modes of thought is the development of a critical theory which has as its goals social and political

emancipation (Giroux, 1983:22). Their analysis of culture, in particular, is useful, in that it is viewed as playing a central role in resisting domination, yet it is not viewed as autonomous of political and economic processes within society.

In this way, the orthodox understanding of culture is rightly counteracted. As Adorno (in Giroux, 1983: 22) argued:

"The substance of culture ... resides not in culture alone but in relation to something external, to the material life-process. Culture, as Marx observed of juridical and political systems, cannot be fully understood either in terms of itself...or in terms of the so-called universal development of the mind. To ignore this ...is to make ideology the basic matter and to establish it firmly."

Critical theorists can therefore be seen to have differed with orthodox Marxism in their understanding of the dynamics of culture in society. As has been shown, orthodox Marxists argued that there was a deterministic relationship between culture and the material forces in society, and they thus reduced culture to "a mere reflex of the economic realm" (Giroux, 1983:22). Contrary to this, critical theorists argued that the role of culture in capitalist society was becoming increasingly extensive. They argued that with developments and modifications in various spheres such as technology (for example, technology led to more effective and penetrative mass media), the rationality of domination began to influence spheres outside the realm of economic production. Therefore, mass-cultural institutions such as educational institutions

became more central in the production and transformation of historical experience (Giroux, 1983:23).

Leaning on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Adorno and Horkheimer argued that ruling class domination was reproduced through ideological hegemony. They maintained that ruling class power was ensured predominantly through the rule of consent, and as such was mediated through cultural institutions of which educational institutions were of central importance. Culture had therefore become a further vehicle for instrumental reasoning, used to legitimate the logic of capitalism. However, while culture might indeed have become a means of ruling class domination it also increasingly became an important site of struggle.

3.2.4 Dialectical thinking

Through emphasising a process of dialectical thinking², critical theorists outlined a form of analysis which emphasises the breaks, discontinuities and tensions in history, and in so doing, they emphasised the centrality of human agency and struggle in transforming the educational process which takes place in formal educational institutions.

² According to Jameson (in Giroux: 1983:35) "dialectical thinking...is thought about thinking itself, in which the mind must deal with its own thought process just as much as with the material it works on, in which both the particular content involved and the style of thinking suited to it must be held together in the mind at the same time." Such an approach to knowledge would lead to a form of educational instruction which would inform the oppressed of their position within specific relations of domination and subordination (Giroux, 1983:35). In this respect dialectical thinking is not dissimilar to Paulo Freire's (1972) concept of "dialogue", which in terms of education is the means to bringing about "liberatory education" (Shor and Freire, 1987:33).

It was argued that the oppressed groups within educational institutions "...need to affirm their own histories through the use of a language, a set of social relations, and a body of knowledge that critically reconstructs and dignifies cultural experiences...(in such a way that) it becomes possible for students who have been previously voiceless in schools to learn the skills, knowledge, and modes of inquiry that will allow them to critically examine the role society has played in their own self-formation" (Giroux, 1983:37,38). Certainly these are the types of skills which ASPs need to develop within students whose academic needs have often been ignored by departments, university administration and even by some unsympathetic ASP staff. These skills, once developed, can be used to thwart further attempts at domination. Ultimately such skills can be the catalyst for struggle against ruling class domination, and ultimately towards an existence in which students have more control over their own lives.

3.2.5 Depth psychology

In attempting to explain the subjective dimension of these processes of liberation and domination, the early Frankfurt School turned to Freudian psychoanalysis for support. Freudian psychology allowed these theorists the opportunity to analyse the interplay between the individual and society, through considering the role which the individual's psyche plays in her/his own domination and liberation. In short, Freudian assumptions provided useful insights which were used in establishing a depth psychology. These included the structure of the psyche and how it relates to the outside world, how

changes in the role of the traditional family affect the individual and how objective and psychological processes can act as obstacles to social change (Giroux, 1983: 29). Even though the early Frankfurt School acknowledged problems with Freud's theory, such as its over-identification with a particular historical period, they nevertheless argued its importance as a theory which could provide them with a strong theoretical framework within which to explain how people play a part in their own oppression.

The importance of this framework becomes clear when examining the manner in which Marcuse incorporated Freudian analysis into his theory of society. Marcuse argued that the most piercing forms of social repression are generated in the inner history of individuals, through the way in which they attempt to satisfy their needs (see Giroux, 1983:33). He argues that these needs are perpetuated through patterns and social routines of everyday life. Given that many of these needs are false needs - the product of false consciousness - it can be seen how the individual's psyche plays a crucial role in turning what is part of capital's dominant ideology into an accepted pattern of habit.

This argument seemingly stresses the power of capital's domination of the individual to a point where psychological factors completely over-ride the potential for human agency, but Marcuse argues that this is not the case. He emphasises the importance of Freudian analysis as a mode of critique, but asserts that psychoanalysis is based in socio-economic conditions that can be transformed (Giroux, 1983:34). For

Marcuse therefore, the limitations of existing forms of domination need to be weighed against the possibility of transformation when considering the individual's position in society. The student, although weighed-down by her/his own psychological processes in the face of the ruling class's attempts at domination, is still able to resist and challenge the ruling class ideas and practices as represented in the lecture-room situation and the university more generally. More specifically, ASPs are able to play a role which facilitates this sort of resistance against conservatism within the university.

3.2.6 The dialectics of formal education

Quite clearly there is a paradox which emerges here. On the one hand it is strongly argued that formal education, as part of the cultural realm has been incorporated by capital as a means of mass domination. Yet this very same site of formal education is also said to be a potential area for critique, assessment and resistance. Within this paradox, a dialectical approach to education has been developed, in which broad structural constraints are recognised, yet ones which are not overpowering and overly-determinist. As Giroux (1983:38) noted, "...human beings not only make history, they also make the constraints; and needless to say they also unmake them."

3.2.7 Criticisms of the Frankfurt School

But while these early critical theorists seemingly provided a way of escaping the determinism of both social and cultural reproductionists, it has been argued that their analysis of society was lacking in depth. In a nutshell, critical

theory is regarded by such critics as being 'empty speculation' (Craib, 1984:197). Marxist critiques have focused on the abstract and speculative nature of the theory which, it has been argued, does not provide us with knowledge about society nor any analysis of "real social structures"³ (Craib, 1984:198). Concepts such as domination and human agency remain very general, and unless more detailed analysis is provided it is difficult to provide an in-depth 'practical criticism' of this approach (see Craib: 1984:199). As Merquior (1986:138) aptly concludes: "...critical theory remained critical only because it purported to sustain a critique, and not because it ever tried to develop as analytically controlled thought."

Equally problematical is the critical theorists' dependence on Freudian psychoanalysis in explaining the link between the individual and society. While many problems with Freud's theory have been postulated, especially dealing with the lack of substantive evidence for the psychic structures and processes which he appealed to, of more significance here is the issue of dualism which the early Frankfurt theorists fail to overcome. They do not adequately show how the oppression of the individual, as a result of (biologically based) processes within her/his psyche is coherently linked to the mode of production within the historical epoch in which the individual is a human agent. Nor do they clearly explain how the social transformation, which is going to liberate the individual from

³Although this is exactly what the Frankfurt School wanted to avoid. Such Marxist critiques presuppose "...a structuralist view of reality as something external and 'given'. This implies a view of social reality which is coercive, which is independent of human actions, and which has the propensity to maintain and reproduce itself" (Mckay and Romm, 1992:55).

the oppressive nature of capitalist domination, is going to eventuate if the individual is all the while 'unfree' due to an oppression which is both psychologically and socially based.

Finally, the early critical theorists' failure to acknowledge the capitalist system's ability to adapt itself to changing circumstances causes further problems. The resilience which characterises capitalism has shown that there is scope for instrumental reasoning to be challenged and changed without the entire capitalist system having to be superseded by a socialist or other economic system.

While it is clear that the original critical theorists provided us with a broad framework in which to situate a rigorous analysis of formal education, they failed to provide a sound and unproblematic social theory which is able to fully explain the particular dynamics of struggle within the site of formal educational institutions. It is for this reason that the focus of this thesis moves to the work of Jurgen Habermas who has provided a more specific and focused analysis of society in which to situate a comprehensive study of formal educational institutions.

3.3 The critical theory of Jurgen Habermas

Jurgen Habermas too is a product of the Frankfurt School, although he differed with the earlier critical theorists in that he wished to return to a concrete study of the social and economic realms in his analysis of repression and transformation. While he did lean on Freudian psychology in

this analysis he discarded substantive notions of psychic forces and rather focused on the therapeutic concept of self-reflection with its emancipatory potential (Merquior, 1986:165). In this sense critical thought is a means to overcoming the suffering caused by repression. Habermas argues that the capitalist class is able to maintain control over the rest of society because individuals are unaware of the false consciousness which holds sway over them (Merquior, 1986:167). Critical thought ultimately leads to a form of self-reflection which enables individuals to experience greater human freedom.

3.3.1 The centrality of language and communication

Unlike Marx, and later Marxists such as Althusser, Habermas argued that socially organised production is not sufficient to distinguish humans from animals, but that language and communication are what make the decisive difference (Craib, 1984: 207). For this reason he did not contend, along with earlier radical theorists that the economic base of society is determinant in the last instance. As Habermas asserted, "...due to the introduction of elements of the superstructure into the base itself, the classical dependency relationship of politics to the economy was disrupted" (Habermas, 1974:237). In fact he argued that the economic level is perhaps only dominant in early capitalism, or at the very most, in capitalism as a whole. His shift from the economic realm leads him to concentrate on particular institutional complexes which dominate specific societies at different times (Craib, 1984: 207).

3.3.2 Legitimation crisis

Whereas the economy formed the dominant institutional complex in early capitalist society, the state fills this role in late capitalism. With the development of capitalism, the state increasingly assumes the role of regulator within society. In the stage of late capitalism (modern capitalist society) state intervention becomes so central to the general operation of society that it reaches a critical point. Habermas argued that although conflict continues to characterise the work place, class struggle as understood in classical Marxist terms is no longer the key area of conflict in society (Craib, 1984:209).

Instead the state becomes the most central institutional complex in capitalist society. Habermas (in Connerton, 1976: 368) maintained that the state employs strategies such as compulsory price fixing and "quasi-political compromises with trade union contractors in wage negotiations" to immunise basic sources of class conflict, while at the same time spreading the "dysfunctional side-effects" of these and other strategies by distributing them amongst "quasi-groups" (such as consumers, invalids, pensioners, etc.) and other minority groups who are rarely able to organise themselves successfully. In this way class consciousness is fragmented and diffused.

Exploitation is thus increasingly mediated through a state apparatus, so that poverty and misery are associated more with such factors as sickness, age, gender or race than with class position as evaluated in terms of a labour theory of value (Pusey, 1987:93). This state apparatus is used by the state as

a means of maintaining its legitimate control over society. The state thus preserves popular assent and mass loyalty through using "...its fiscal revenues to provide social, educational and welfare services and to support the ideology⁴ that legitimates the whole system" (Pusey, 1987:95).

Habermas thus argued that the state can be viewed as a system which employs legitimate force. "Its output consists of autocratically-executed administrative decisions; for these it requires an input of mass loyalty, as little attached to specific objects as possible" (Habermas in Connerton, 1976:375). Habermas argued that both of these directions may lead to critical disturbances within the social system. Firstly, output crises take the form of crises in rationality (cf.7.3.3). This occurs when the administrative system fails to fulfil the necessities of control which it has taken over from the economic system. At such times a "disorganisation of various areas of social life" eventuates. Secondly, input crises take the form of crises in legitimation (cf.7.3.1) whereby the legitimation system fails to maintain a sufficient level of mass loyalty (Connerton, 1976:375).

Habermas argued that these crises are the inevitable result of the expanded activity of the state in modern capitalist society. With this expanded activity comes an increasing need for legitimation - for justification of state intervention into new areas of social life. However, this process of the

⁴ Habermas uses the term ideology to mean "...ideas that serve either to hide or to legitimate power, in other words, to hide, normalize, in short to legitimate the underlying structure of social organization" (Pusey, 1987:96).

"colonization of the life world" (See Pusey, 1987:99) simultaneously leads to the unintended side-effect of undermining traditional forms of legitimation. In this manner, "...rationalization destroys the unquestionable character of validity claims that were previously taken for granted; it stirs up matters that were previously settled by cultural tradition in an unproblematic way; and thus it furthers the politicization of areas of life previously assigned to the private sphere" (McCarthy, 1984:369-70).

3.3.3 Legitimation crisis in formal education

Increasing state intervention has affected the formal education system in capitalist society in the aforementioned way. Indeed, Habermas (in Connerton, 1976:378) claims that within formal education the "...unquestionableness of tradition has been destroyed." This has occurred because the manner in which traditional formal educational institutions merely codified a canon which had developed in an unplanned nature-like manner, has been superseded by curriculum planning which is "...based on the premise that traditional patterns could as well be otherwise. Administrative planning produces a universal pressure for legitimation in an area which was once distinguished precisely for its power of self-legitimation" (Habermas, 1976:71).

With this failure of older institutions and traditions, the state increasingly needs to fulfil the requirements of social integration (Pusey, 1987:99), and thereby causes an irreducible dependency upon its welfare provisions. This can be seen to be true for students who are dependent on the

formal education system for future job prospects. However, Habermas (in Connerton, 1976:381-82) notes that the ideology of achievement which legitimises formal education fails when it does not provide children with "...equal opportunities of access to schools leading to higher education", or when "...non-discriminatory standards for evaluating educational achievement" are not applied. In addition, as the formal education system expands, it increasingly becomes independent of changes in the workplace. Students who fall victim to such discrepancies within the formal education system and whose life chances are detrimentally affected begin to feel alienated and frustrated within their educational environment.

This frustration precipitates political contestation over the resources which are allocated by the formal education as well as other institutions. The state, in response, attempts to cover-up this kaleidoscope of contradictory demands with "...smoothing and avoidance strategies that are impossible to coordinate successfully beyond the short term and that ultimately only add to the frustrations, suspicions and resentments of large populations" (Pusey, 1987:100). These grievances are expressed at each point at which the colonisation of areas of social life has taken place (cf. 7.3.3 and 7.4).

Each institution has the potential to become a site of struggle, if the ideological hold of the state over the institution begins to falter. In other words, localised incidence of legitimation crisis can be said to emerge, according to the particular dynamics of individual areas of

social life. Within these areas of social life grievances can be expressed through a process of communicative action (cf. 7.6; 7.6.1; 7.6.2; 7.6.3. Communicative action is action which is oriented towards reaching an understanding, and is achieved through the acceptance of each others' speech acts⁵ (cf.7.7.1), once a background of culturally ingrained pre-understanding has been established (see Pusey, 1987:75-82).

3.3.4 Overcoming structural determinism

In this sense, Habermas has overcome the problems of determinism to which more functionalist analyses of formal education fall prey. By carefully explaining "...that there is no way of predicting the type or form, and certainly not the outcome, of a crisis" (Pusey, 1987:100), he allows for a greater role for human agency than do those theories previously discussed. In addition, Habermas has avoided making any mechanical formulations which might stress that various universal patterns must necessarily emerge through such agency (cf. 7.8).

Habermas, in holding this general outlook on society, has been supported by Giddens (1982: 30) who argued that it is crucial to view human agents as being 'capable' of doing otherwise, as being able to influence a pre-existing course of events, and of their ability to challenge existing structures which

⁵A speech act involves three types of validity claims: constatives, regulatives and avowals. Constatives are a cognitive mode of communication which function as a means of representing facts. Regulatives are an interactive mode of communication and function to establish legitimate interpersonal relations. Avowals are an expressive mode of communication which disclose the speaker's subjectivity. For Habermas all three categories are necessary for a speech act, and hence communicative competence, to take place (see Pusey, 1987:76-79).

restrict their experience. In other words, for Giddens, it is a mistake to treat the structural features of the formal education system as overpowering constraints which cannot be influenced by local circumstances.

3.4 Conclusion

It is the argument of this thesis that particular conditions within specific local circumstances need to be taken into account when viewing the potential for change within areas of society. This means that any theory of change must necessarily focus on the liberatory potential of agency as opposed to macro-level structural determinants if it is to adequately account for the dynamics of local circumstances. In terms of the particular focus of this thesis, it is contended that it would be a mistake to assume that the formal education system (if one can speak of a South African education system) meets the needs of capitalist society.

Instead it is argued that the situation is not as simplistic as deterministic and functionalist theories portray. The South African education scenario needs to be regarded as complex and flexible, rather than a rigid puppet of a broader and more powerful racial-capitalist structure. The latter approach is crudely determinist, and must necessarily be replaced by an approach to formal education which provides actors within the site of formal education a far greater degree of control over their own lives and destinies. Unless this sort of approach is realised, the pursuing analysis of ASPs will be overly simplistic and pessimistic.

Having established an appropriate theoretical framework in which to situate Academic Support/Skills Programmes, it will be possible to consider the historical context in which the Rhodes University ASP has progressed. It will be argued that the development of ASP during the last decade leaves no doubt as to its ability to adapt to and overcome local constraints. Through engaging in a process of communicative action the Rhodes University ASP indeed has the capacity to involve itself in the progressive transformation of Rhodes University, by challenging existing ideas, methods and practices.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RHODES UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC SUPPORT/SKILLS PROGRAMME IN THE 1980'S.

4.1. Introduction

Having provided a theoretical context in which to locate a non-structuralist approach to the Academic Support/Skills Programme (ASP) at Rhodes University, it is now possible to consider the history of the Rhodes University ASP. This account will be informed by reference to developments concerning ASPs on other campuses as well as to relevant theoretical debates regarding the role of ASPs in South African universities.

In this chapter the progress which the Rhodes University ASP has made over the last decade will be assessed. Within this context a thorough analysis of ASP's potential to act as an agent of progressive change at Rhodes University will be possible.

4.2 The effect of racial legislation on access to university education

"We do not want to make of the Native child a big, broad, philosophic being such as the liberalists talk about. There is not sufficient time for that. We can only give him the absolute neccessities. We must teach him to become a person who is competent in the task awaiting him in life, not for the task awaiting the European child, not to become a teacher or a parson; we must prepare him for those things which he needs in life. Then those schools will really have done their moral duty to those

children" (A. Hertzog, in Union of South Africa: Hansard 1953:4054).

The catastrophic conditions within South African education which resulted from such Nationalist ideological reflections have been extensively documented and theorised. Yet the adversities of Bantu and Christian National Education cannot be underestimated as they continue to plague and perplex those educationists who are confronted with student difficulties at the tertiary level in the 1990's.

Apartheid education policy of the 1950's had the effect of a two-prong attack on any attempts by the four traditionally liberal universities¹ to provide equal educational opportunities to all South Africans at the tertiary level. These came in the form of The Bantu Education Act (Act No. 47 of 1953) and The Extension of University Education Act (Act No. 45 of 1959).

4.2.1 The Extension of University Education Act

The most immediate affront to these universities was the passing of The Extension of University Education Act of 1959, which introduced measures which placed a limitation on the circumstances under which black students were allowed to enter

¹ These are the Universities of Cape Town, Natal, Rhodes and Witwatersrand.

these universities². According to the Act, "... no non-white person who was not registered as a student of a university established by Act of Parliament, other than the University of South Africa, on or before the said date, shall register with or attend any such university as a student without the written consent of the Minister" (Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1959:506). While it is true that these universities had practised racist admission policies prior to the passing of this Act³, they did nevertheless take a strong stand against the 1959 legislation. As Behr (1987:3) notes, the four traditionally liberal universities responded by dedicating "...themselves to the principle of freedom of association and of the right to determine who shall be taught, what shall be taught, and how it shall be taught, without regard to any criterion, except academic merit."

Despite opposition from these universities, only a select few black students were allowed to enrol at these white universities. The circumstances of their admission were subject to certain conditions, at the discretion of the Minister of Education (Behr, 1987:3). Overall, despite the

² The purpose of the Act was to "...provide for the establishment, maintenance, management and control of university colleges for non-white persons; for the admission of students to and their instruction at university colleges; for the limitation of the admission of non-white students to certain university institutions; and for other incidental matters" (Statutes of the Union of South Africa, 1959:484).

³ Behr (1987:3) notes that the University of Cape Town and Witwatersrand did exclude students on the basis of their race prior to 1950. For example, as Murray (cited in Behr) argues "...at its inception Wits very much reflected the prejudices of the society to which it belonged...It was not until World War II, when it became impossible for black students to pursue their professional studies overseas, that Wits began to accept black students on any scale at all."

initial outcry, Budlender (1972:4) notes that "...one of the more disappointing aspects of the universities' reaction to the 1959 Act (was) their lack of enthusiasm in attempting to counteract the effect of this legislation."

4.2.2 The Bantu Education Act

Those black students who did gain admission to white universities were nevertheless still victims of the second, although less immediate of the 1950 Acts - The Bantu Education Act. The most serious effect of this Act, was the fact that racial segregation in South African schools was legally enforced. All African schools were placed under the central control of the Native Affairs Department, who administered an inferior education system to Africans than provided to the other race groups in South Africa. So-called Indians and Coloureds also suffered inferior education as a result of this Act (Christie and Collins, 1984:162).

The implementation of the Bantu Education Act adversely affected all black scholars who attended public schools. The fact that the majority of those few students who did gain access to white university education came from these inferior schools, placed them in a disadvantaged position within the university situation. As the number of black students gradually increased, so too did the poor quality of their primary and secondary education become a problem for the universities which were admitting them.

But for a long time the number of black students entering white universities was kept to a minimum by the rigid

implementation of the Extension of University Education Act. In 1959 only two percent of all students in the four liberal universities were African, while this figure had dropped to one percent by 1967 (McMenamin, 1987:51).

However, with the relaxation of the regulations governing the admission of black students to white universities which occurred during the late 1970's, this figure changed so that by 1983 the number of African students in these universities had risen marginally to four percent (McMenamin, 1987:51), while a particular focus on Rhodes University reveals that in 1982, black students comprised approximately eleven percent⁴ of this university's student population (Bekker and Mqingwana, 1983:2).

Despite this concession which led to the increased trickle of black students into open universities, these students still needed to gain ministerial approval in order to attend these universities. The most apparent criterion for acceptance for admission was the non-availability of a course at black universities, although this was not always the case, as was evidenced by the presence of black students in the Rhodes University Faculties of Science, Social Science, Divinity and Law (Bekker and Mqingwana, 1983:2).

⁴The exact black student numbers at Rhodes University for 1982 were as follows: African students: 103; 'Coloured' students: 62; 'Indian' students: 92. Thus totalling 257 students of a total student population of 2 324. In other words, 11% of the total student population were black.

4.3 1979-1982: The establishment of the Academic Support Programme at Rhodes University.

The effect of the Bantu Education system in particular began to be felt by the traditionally English liberal universities in 1979 with the admittance of significant numbers of black students into these universities, as a result of the above-mentioned concession. From the outset it was obvious that there was a disparity in the extent to which students were prepared for the demands of academic endeavour at these universities. This led to a hasty response from these universities in the form of the introduction of Academic Support Programmes (ASPs) whose proposed task it was to redress the imbalances of apartheid education.

At Rhodes University the move towards the introduction of ASP lagged somewhat behind the other traditionally liberal campuses. While ASPs were actually already in operation at the University of Witwatersrand and the University of Cape Town in 1980, and at the University of Natal (Durban and Pietermaritzburg) in 1981, it was only in 1982 that the Rhodes ASP Centre was established.

According to Paul Walters (1982b:1), this was the result of several years of consideration, brought about by the plight of academically "at risk"⁵ students at the University. The first official Rhodes University enquiry to investigate the issue of

⁵Senate used the term "at risk students" to refer "largely, though not exclusively" to under-prepared students "coming from the poorly financed secondary school system provided for so-called blacks*, Indians and coloureds" (Walters, 1985c:1). *It needs to be noted that at the time Rhodes University used the term 'black' in a very narrow sense to refer to 'African' students.

"the unsatisfactory results of Black, Coloured and Indian students" was conducted by a Senate Sub-Committee which was appointed in December 1979 (Walters, 1982b:1).

By June of the following year this sub-committee had completed its investigation, and recommended to Senate that various measures be taken to assist "at risk" students. These measures included post-admission testing, counselling and tutorial assistance. While Senate accepted this report, nothing was done to implement any of the recommendations. In the following year further investigation went into the issue of student support, in the form of contact with overseas academics⁶ (Walters, 1982b:1).

After sixteen months of non-action, the sub-committee on "Unsatisfactory Results" reconvened in October 1981, in an attempt at concretising some form of support for "at risk" students. After further assessing the situation, and through incorporating new ideas which had developed through meeting with academics from other universities, this sub-committee once again presented a report to Senate (in December of the same year). This time the report recommended that all first year students be tested on their arrival at the University, and that two posts be established to provide tutorial assistance for "at risk" students. In addition, the sub-committee stressed the urgent need to immediately seek

⁶Walters (1982b:1-2) notes that local support came from the Molteno Brothers Trust who endowed a chair in the Study of English in Africa to look into the issue of English as a second language, while overseas support was received when Professor Lanham visited six British universities, and overseas academics visited South Africa to present workshops on bridging courses.

"...outside help to fund a teaching force commensurate with the anticipated scope of the problem" (Walters, 1982b:2).

This report was adopted by Senate, and the University immediately set about implementing its recommendations. 700 first year students underwent NIPR Intermediate Battery Tests, with the intention of detecting "at risk" students prior to the commencement of the academic year. Also introduced was a "study skills" course which was completed by 146 summer school students. With successful fund raising efforts taking place in the early part of the year, an integrated academic support programme was proposed in March 1982. In the following month the first director of the Rhodes University Academic Support Programme (Dr. Paul Walters) was appointed, and in May, the sub-committee on "Unsatisfactory Results" became the Academic Support Programme Advisory Committee. After a variety of administrative details had been completed, in November 1982, Senate approved the budget and appointments proposed by the ASP Advisory Committee, and thereby formalised an Academic Support Programme at Rhodes University which had successfully completed a rapid introductory year of growth and consolidation.

4.4 1982-1984: The formative years of Rhodes University ASP

In its formative years, Rhodes ASP like ASPs on the other liberal campuses was small, on the fringe and generally naive or at best unclear as to the complexities and intricacies of the type of problem they were commissioned to deal with. ASPs were founded within the broad ideology of liberalism (Hunter, 1990) and as such nurtured a relatively simplistic

deprivationist model which principally viewed the student as the problem, rather than observing the need for any particular changes within university teaching and structure itself. This period was one in which ASPs floundered in their attempts to provide effective and meaningful support to a group of students who very often felt both academically and socially isolated in an insensitive and achievement-oriented academic environment.

4.4.1 The initial policy of the Rhodes University ASP

Indeed, Rhodes ASP formalised its initial aim as "...improving the quality and quantity of graduates who belong to the so-called Black, Coloured and Indian groups" (Walters, 1982b:5). However, the ASP staff members did take cognisance of the fact that:

"Students in general tend to avoid or to react negatively to any programme with a 'remedial' flavour, and South African 'disadvantaged students' in particular - *for whom the programme has essentially been devised*⁷ - are deeply suspicious and resentful of any programme which appears to have been designed specifically for 'other-than-white' students. *It has therefore been thought best to adopt an open-door, non-racial, non-compulsory approach, while, at the same time, securing the co-operation of (various) bodies... who will themselves ensure that their 'other-than-white' bursary holders will attend the modules in the programme*⁸" (Walters, 1982b:5).

⁷ My emphasis

⁸ My emphasis

While Rhodes ASP at the time did argue that many students who had English as their first language were lacking in "higher-level linguistic and cognitive skills" (Walters, 1982b:5), it is quite clear that the initially intended clientele were black students, and that ideally ASP's aim was to assist in bridging the gap between school and basic university level skills, rather than to delve in the area of higher-level skills. This can be clearly evidenced in the fact that in 1982 ASP argued that its aim was to "...make up academic deficiencies and remove social disabilities which make it impossible for students beginning their university careers to meet the expectations of their lecturers and the demands of the courses they follow" (Walters, 1982b: 8).

This description - of desperate students needing academic support if they are to have any chance of passing their courses - certainly does not paint the picture of an ASP which intended to place equal emphasis on supporting all students, regardless of social and educational background. Yet this is the sort of hazy area within which ASPs located themselves. A small and peripheral group of academics suddenly found themselves flung into the midst of the unexplored and intimidating territory of compensatory student support, and often struggled to gain acceptance in these initial years. For example, then Director of ASP, Paul Walters (1985a:1) admits that the different responses to this problem by the various ASPs were all "...a combination of educated guesses as to what would be most appropriate or acceptable to the students themselves", and that after three years of full-scale operation, the Rhodes University Senate nevertheless regarded

ASP as experimental because its effectiveness was unproven. For this reason ASP had to offer peripheralised courses which Walters described as an "organisationally rather messy approach" (Walters, 1985a:1).

4.4.2 The experiences of black undergraduate students at Rhodes University.

In the meantime the Rhodes University Administration, while recognising some sense of obligation to "at risk" students, were not convinced that they were obliged to do too much about the situation other than allow ASP to operate in this rather untested and perhaps haphazard manner. In late 1981 the Vice-Chancellor, Derek Henderson, had approached the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) and asked them to conduct a survey looking into the position of black students at Rhodes University, and in early 1983 the report (researched by S. Bekker and G. Mqingwana, 1983) was completed. Its findings strongly indicated that black students felt ostracised and disadvantaged in most areas of campus life.

On the issue of academic support, most students (eighty nine percent) interviewed were in favour of the provision of extra classes to assist them with areas of the work in which they were not well-equipped. The main reason for this strong acceptance of extra lessons was the poor quality of their high school education. This would seem to be an overwhelming vote of confidence in what ASP was doing, given the aforementioned aims of ASP on Rhodes University campus. Yet students felt bitter about the lack of effective extra-lecture tuition provided by University support programmes. As one respondent

complained:

"Last year we had such classes, instead of dealing with the work we've been doing during lectures, we were given topics such as my dog, describe a car. What's that? No exam paper would pose such a question. We felt undermined and we stopped long before we'd even written exams" (in Bekker and Mqingwana, 1983:11).

While this sentiment need not necessarily be viewed as a total rejection of ASP, it stresses the crucial nature of student support: that at that time especially, black students regarded it as vital, but only if it professionally and effectively dealt with their academic problems. ASP in its formative years clearly did not do this, as is indicated by the fact that approximately fifty five percent of first year black students attended ASP during the first half of 1983, many of whom were not regular attenders (Walters, 1983:7).

4.4.3 The Rhodes University Administration's involvement in academic support

A more significant finding of the ISER report was that very few (only twenty percent) felt that the Rhodes University Administration did not discriminate against black students (Bekker and Mqingwana, 1983:22). The type of discrimination referred to by these students included the University bursary policy, and admission to residence, although lack of student support needs to be regarded as a further area of such discrimination. As Steve Sommerville (1983a:2) argued, the administrations of the various traditionally liberal universities were guilty of underproviding for the long-term

effects of the Bantu Education Act. He argued that ASPs were introduced as a means of solving the problem, yet they had floundered in their attempts to provide adequate support.

Sommerville noted that "...we have watched the painfully slow increase in black pass-rates, stuttering attempts to restructure residential and social life on campuses to ease conflict and reduce isolation" (Sommerville, 1983a:2), but that all these attempts were merely a weak attempt at introducing change within the university. In fact Sommerville (1983a:1) went as far as to argue that the administrations of these universities had entered into "collusion" with the state, by streamlining "...obsolete features of the separatist policies of the ruling party in the interests of modern industrial capitalism" and thereby protecting "...the interests of the privileged minority at the expense of the subaltern majority."

Sommerville's argument was to be the first of a number of attacks against ASPs (cf. 4.5.2; 4.5.5.1; 4.6.2). He questioned not only their effectiveness in dealing with students' academic difficulties (he did not view them as effective academic support bodies), but more importantly he questioned the role which they were playing in supporting "...the abdication of white universities from any significant role in the rapid changes required for tertiary education by the massive increase in black matriculation" (1983a:3).

4.4.4 The Universities Amendment Act

In 1983 the state passed the Universities Amendment Act (Act No. 83 of 1983) which repealed the provision whereby the permission of the Minister of National Education was required by blacks wanting to register at an historically white university. The Act thus entrusted "...the admission of individual students to the university authorities, but subject to a new provision in clause 9⁹ enabling the relevant Minister to specify conditions, including a numerical quota or ceiling, for the admission of students of population groups other than that of which the student body of the relevant university at the present time mainly consists" (G Van N Viljoen in Republic of South Africa: Hansard, 1983:9030).

The state threatened to impose this quota system if university administrations overextended the boundaries of "broader (apartheid)¹⁰ policy constraints" (G. Van N Viljoen in Republic of South Africa: Hansard, 1983:9031). The Minister of National Education argued that: "While the Government holds the principle of university autonomy in high esteem, it has always emphasised that this is not an absolute autonomy. It considers the duly elected Government entitled to lay down

⁹Clause 9 of the Universities Amendment Act of 1953 states that the Minister of Education is able to determine the conditions under which "... persons of a population group or population groups mentioned in the conditions other than that of which the study body of a relevant university mainly consists ... (may) at any time be registered as students of such a university, or as students for a study course or study courses, so mentioned, at such a university, including such conditions providing for a basis for the calculation of a number of persons of a population group or population groups mentioned therein who may at any time be registered at a relevant university as students..." (Statutes of the Republic of South Africa, 1983:8790).

¹⁰My parenthesis.

parameters of broader policy of state within which the university has to exercise its autonomy" (G. Van N Viljoen in Republic of South Africa: Hansard, 1983:9031). However Sommerville (1983a:2) noted that the Minister of National Education withdrew this threat because the administrations of the said universities had since adopted mechanisms which restricted the number of black students entering these institutions. These mechanisms included the acceptance of a revised formula for calculating state subsidy¹¹ and the adoption of ratings systems which give matriculant excellence primary place amongst admission criteria.

4.4.5 The liberal universities' inadequate response to the University Amendment Act

Sommerville (1983a) argued that the low number of black students in the liberal universities was rooted in these universities' failure to fundamentally challenge the quota system. In that very year these universities had solemnly re-dedicated themselves to the principle of freedom of admission, yet they nevertheless committed themselves to low growth rates, matriculant-based admission criteria and revised subsidy formula. All of these policies favoured prospective white students rather than blacks.

¹¹This refers to the universities' acceptance of SAPSE (South African Post Secondary Education) 110 subsidy formula whereby students who fail their first year at university will only count for half of the normal state subsidy. Sommerville (1983a:5) notes that this means that universities who devote their resources to maximising their first-year pass-rate will be financially rewarded. The pressure is therefore on the university to select students who have already proven themselves academically (in terms of matriculation results) rather than to enroll "disadvantaged students" or "marginal achievers".

Sommerville (1983a) further argued that ASPs papered any remaining cracks by supplying rudimentary support to those black students who did manage to escape the quota trap. His argument was that peripheralised academic support programmes were not the solution to the tertiary problem of South African universities, but rather, that the university needed to revolutionise its admission policy "...towards a point where our black to white ratio of students can reflect the ratio of black to white in South Africa" (Sommerville, 1983a:8). This did not entail a dropping of academic standards. Rather, it involved a reorientation in university values away from SAPSE¹² (South African Post Secondary Education) publication-oriented excellence to student-oriented teaching excellence. As Sommerville noted in a memorandum to the Rhodes University Senate Sub-Committee appointed to 'investigating size' (1983b:3):

"Academic staff (particularly at less senior levels), already under pressure to pursue an ideal of academic excellence geared to publications and prestige-enhancing research have less incentive than ever to integrate teaching excellence with academic support, and with the time-consuming adjustments in approach required of mixed ability teaching in an expanding and diverse student population."

¹²As Helling (1986:5) concludes, "the fundamental problem of access to education becomes more complex with the introduction of SAPSE. The solution is seen to lie in the maintenance of the present social order. Among others, the stricter selection of students, the lack of subsidies for adult education and student support services, and the inability of materially disadvantaged communities to contract research where necessary, are all facets of SAPSE which ensure the reproduction of our society..."

Despite Sommerville's memorandum, and SRC deputations, the Rhodes University Administration was not prepared to challenge the state "broad side on". Instead they adopted a truly liberal stance by admitting black students purely on the grounds of matric symbol merit. This was despite the difficulties involved in studying at D.E.T schools and government administrative control measures whereby the D.E.T shifted "...the curve of black's actual results towards the lower end of the scale before publishing them" (Orkin, 1983: 2). Indeed, research conducted at the University of Witwatersrand concluded:

"Our evidence is that black matriculants perform as well overall as whites from across the matric scale, and significantly better than whites on comparable matric ratings, both as regards the proportion who pass and as regards the number of credits they achieve.... Given this knowledge, were the university not only to persist in adjudging black applicants by their matric ratings, but also to propose to raise the admission ratings, it would in effect be entering into complicity with racial discrimination" (Orkin, 1983:4).

Sommerville (1983b:2) consequently argued that Rhodes University's "...proposal to limit growth by admitting only higher matric scores has the discriminatory effect that blacks who are actually worthy will not qualify for our attention." Yet the Rhodes University Administration persisted with this form of admission policy. Despite this evidence the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Henderson, regarded a D.E.T. pass as the equivalent of other education department passes. He argued

that "...a matric is a matric is a matric. Whether that matric is J.M.B or an Education and Training matric, if the matric aggregate is a D symbol we are quite happy to accept the student"¹³ (Rhodes University SRC, 1983:7). The Academic Support Programme at Rhodes University (and likewise on the other traditionally liberal campuses), through this form of "internal quota" therefore indirectly received a vote of confidence (or at least was given an invitation to continue to operate within a needy context) from the University Administration.

4.5 1985-1988: Years of growing coherency in Rhodes University ASP policy

Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in academic support, ASPs gradually began to specialise in this area, themselves being educated through the process of student support.

Probably the most significant lesson which was learnt in the formative years of ASPs was that of understanding the nature of the problem which was being confronted. And that was as follows: that student difficulties cannot be addressed in isolation from course content in a remedial fashion with the focus on the individual.

This led to a shift in emphasis away from ASPs simply dealing with students on an individual basis in isolation from the relevant academic departments to one which took into account all aspects of university life. Plans to move towards this

¹³Henderson (in Rhodes University SRC, 1983:7) argued that this policy was one in which students were admitted "without regard to race". Yet, as Orkin (1983) noted, such an attitude fails to take note of the school context of prospective students.

form of integrated support were indeed already in the pipeline at Rhodes University ASP in 1985, albeit in a limited way. Whereas at the outset Rhodes University ASP had offered general academic support sessions such as "Language as the medium of instruction and communication", "Study skills", "Reading and reference skills" and "Coping with examinations", it increasingly began to incorporate the teaching of these skills into a more course-related approach. One of the most evident ways in which this was accomplished was through ASP's employment of additional tutors each year, so as to broaden its availability to individual departments in a more personal and therefore more effective way.

4.5.1 ASP consolidation based on past experience

By the beginning of 1985 a few additional notable changes in Rhodes University ASP had occurred. Firstly, a pre-session course at the beginning of the year was dropped because of poor attendance in 1984. One of the most obvious reasons was that many students (especially D.E.T. matriculants whose matric results are released later than everybody else's) did not know that they were accepted by the university until very late. Attendance of such a course for these students therefore proved complicated (Walters, 1984b:5). In addition, this sort of course only teaches basic skills and within a context which is entirely removed from the exact context of application to university study. ASPs have subsequently discovered that students attend and appreciate more integrated courses which run parallel to (or which are integrated into) course content as it is being taught.

Secondly, an element of compulsion was introduced when it was agreed that Deans of Faculties would require attendance of ASP as a condition for re-admission on probation for students who would otherwise have been excluded from the University (Walters, 1984b:5). This developed out of an earlier system whereby ASP asked department staff members to use Referral Pads (see Appendix One) to refer students to ASP, however students were not obliged to attend ASP once referred (Walters, 1983:4). The introduction of compulsory attendance meant that ASP felt that at least some of the more 'in need' students would attend ASP. However, the issue of compulsion is a controversial and complicated issue. While on some levels it might appear to be a good idea to obligate weak students to attend ASP in order to pass their first year, compulsion is not as straight forward as this. The issues of which students should be compelled to attend ASP and how to select them are by no means easily resolved. The effect of compulsion on a student's morale in many circumstances could be quite devastating, given the way in which they feel that they have been singled-out as having a problem which most other students do not have. ASP did believe though, that students who had failed their first year very badly, and who were nevertheless seeking readmission, did fit into the category of students who should be compelled to attend ASP. In a sense this was a breakthrough for Rhodes ASP because it did, to some extent, indicate the University's recognition of the possible effectiveness of ASP.

Thirdly, in dealing with the problem of stigmatisation of students, and not wanting students to feel that they were in

any way being blamed for their inability to cope with their university work, and to combat notions that ASP was patronising students, the Rhodes University Academic Support Programme changed its name (but not its acronym!) by substituting "Skills" for "Support". The argument was that the word "Support" was "...open to misinterpretation, and that students tended to perceive it as excessively paternalistic and condescending" (Walters, 1984b:6). The word "Skills" was used as a replacement because it suggested "...more precisely the principal object of our teaching" (Walters, 1984b:6). However, accurately defining an institution as complex as ASP in terms of a single three or four word formal title is never going to be an easy (if at all possible) task. In the years immediately after Rhodes University ASP formally changed its name, the trend to integrate skills and content intensified in a major way, thus leading to questions as to the suitability of 'Skills Programme' to define ASP's task. The argument against such a name is that it suggests a false distinction between what students read in their degrees, and the skills required for successfully doing so. Despite the name change, students have nevertheless attached a stigma to ASP attendance at Rhodes University¹⁴. The solution obviously lies in the way in which ASP goes about performing its task, rather than

¹⁴For example one Sociology student commented in a course evaluation in October 1990 that: "ASP should emphasise that it is not for stupid people only. It has helped me a lot but I know people who don't go because they think that it's not for them." Many students have expressed similar sentiments, saying that they have found Sociology ASP to be very stimulating as well as beneficial, but that until they had attended they thought it was only for students with severe problems or difficulties.

in the name under which it operates¹⁵.

Obviously Rhodes University ASP was not so short-sighted as to simply attempt to brush-up its image on campus through name-changing and other similar tactics alone. Indeed, in considering longer-term interests, Director of ASP in 1985, Paul Walters (1985a:3) argued that the ASP's policy of using numerous half-time and quarter-time posts as a means to catering for as many students as possible was not in ASP's long-term interests. In line with developments at the University of Cape Town, steps were taken to improve ASP staffing through establishing as many full-time, permanent posts as possible. Together with this intended goal came a dividing of ASP into two semi-autonomous units, each under the co-ordinatorship of a Lecturer. One of the two units would deal with subjects from the Science Faculties (Science, Pharmacy, Commerce) while the other would deal with subjects which fall more directly within the framework of the Humanities Faculties (Arts, Social Science, Divinity, Education, Law). This change actually took effect as from the beginning of 1986.

4.5.2 Continuing Rhodes University Administration scepticism

But despite positive attempts to improve ASP's operations on campus, ASP was still not strongly supported by the Rhodes University Administration. Senior members of the

¹⁵ To complicate matters, the University of Natal refers to its equivalent of ASP as the Student Support Services (SSS), referring to the notion that it is incorrect to distinguish between academic and other areas of relevant student life - these include financial, accomodation, counselling and orientation issues.

Administration still regarded ASP as a peripheral institution which did not and in fact could not achieve much within the University context. In his Graduation address of 1986, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Henderson (in Stones et al., 1986:11) argued that ASPs could not be seen as anything other than "...as a short-term palliative indicative of manifest goodwill" and that ASP will not "...in the long term prove to be very efficient or effective." In justifying this statement, Henderson shifted the responsibility of the South African educational deficiencies from the university to the school level. He argued that "...the proper solution is to devote far more resources to the patient improvement of primary and secondary schooling, in that order of priority." Henderson quite clearly saw no need for the University Administration to directly intervene in the process whatsoever, except as a sign of "goodwill" through the Administration's half-hearted support of ASP.

It is to Rhodes University ASP executive's¹⁶ credit that they transcended the limited framework within which Henderson's understanding of its operation is situated. As Stones et al. (1986:11,12) argued in a response to Henderson:

"...the allocation of available funds to the upgrading of primary and secondary schooling in this country, is feasible only in a context where political pressure does not render patience impractical. **In the present political**

¹⁶The overall direction, policy and control of Rhodes University ASP in 1986 was in the hands of a small executive comprising of Paul Walters, Chairman of the Academic Skills Advisory Committee, Harriet Tunmer (Lecturer/Co-ordinator of the Sciences) and Annette Stones (Lecturer/Co-ordinator of the Humanities). They together drafted the June 1986 Progress report in which this critique of Henderson's position appears.

climate, long-term solutions will be determined by the effectiveness of the short-term solutions that are implemented¹⁷. In this regard, the role of ASPs on campus may prove to be pivotal in facilitating the provision of appropriately qualified manpower (sic) to ensure the viability of future expenditure on lower-level educational reforms. While the funding of an ASP may be regarded as an interim measure, its potential contribution to long-term solutions cannot be underestimated."

This argument advocated by ASP is expressed in a simplistic form, which lacks rigorous and systematic justification, yet it importantly underlines the role of ASP in a repressive and unjust society, in which education was intentionally unequal. The 1986 ASP executive aptly viewed ASP's role as one of significance within the South African educational set-up. Not only did they regard ASP's programme as being effective in assisting disadvantaged students, but they also aligned themselves to some extent with progressive forces elsewhere, in an attempt at bringing about change, albeit it in a vague and limited way.

4.5.3 ASP and the broader community

Indeed, at the national ASP Conference of 1986 Vusi Khanyile (1986:1) reiterated this point in arguing that ASP at different universities "...could play a crucially important role, not only in the future of their institutions but also in shaping the future of tertiary education in South Africa."

¹⁷ My emphasis

Khanyile stressed the importance of the interaction which took place between ASP staff and students in the teaching process. In an argument which could be seen to support Habermas's theory of communicative action (cf. 3.3.3 and 7.6.3), Khanyile noted that this interaction has exposed ASP staff members to students whose experiences have been shaped by struggles at schools and within the community. He argued that "...this exposure was the vital factor in moving many ASP staff from a mere intellectual appraisal of the problems facing black students to an experiential understanding of their struggles, not only at an academic level, but on the political terrain as well" (Khanyile, 1986:1). This contextualisation of ASP within both the academic and political life of South Africa is crucial, because it strongly undercuts arguments such as those put forward by Henderson which situate ASP in a merely academic setting, thus diminishing its potential role as agent of change both in the university and in broader society.

In terms of ASP's role in the broader community, Khanyile (1986:2) emphasised the need for ASPs to expand and transform their roles within the university, especially through challenging the existing traditional concepts and structures of tertiary education. An important way in which to succeed in this task would be to set up relevant and accountable links with community organisations and especially strengthen consultation ties with students - ASP's immediate constituency. Khanyile concluded that unless this task is undertaken, "...the universities will miss the historic moment that has arrived for them to play a creative and constructive role in the process of radical transformation that South

Africa has irrevocably entered" (Khanyile, 1986:2).

4.5.4 The need for ASP to recognise the inadequacy of South African school education in general

In agreement with these sentiments expressed by Khanyile, Herbert Vilakazi (1987) stressed the need for the university to involve itself in the educational problems caused by unequal education at school level. However, he did not limit his discussion to simply that of black education. Having defined education as a means to personal liberation from the shackles of ignorance and domination¹⁸, Vilakazi argued that the overwhelming majority of white as well as black students leave school with an inadequate education. Given the true aim of education as being to create better human beings rather than to direct scholars into specific class and occupational positions, Vilakazi (1987:2) warns that it "...is a terrible mistake, misleading oneself and others, to focus only on black education, when discussing the educational crisis in South Africa." Indeed, Peter Hunter (1986:27) had already noted that at the University of Witwatersrand, "...most but not all of those who need it (academic support) will be from the disadvantaged group (DET matriculants)." While at Rhodes University attendance figures revealed that more white

¹⁸ More precisely, Khanyile (1987:1) argues that education and liberation are inextricably linked. "Indeed, the essence of education is liberation; liberation from the shackles of ignorance, from the terrible shackles of fear; from arrogance, rudeness, and haughtiness; from the domination of the unknown, within the human individual, in society, and in nature; and liberation of the human personality for all-round total development of human capacities, development which is forever outstripping the limits and boundaries of yesterday and yesteryear. Yes, education is liberation also from evil desires to limit the freedom, happiness and development of other human beings."

students than black attended ASP: out of 737 students who attended ASP in 1986, 401 were white. In other words, 54,4 percent of all ASP attenders in 1986 were white students (see Tunmer, 1987:3). Given the fact that ASP at Rhodes was not compulsory except for a very select few "on probation" students, these figures definitely seem to indicate that white as well as black students did not receive adequate schooling prior to entering university.

This increasing realisation that academic difficulties which stem from impoverished school education are not exclusively experienced by black students was a lesson learnt by all the traditionally liberal universities, although as is borne-out by the experience of ASP at UCT, while students from a range of educational backgrounds experience difficulties at university, these are not all necessarily of a chronic nature. So while white students might also experience difficulties with their university studies, these difficulties need not be of the same magnitude or type as those experienced by black students. Similarly, some difficulties are peculiar to white students, because of different emphases placed on them at school. A shift in ASP thinking therefore took place in this area - away from a DET student-centred approach to one which considered the "cognitive mobilisation"¹⁹ of students more generally.

With ASP's changing emphasis from being a peripheral support body for a small minority of disadvantaged students to one

¹⁹ Questionnaire completed by Nadia Hartmann of UCT ASP in June 1991.

which caters for the academic needs of all students who are not coping at university, came a greater acceptance of ASP by students. For example, a 1986 Journalism graduate at Rhodes University wrote to ASP saying: "I attribute my success and concomitant happiness in my studies to the contribution made...by the ASP.I found the study techniques and essay-writing guidance invaluable" (Tunmer, 1987:7).

4.5.5 The potential for ASP to bring about progressive change within the university

Yet despite various incidences of positive feedback from students, questions were nevertheless being raised about ASP's effectiveness on campus. In 1986, the Director of ASP at UCT, Ian Scott considered the role which ASP was playing, and which it could potentially play in the future. He noted the extent to which ASP had grown in its ability to cope with the issue of student academic support. "While there have been many false starts and changes of direction, it is nevertheless encouraging that important principles and insights have emerged which hold considerable promise of significant development in this area in future" (Scott, 1986: 18). Notwithstanding this potential to instigate progressive change which ASP might have had, criticisms did emerge.

4.5.5.1 ASP: Tinkering or transforming?²⁰

The most important criticism levelled at ASP had to do with its orientation towards a 'clinical model' of dealing with student difficulties. According to this model, the student is seen to be a patient in need of a cure. The criticism was

²⁰Taken from the title of a paper by Ian Scott (1986).

"...that ASPs are concentrating on changing students to fit the institution rather than on attempting to bring about progressive change in the institution itself; and that this approach is essentially patronising and cannot ultimately be effective" (Scott, 1986:18,19). Scott noted that if ASPs merely attempted to change the student not only could they be viewed as being ineffective through failing to promote essential change in the university, but they could also be seen to be inhibiting such change.

Scott therefore stressed the importance for ASPs to ensure that they undertake a broader role than to simply deal with the student him/herself. Instead ASPs should work towards the goal of making university education more accessible to "...potentially able students from the disadvantaged and historically 'excluded' communities..." (Scott, 1986:18). Truly accessible education here included both admission criteria and an effective level of academic support. Scott argued that (in the mid-eighties) ASP was failing to ensure accessible education through effective support, but that it nevertheless did have the potential to do so. This potential lay in a more integrated form of support. In particular Scott underlined the need to explore the area of bridging programmes which could be instituted in addition to regular extra-mural type tutorial support, as was the sole present practice.

4.5.5.2 ASP: Missionary or agent of change?²¹

While the intricacies of such a system are not the central issue under discussion here, it is important to note Scott's

²¹Taken from the title of a paper by Jo Lazarus (1987).

argument that ASPs have the potential to be either reformist or progressive. This is a view which was reiterated by Jo Lazarus (1987) who argued that the traditional role of ASPs had been to act as "missionaries" in the sense that they supported students in adapting to the requirements of the university, rather than attempting to change the university itself. However, like Scott, Lazarus argued that ASPs were not by necessity reformist. Instead he argued that they could operate as effective agents of change within the university.

Lazarus was in agreement with Khanyile (1986:2) who argued that ASPs needed to "expand and transform their role at universities." For Lazarus, this meant that ASPs needed to attempt "...to help students and the system to cope with each other" (Lazarus, 1987: 12). This was viewed as being different to ASP's past role as missionary in that as an agent of change it would "...address the problem within the academic context as a whole" (Lazarus, 1987:12). ASPs would achieve this through identifying the factors within the aforementioned context which "...contribute to the poor performance of black students and to facilitate the development and implementation of strategies which will address these factors" (Lazarus, 1987:12). While not being precise as to the means by which this could be achieved, Lazarus stressed that if ASPs were to act as effective agents of change they would need to work within the system, "...through its already established functions and structures" (Lazarus, 1987:13). This did not mean that ASPs needed to accept the system as it existed, "...on the contrary the major reason for working within the system is firstly to introduce the system to the new

educational realities raised by the admission of more black students and, secondly, to expand and transform the educational reality of the system itself."

4.5.6 The need for a clear ASP blueprint

One of the shortfalls of these arguments which were put forward in defence of ASP operations and their potential to operate progressively was that they failed to outline a clear and workable blueprint for progressive action. Even more of a problem was that very little was happening within ASPs to convince critics of the plausability of such contentions. On the surface it appeared as though ASPs - regardless of the intentions of its senior staff - were structurally bound by the conservative environment in which they were located.

At Rhodes University this was particularly true. As has already been noted (cf. 4.4.3; 4.4.5; 4.5.2)), during the early and mid-1980's, the Rhodes University Administration had not taken ASP very seriously at all, and had certainly lagged behind the administrations of the other liberal universities in this respect. In fact not only were the leaders of the University happy to leave ASP to operate as a small unit on the fringe with little official backing, but they also neglected to assess the needs of both ASP and the student body whom it supported.

As Monty Roodt, presently a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology noted²², when the post of Director of ASP came available in 1987, a number of ASP staff

²² In an interview in February 1992.

(including himself) applied for the post. Until then the post had been of a low-key nature, given a lack of funds and University backing. But during the process of interviewing the various applicants for the post, the Administration representatives (most notably the University Vice-Principal, Dr. Roux Van der Merwe) were made aware of the enormity of the task confronting ASP - a situation they had previously underestimated. This led to a decision to upgrade the post of Director, and ultimately to take ASP more seriously - a cause to which Van der Merwe subsequently committed himself. Ultimately this led to a gradual but steady growth of ASP over the next few years. However, despite such initiatives, ASP still found the University Administration to be wary rather than fully supportative of its activities on campus.

4.6 1988 and beyond: Rhodes University ASP moves towards integration

In an insightful analysis of the battle between ASPs (in their attempts to operate effectively and progressively) and conservative university administrations, Jane Hofmeyr and Rod Spence (1989:39) referred to the educational context in which ASPs were situated as being an "education crisis". They argued that:

"...what is called the 'education crisis' is far more than that: it is the national crisis focused on education. Education mirrors the tensions, anomalies and debates of the wider society. It is little wonder that education has become a contested and dynamic terrain marked by politicisation, polarisation and violence, as well as experimentation and creativity."

4.6.1 ASP as a contested terrain

Hofmeyr and Spence argued that Academic Support Programmes have, like other aspects of the education terrain in South Africa, become a site of contest in terms of how ASP can effectively accomplish its task of dealing with student difficulties. While it has been shown that one polarity in the debate is represented by the "missionary" approach which focuses on the "under-preparedness" of students entering the university, the opposing polarity in the debate has focused more specifically on the university itself as well as the social context within which the university operates (Moulder, 1988).

4.6.2 James Moulder: The call for the abolition of ASPs

James Moulder (1988) noticed the extent to which ASPs had failed to effectively introduce the much referred to changes (as discussed by Scott and Lazarus above, cf. 4.5.5) to the university, and he argued that this impotence was symptomatic of the conservative role which had been assigned to ASPs by the various university administrations. In addition he contended that ASPs would never be able to bring about meaningful change within the university. He argued that not only were ASPs introduced as a means of avoiding organisational change, but that their very existence also acted as an obstacle to any attempts at facilitating change within the university in the future, and for this reason ASPs need to be abolished.

Moulder (1988) argued that the traditional liberal universities operate within a paradigm which views South

Africa as a developed country, with only pockets of underdevelopment. Within this paradigm, under-prepared students are regarded as a product of that underdevelopment, and as such they need to be provided with the support necessary to balance out the inequality of their primary and secondary education. These students therefore require merely subsidiary support in the form of ASPs. This approach clearly does not envisage the possibility of the university ever having to deal with more than a "trickle" of these underdeveloped students. Furthermore, it assumes that only black (or at least) D.E.T. students experience difficulties in confronting academic issues within the university. However, as has already been outlined, most South African secondary education does not adequately prepare students for university.

Moulder argued that ASPs were (and continue to be) a strategy adopted by these universities to avoid organisational change. With the implementation of ASPs, the university administrations could wash their hands of the problem of unequal education prior to the tertiary level. But as Moulder demonstrated, the percentage of black students entering the traditionally liberal universities will increase dramatically in the near future. He argued that this would lead to a flood of under-prepared students who would place a heavy drain on ASP resources, thus giving rise to a "crisis" within these universities. Moulder therefore advocated a new paradigm which involved the changing of the structure of the university, bringing it in line with the crucial demands and needs of South Africa's predominantly underdeveloped society.

Intrinsic in Moulder's argument is the belief that not only were ASPs introduced as a means of avoiding organisational change, but that their very existence continues to act as an obstacle to change in the university. Underlying his argument is the notion that ASPs need to be abolished and that the task of 'academic support' be undertaken by lecturers themselves, in a manner which is integrally linked to the teaching of course-content. Moulder envisaged a new paradigm which:

"...will not include the idea of academic support programmes, and these programmes will not be required because academics will accept that, because they have been employed to teach and to research, they have been employed to teach all the students who register for their courses. In place of academic support programmes to help students who have learning problems, the new paradigm will have programmes to help academics to be better teachers and, in particular, to be better teachers of students who have learning problems"

(Moulder, 1988).

Moulder thus outlined a means by which the university would be able to tackle the problem of student difficulties through abolishing ASPs and replacing their task with more concentrated teaching support from academics within individual departments. Moulder (1988:1) suggested that:

"...universities should give a much higher priority to being excellent at teaching than to being excellent at research" and in the process of achieving this they need to remove totally any responsibility from ASPs. However, he provides no

guidelines as to how this excellence in teaching could be achieved, nor how it would be maintained. While he alludes to a programme which will "help academics to become better teachers", he fails to concretise this notion, which therefore remains vague and undefined.

The immensity of the task of dealing with the kaleidoscope of academic problems presently encountered by ASPs cannot be underestimated. To suggest that this is a task that can be successfully undertaken by lecturers within the university is at the very least optimistic. In any case not all "learning problems" (as Moulder terms them) are directly linked to the context of the teaching situation. While it is possible for lecturers to perhaps revolutionise aspects of their teaching techniques, such as the level at which the lectures are pitched, the structure of their lectures, the use of relevant course material, etc... many of the issues which ASPs have to regularly confront are not so easily addressed. Some of these include: difficulties in concentration; inability to manage time planning; severe reading disabilities; inability to think analytically and to solve problems; low self-esteem; anxiety, etc.... These are not problems which can possibly be dealt with by any one lecturer, no matter how sophisticated the programme which supports and guides him/her. Firstly, because of the time involved - in courses with over 100 students there would simply not be sufficient time for lecturers to provide the individual attention that some of these problems entail, and secondly because of the high levels of expertise which each of the aforementioned academic issues require.

4.6.3 The importance of a strategy of integration in student support

Given the difficulties which student support entails, the argument which gained most credence within ASP was that there was thus a need for a system which confronts teaching and support issues in a manner which is separate to, yet interlinked with course material, and which strongly accepts an approach to ASPs within the universities which does not call for their exclusion, but which challenges ASPs to become an integral part of individual departments, although maintaining a necessary degree of autonomy.

While it is precisely the contention of this approach that the task of teaching academic skills needs to become the responsibility of individual departments, and that the recognition of this responsibility by departments will ultimately require the acceptance of a new paradigm for the relevant universities, Moulder's conclusion that ASPs therefore need to be abolished was rejected. Instead it was argued that it was of crucial importance that ASPs be seen as a "contested terrain" which could be effectively employed in the progressive transformation of the university as a whole. In substantiation of this point Thandeka Gqubule (1989) noted that:

"Organised black students on campus are reluctant to condemn ASPs because they see that students need to be helped with their studies. But they also emphasize the need for the programmes to explore the possibilities of Africanising universities and experimenting with teaching methods and structures

appropriate to their African context."

Indeed, many students have actually attributed part of their success at university to ASP attendance. This is the general view of ASP on all the English liberal campuses. As one black student leader at Wits commented: " I have been through academic support and it is useful. But this does not detract from the view that the university itself must change" (Chris Ngcobo in Gqubule, 1989). Thus despite Moulder's criticisms the dominant approach in ASPs in the late 1980's came to be an acceptance of the necessary combination of these two aforementioned polarities. ASPs have accepted (in principle at least) that there is a distinction between the immediate aim of improving academic performance and the more long-term aim of contributing to change at universities. They have contended that while they are committed to change, they cannot ignore the immediate needs of students. This mix between short and long-term goals, does however, take cognisance of Moulder's criticism that ASPs have (often) been an "ad hoc response to circumstances rather than the result of a concrete programme of change" (Weekly Mail, March 1989).

4.6.4 Integration as both short and long-term solution

As was argued by Michael Drewett and Louise Vincent (1990), the ad hoc nature of this response occurred at two interrelated levels : firstly, ASPs failed to formulate a coherent analytical understanding of the notion of "change" and hence they subsequently also failed to theorise both their short and long term goals. Secondly, Drewett and Vincent contended that ASP's programmes of action were often

"dispersed and contradictory" because the various ASPs had no clear conceptual framework within which to understand their actions and to measure their successes and failures.

This lack of conceptualisation seems to accurately explain the apparent directionless journey of ASPs during the 1980's. ASP programmes and goals seemed to emerge more from immediate difficulties on the various campuses than from well-researched and analytical planning. This tendency to operate in a 'hand-to-mouth' manner (of reacting to problems rather than pre-empting them through planning and research) meant that ASPs were not able to point to a clear and well-defined set of goals which would lead to the types of progressive changes which they were (in principle at least) attempting to pursue.

This is not to suggest that ASPs were ignoring planning and research activities. As early as in 1984 Martie Sanders (1984:28) argued that it was imperative that ASP, in its infancy, needed to systematise a mechanism for the evaluation of its programmes. While at Rhodes University, Paul Walters (1985c:2-4) outlined various attempts at evaluation and planning which Rhodes University ASP had undertaken. But the problem with such intentions and attempts was that they were not backed by sufficient theoretical contextualisation, or were not given sufficient significance in the actual operation and planning of ASP. Only recently have more formal and serious moves towards research and planning been implemented. For example, the University of Witwatersrand ASP presently

employ an evaluator²³ while Natal University (Durban) ASP are currently negotiating an academic research and resource centre²⁴. Rhodes University ASP has also begun to institute plans which will see the introduction of an ASP research post.

However, the lack of an official research post at Rhodes University ASP has not meant that research has not been conducted. Attempts have been made by various staff members to evaluate modules and activities as well as to attempt to conceptualise such practices. In addition to conscious research and theoretical endeavours all ASP staff have learned through their daily teaching experiences, so that some academic skills modules and teaching methods have been discarded because they have been found to be ineffective or inappropriate, while others have been refined or adapted, so as to improve on apparent weaknesses.

Of all the lessons learned from past experience, the most significant is that modules which are abstracted from course content and to the direct requirements of individual courses are not as successful as ones which are more integrated into course content. Increasingly ASP staff members have found that general skills modules which ignored the specific demands of their particular course have not been successful. Consequently they began to adapt these modules to their courses, using appropriate examples and texts where possible.

²³ Questionnaire completed by Sue Starfield of The University of Witwatersrand ASP in June 1991.

²⁴ Questionnaire completed by C. Damerell of Natal University (Durban) SSS in June 1991.

This practice has since strongly impacted on the long-term plans of ASP at Rhodes University as well as ASPs on other liberal campuses. Rhodes ASP has moved from a situation in which ASP tutors had been told to focus specifically on academic skills and to avoid teaching course content, to one in which course content and academic skills are necessarily taught in an integrated manner.

4.7 Conclusion

In the light of these developments in ASP a policy of integration has been accepted as not only making sense in terms of what ASP tutors teach students, but also in terms of how this instruction should best take place, and how ASP instruction should be organised within departments. As has already been argued (cf. 4.6.3), if ASPs are to avoid the type of criticisms lodged by Moulder (1988) whereby ASPs are regarded as being ineffectively peripheral, a movement towards integration is crucial.

For this reason there is a need to discuss the nature of this policy of integration as well as to consider the extent to which it has thus far been put into practice by ASP at Rhodes University. Chapter Five will show that integration has become increasingly widespread at Rhodes University because of the weaknesses of previous approaches and also because integration is the most effective pedagogical model available to departments who are concerned about students who, because of problems inherent in their previous educational experiences, enter courses for which they are not adequately prepared.

CHAPTER FIVE: INTEGRATION AS A STRATEGY OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

5.1 Introduction

In the concluding stages of the preceding chapter the importance of presenting a discussion which specifically focuses on integration was stressed. The following discussion of the integration strategy will outline what this strategy is, and why it has come to be regarded as the most suitable approach to student academic support by all the Academic Support/Skills Programmes (ASPs) on the traditionally liberal campuses in South Africa. Up to this point only broad reference to the process of integration has been made. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the aforementioned aspects, thus shedding light on an area described by George Carter (1990a:11) as an "holistic approach to support."

5.2 1988-1992: Rhodes University ASP's moves towards a strategy of integration

In recent years the experience of ASP, as well as the findings of various research undertakings, have led the various ASPs to place particular emphasis on integrating what have been ASP's traditional operations (the teaching of academic skills) with course content at department level. As Nadia Hartman¹ noted, the University of Cape Town ASP:

"...recognise that it is not possible for ASP to do it all, the problem does not only lie with the students, therefore departments need to increasingly take over the

¹ Questionnaire completed by Nadia Hartman of the University of Cape Town ASP in June 1991.

work of ASP. This implies that ASP needs to play more of a consultative role in relation to departments. This idea is reflected in a new term which has entered ASP discourse (nationally), i.e. educational development."

Indeed, the recognition that ASP attempt to share the responsibility of academic support with departments has also affected the long-term planning of Rhodes University ASP. Tentative and cautious attempts at closer links with Rhodes University mainstream departments began in 1988. As Director of ASP Carter (1989a:11-12) noted, " ...a very encouraging aspect of the ASP's work in 1988 was the increase in both formal and informal contact with academic departments.... Several departments approached ASP for consultation on students or to explore possible ASP tutorial assistance, and or the possibility of having a tutor assigned to their department."

5.2.1 The placement of ASP tutors in individual departments

At the same time attempts were being made, wherever possible, to locate individual ASP tutors in the departments in which they were teaching. In addition, the concept of ASP Liaison persons was introduced. According to this system a lecturer in each department in which there was an ASP tutor was appointed to act as a liaison between the department and ASP (particularly the ASP representative in that particular department). The idea was for the liaison person to facilitate closer contact between ASP and departments.

While these developments all appear to be quite remote and

insignificant, importance can be attached to them in the sense that they were the beginnings of a trend towards the type of integration to which Hartman (1991) referred (see above). The beginning of this trend at Rhodes University ASP can largely be traced to the appointment of the Rhodes University ASP's first full-time Director (Dr. George Carter) in late 1988. As early as June 1989 the positive effects of this appointment were being felt. By mid-1989 Carter (1989a:14) was able to conclude that: "ASP is now being seen increasingly as an integral part of the University, no longer on the periphery." However, despite this note of optimism, Carter noted the extent to which further changes (of a far more fundamental nature) needed to take place.

Subsequent moves towards integration at Rhodes University were slow and remained tentative. While attempts at integration were being taken forward by Carter (who used his experience of USA universities as a basis for implementing integration), it has not been a straight-forward task. There have been financial constraints, but more importantly, a lack of enthusiasm and a strong degree of scepticism from the University Administration and departments. While this attitude can be partly attributed to a degree of conservatism within the University hierarchy, ASP needed to share the responsibility. Unless substantial research into integration takes place, it is difficult to expect immediate acceptance of such a proposal by Administration and departments. In any case, the idea of integration has not been fully marketed on Rhodes campus. So while various levels of integration (still to be discussed) have been implemented, and as such they form

part of a general pattern of research into the area, the onus is on the ASP to motivate this shift in emphasis far more strongly than in the past.

5.2.2 The impact of political and social changes within South Africa

Meanwhile the need for ASPs to take cognisance of broader political and social changes within South Africa was underlined by representatives from ASPs at all the traditionally liberal universities ² who revealed that all ASPs expect there to be a large influx of students with D.E.T. educational backgrounds. As Hartman argued: "In the short term (the next five years) a larger number of students from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds will enter university and the resources are not available to have an ASP person in each department, nor is it desirable." Sue Starfield agreed that the "...political and social pressures of society in transition..." would lead to rapid changes in student demography and a short-term worsening of the schooling crisis. More importantly, she felt that the recession would impact on ASP's resources. This would obviously curtail efforts to increase ASP staff numbers. It is quite clear that ASPs are very much affected by the context of the political and social changes taking place in South African society.

It is generally accepted (certainly in the opinions of the respondents from the various ASPs) that ASPs do align themselves with the need for fundamental and far-reaching social, political and economic change in South Africa. It is

² In questionnaires completed in June 1991.

also accepted that within this context, universities themselves need to change in fundamental ways. These have often been enumerated. Jane Hofmeyr and Rod Spence (1989:47) list the following: "...the universities will have to develop a new non-racial culture and ground their research in the South African context. Above all else universities will have to give primacy to teaching....In their governance, structures, staffing and enrolment, universities will have to become more representative of, and responsive to, the needs of disenfranchised communities" (cf.7.6.2).

ASPs need to question whether or not they wish to commit themselves to change of this fundamental nature. If they do, the framework for understanding their role and within which to evaluate their success needs to be oriented towards this goal of community interests. Indeed Habermas maintains that emancipation can only be achieved democratically "...in and through communicative action, through action that is genuinely oriented to reaching an understanding" (Pusey, 1987: 120). The understanding which develops within communicative action is dependent on ASP taking into account the interests of the community from which students come. Here Vusi Khanyile's (1986:17) argument is important. He argues that: "ASPs should realise that their programme can only be successful if they (ASPs) carry broad acceptability and legitimacy". This quintessential goal is able to inform both the theory guiding ASP and ASP's practice. Without committing themselves to community interests ASP risks the danger of its short-term practices contradicting one another as well as its long-term goal of changing the university.

In distinguishing between short and long-term aims, and then planning strategies for achieving each of these, ASPs need to ensure that they are guided by the unifying framework of fitting into the broader changes taking place in society. Long-term goals are not goals that ASP should intend addressing some time in the distant future. They are "long-term" only in the sense that they are likely to take longer to achieve than would short-term goals.

ASP can thus be seen to be operating at two levels : (1) dealing with immediate problems (or symptoms) in an effective way and (2) dealing with root causes, that is changing the university. It is important that the goals at one level are related to, and complement the goals at the other level. In other words, the daily interaction with students and the university needs to be making a contribution also to more far-reaching change. ASP's daily activities therefore need to be assessed in terms of the contribution which they make to the development of a non-racial culture, to excellence in teaching, to relevant research, to the democratisation of university decision-making structures, to the redesigning of curricula, and so on. Nadia Hartman³ outlines the extent to which the University of Cape Town (UCT) ASP is presently involving itself in both short and long-term planning. While in the short-term the UCT ASP are dealing with students directly through various ASP support sessions, they are simultaneously working with departments to facilitate better teaching and course design - a longer term goal.

³In a questionnaire completed in June 1991.

Within this paradigm of facilitating broader change within the university, ASPs therefore have an important role to play within South African universities. While there is an expectation within these universities that ASPs will limit themselves to dealing with 'students with problems', and thereby passively accept their envisaged role of obscuring the inadequacies of teaching within these universities, it is clear that ASPs do have the expertise and independence to challenge the present structure of the university. In this sense ASPs are able to challenge and influence a number of important 'sacred' areas within the university, especially teaching methods, course content and student participation.

As has been documented, there is widespread agreement that the future of ASPs lies precisely in their integration with university departments. Carter (1990a) and others such as Merlyn Mehl (1988) have strongly advocated an integration strategy which will: "1) place ASP into the University's departmental fabric, and 2) that will integrate student-staff development (Carter, 1990a:3)." Carter proceeds to argue that:

"...such action will ensure the survival of academic development within South African Universities as a critical element in the success of all students in achieving their goals within the tertiary education system...(through)...improving instruction on the one hand and improving performance on the other (Carter, 1990a:3).

In addition, Michael Drewett and Louise Vincent (1990) argued that integration:

"...is an effective way of ASPs acting as a catalyst for change as well as making pedagogical sense in terms of the skills they are attempting to impart in the short-term. It is a good way of 'integrating' ASP's short and long-term goals. In other words, we understand the strategy of integration to be one which ... stands up to scrutiny in terms of an holistic conceptual framework which judges ASP's practices in terms of its overall understanding, rather than as ends in themselves."

5.2.3 The shift towards integration in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology

Within the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology the shift towards integration started to take place gradually in the late 1980's. During the early and mid-1980's (until 1987) the task of providing academic support for Sociology students lay with ASP staff members whose responsibility it was to oversee student difficulties pertaining to a number of courses apart from Sociology. This meant that ASP assistance often lacked specialisation as to the specific needs of the Sociology course. Assistance was therefore more of a general skills nature rather than specifically related to particular course requirements.

To exacerbate matters, before 1989 the ASP tutor responsible for Sociology was situated in the Psychology Department which is located across campus from the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. Sociology ASP was thus very peripheralised in the minds of Sociology students seeking academic assistance. But with the shift towards integration,

1989 saw the situation change to one in which the ASP tutor was dealing only with Sociology students, and within the confines of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology Department itself. Students began to perceive the ASP tutor as an integral part of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology staff structure, who had specialised knowledge in Sociology and who was conveniently accessible.

5.2.4 The History Skills Project (HSP)

However, the minor steps towards integration which had been initiated during 1988 and the early part of 1989 were a long way from the 'holistic approach to support' (Carter, 1990a:11) which ASP was hoping to achieve. For this reason, more departmentally integral approaches were sought, most notably a venture sponsored by the Human Resources Trust in the Rhodes University History Department.

This project (known as the History Skills Project) involved the designing of departmental specific modules which combined academic skills and course content. The modules (which were designed in the latter half of 1989) were the result of the combined effort of the History liaison person, the History ASP tutor, and the ASP project co-ordinator. These modules were integrated into the History I course as an additional component to the course, for students who the Department

designated as being 'at risk' students⁴. Those students who fell into this category were not allowed to continue with History I unless they committed themselves to this programme.

This approach, while a useful (and perhaps necessary) attempt at exploring integration, obviously succumbs to certain shortfalls. There are two central problems. Firstly, any set of skills/content modules which are not workshopped within the official department tutorial system (in other words, the **only** tutorial system which must be attended by all students enrolled for that course) cannot be regarded as fully integrated. It certainly is not perceived as such by students. Secondly, because these are additional tutorials, which are not fully integrated into the first year course, making them compulsory tends to breed resentment amongst those students assigned to the tutorials (in fact some students choose to drop History I rather than undergo the special ASP programme). Because this course is obligatory for a select few, it inadvertently takes on a "blaming and singling out the victim" nature (see Ryan, 1976), perpetuating rather than alleviating students' lack of confidence. ASP then tends to affirm rather than oppose the unequal education structures which it sought to confront through its establishment. A more direct form of integration is therefore necessary.

⁴ All first year History students were required to write a diagnostic essay at the beginning of the first term. Those who did not perform this assignment comprehensively were assigned to the History Skills Project. According to Tisani, N., (1991:5), the ASP 'team' "...looks out for those students who present a shallow or superficial argument in their writing: those whose work lacks structure and coherence as well as those who display some weakness in the proficiency of the use of English."

History ASP tutor Thami Tisani (1991:8) is in agreement with this sentiment. She noted that the History Skills Programme is merely a transitory step in the shift towards a fully integrated skills/content tutorial system whereby: "HSP modules will be part of tutorial teaching for all first-year-historians at Rhodes".

5.2.5 The importance of continuing research into integration

Despite the shortfalls of the HSP initiative, it must be regarded positively within the general context of exploring methods of integration. The Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology at Rhodes University was the next Department to explore methods of integrating skills and content in their first year course. It has been noted that by 1989 ASP in Sociology was operating in its most integral form ever, yet it nevertheless remained more or less separate to the first year course. Some experiments with ASP lectures⁵ were conducted, but these proved to be ineffective because of the difficulty of teaching practical skills to a large class (in excess of 250 students) with students with diverse needs and problems.

During 1990 research was conducted concerning the idea of integration in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. While a comprehensive discussion of this research will take place in chapter six, it is significant to note that Rhodes University ASP continued to explore methods of integration into mainstream departments.

⁵ A series of academic skills lectures were held, whereby either ASP or Sociology staff presented academic skills lectures to the entire Sociology I class during normal lecture times.

In discussing the changes which will come about as a result of such integration, Director of ASP at The University of the Witwatersrand, Peter Hunter (1991:5) noted that it is a fallacy to ignore:

"...the process by which such change must come about if it is to be implemented effectively. When these universities were founded, the curricula structures and strategies would necessarily have taken cognisance of the pattern of academic preparedness characteristic of the entering matriculants. Any substantial change in that pattern would logically entail a rethink of these structures and strategies."

Hunter argues that the changes in student demography which have occurred over the last decade cannot simply be addressed by means of instant mainstream change. The situation is far more complex than that. In substantiating this point, Hunter (1991:6) argued that:

"...the changes effected through such a review could amend the permutation of course-components in such a way as to facilitate, for students needing it, a more gradual introduction to certain or all first-year courses. This would be one in which learning and language skills would be explicitly woven into the teaching of the relevant academic content and processes."

While this process must be undertaken as quickly as possible, it ought to be borne in mind that: "...teaching which integrates subject matter and academic skills in this way is an art which needs to be learned" (Hunter, 1991:6). Once

"...all the needs supplied in such teaching are provided in permutations of mainstream lectures, tutorials and practicals" (Hunter, 1991:6), ASP itself can be phased-out to the point where "...ASP central units will become consultancy and specialist units" (Carter, 1990a: 13) whose task it will be to facilitate and support mainstream change and development.

5.2.6 The Independent Development Trust's support of the integration process

There is clearly widespread agreement that ASP needs to facilitate a process whereby individual departments increasingly take responsibility for the academic skills which until now have been the almost exclusive terrain of ASP, while at the same time bearing in mind the sentiment of Hunter's (1991) argument that this process cannot occur without a careful transition taking place. Indeed the Rhodes University ASP Director, George Carter, began negotiations with the Independent Development Trust (IDT) in late 1990, with the aim of obtaining funding for a more integrated system of academic development at Rhodes University. In the funding application to the IDT Carter (1991a:3) noted that:

"At present ASP employs twenty seven subject tutors on a half-time or quarter-time basis. This arrangement is unsatisfactory as it does not attract and hold well-qualified and highly motivated staff. If the number of part-time tutors was reduced and the level of the posts up-graded, the prospect of greater effectiveness and continuity would exist". Under such a system "...ASP would be able to function and serve the student body more effectively as well as move closer to mainstream

activities in the academic departments."

By the beginning of 1992 IDT funding (in support of integrated academic development) for a period of three years had been received by the Rhodes University ASP. As the funding arrived too late to alter ASP's arrangements for 1992, the integrated system of academic development as described in the funding motivation only commenced in 1993. While it is presently too early to evaluate the success of this new direction, the crucial aspect of the changes is that integration is now being thoroughly tried and tested. The level of success with which it meets will depend on the particular processes and circumstances of each of the departments in which integration is intended to take place.

5.3 Integration within the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology

The type of integration which is being referred to is therefore a form of departmental involvement in skills teaching which occurs in a number of areas, all of which need to be inter-related and complimentary if a holistic and integrated approach to teaching both content and academic skills is to be achieved.

An underlying assumption of this approach is that while a theoretical distinction between content and skills is useful and necessary, in practice these two areas of work need to be regarded as an integral part of the same process. For example, it is impossible to structure and write an essay without the relevant information, or to present an argument without the

material with which to do so. To separate content from process in the actual practice of education is an artificial abstraction which leads to teaching which is debilitating to students rather than supportative.

So in advocating a process of integration, it is implied that all aspects of a department's teaching need to incorporate skill and content in a completely integral manner. The implications of integration into the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology would entail a change in the structure of courses, lectures and tutorials, so that all aspects of the Department combine to create an integrated system of instruction, in terms of teaching both sociology and academic skills.

5.3.1 The structure of courses⁶ and tutorials

It is obvious that the content and structure of a course are the most central determinants of the work which the Department expects of the student. It therefore follows that the way in which any course is structured needs to be systematic and logical so that all material covered follows from what has been taught previously. This applies to the relationship between courses as well as to sections⁷ within courses. There is therefore a strong need for coherency when planning of courses is undertaken.

⁶The term 'course' refers to the syllabus of any one year of study, for example Sociology I or Industrial Sociology III.

⁷The term 'section' here refers to any sub-section of a course - usually one academic term (or half of a semester) in duration.

To begin with, the Department needs to have a strong understanding of students' prior knowledge and must incorporate this understanding into an approach which "...links new ideas and concepts to one's existing knowledge and personal experience" (Zuber-Skerritt 1987:66). In this way the Department is able to take cognisance of the fact that not all students enter the first year course with the same background knowledge.

Following from this is the need for the Department to ensure that all subsequent sections and courses follow systematically from the preceding ones. This does not apply simply to content but also to structure, and how things are taught at what stage. For example, if students are not yet at a stage where they have grasped the fundamentals of note-taking, the lecturer would need to teach at a different pace than at a later stage when students are accomplished note-takers.

Not only lectures themselves but aspects such as course outlines and tutorials are an important part of the structuring of sections and courses. As the Head of Department, Jan Coetzee, noted: "I think it is possible for lecturers to play a more important and proactive role in terms of the structure of courses. In particular more should be done to improve the structure of hand-out material (which is supposed to provide guidance through the course)."⁸

While individual lecturers are responsible on a personal level for coherency within their own sections of the work, the onus

⁸In an interview in June 1992.

is on the Department as a whole to ensure that cohesion between sections and courses is achieved. Similarly the Department needs to consider the most appropriate content for the different sections of each course. The staff need to have in mind not only a starting point (in terms of prior knowledge) but also what they expect students to have achieved by the end of the course. And then they must ensure that students are equipped with the necessary understanding of the process as they progress through the course. An example of this is that at present third year students in Sociology as well as in Industrial Sociology are expected to undertake a research project individually or in pairs. In order to equip them with the necessary skills they are taken through a very uncomplicated step-by-step second year research process in groups. All the necessary research skills are covered in this project.

The Department could similarly consider the use of tutorials to equip students with other important sociological skills, such as critical thinking and writing. This means that lecturers need to be encouraged to pay as much attention to structure as to content in planning sections and courses. In other words they need "...to become more student-centred and process-oriented instead of merely lecture-centred and content-oriented" (Zuber-Skerritt 1987:68) through emphasising the understanding and performance aspects of the learning process. As Gavin Gibbs (1981:60) argues, "...if we give advice in a generalised way, without regard to the individual student, or the particular course...then it is not likely that we will have a positive effect."

The strategy of dealing with academic skills in an integral manner within the Department's tutorial programme is therefore crucial. In this way staff and students realise that learning skills and critical thinking are skills which we continue to develop and refine at university and throughout life, rather than remedial activities, i.e. skills which should have been developed at school (Zuber-Skerritt 1987:69).

5.3.2 Lecturing as critical discourse

Much emphasis is placed on critical thinking within the discipline of Sociology. Above any of the academic skills which ASP has traditionally dealt with, it is the most crucial skill necessary in Sociology, and as such forms the basis for other skill areas, such as essay and examination writing. This is obviously because of the nature of the material which is covered within the subject. Bauman (1990: 214) suggests that: "Sociology is a refinement on that knowledge we possess and employ in our daily life - inasmuch as it brings into the open some finer distinctions and some not immediately evident connections which an unaided eye would fail to locate." Furthermore, "...all knowledge...contains an interpretation of the world. It does not, as we often believe, reflect things as they are in themselves; things are, rather, called into being by the knowledge we have..." (Bauman 1990: 227). The way in which students are expected to explore different theories - which all attempt to interpret the world - by integrating them with existing knowledge certainly is a process of critical thinking.

5.3.2.1 Critical thinking defined

Mark Weinstein (1990:122) suggests that: "Critical thinking is, whatever else, an educational idea of great breadth and profundity." He notes that it has been identified with reasonableness in general, such that the critical thinker is "...one who is appropriately moved by reason" (Harvey Siegel in Weinstein, 1990:122). Weinstein also points to the way in which critical thinking has been identified as "...reasonable and reflective thinking focused on deciding what to do or believe" (Robert Ennis in Weinstein, 1990:122). More specifically, it would seem that an ability to analyse and construct arguments is what most academics expect of their students when they refer to critical thinking. While it is commonly accepted that an argument is "...a set of assertions one of which is understood or intended to be supported by the other(s)" (Barry and Rudinow, 1989:95). This process of critical thinking in turn seemingly stems from the highly valued principle of rationality to which the traditionally liberal universities aspire. As Degenaar (in Coetzee 1989: 5) contends: "The existence of the university is often legitimated by the fact that it is able to operate as a centre for free and critical questioning based on the principle of rationality." This point is similarly stressed by Tisani (1991:3) who says that:

"...there seems to be general agreement among academics that the end result of university learning is the development of critical thinking in an individual. This is what Ashby describes as 'post-conventional thinking' - (where) the student moves from the uncritical acceptance of orthodoxy to creative dissent."

5.3.2.2 Thinking sociologically

Sociological thinking is a crucial form of critical thinking expected of students in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. It is a type of critical thinking which, along with critical thinking in general, needs to be developed within students entering the university with a non-critical background. As Bauman (1990:14) notes:

"... (sociology) demonstrates that the common metaphor of the motivated individual as the key to the understanding of the human world - including our own, thoroughly personal and private, thoughts and deeds - is inappropriate. When thinking sociologically, one attempts to make sense of the human condition through analysing the manifold webs of human interdependency - that toughest of realities which explains both our motives and the effects of their activation."

This process of depersonalising social explanation involves an important break from common sensical interpretations of the social world. Bauman (1990:8) defines common sense as "...that rich yet disorganised, non-systematic, often inarticulate and ineffable knowledge we use to conduct our daily business of life." In other words these are interpretations of the life-world which offer merely surface-level explanations of complex social processes and patterns.

Tony Bilton et al. (1987:5) agree that it is important that sociologists make this distinction between sociological and common sensical or individualistic explanations. They argue that sociology "...insists on a willingness to reject what is

'obvious', 'common sense', 'natural', and go beneath the surface of such understanding of the world." In agreement with this sentiment Peter Berger (1966:32-34) notes that: "The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives.... It can be said that the first wisdom of sociology is that - things are not what they seem."

Thus it is evident that the raw material of sociological findings is all human experience. Bauman (1990:9) notes that this experience:

"...is the experience of ordinary people in ordinary, daily life; an experience accessible in principle, though not always in practice, to everybody; and experience that, before it came under the magnifying glass of a sociologist, had already been lived by somebody else - a non-sociologist, a person not trained in the use of sociological language and seeing things from a sociological point of view."

The difficulty and confusion which confronts the prospective sociologist (the Sociology I student) is that the subject matter of sociology is the very experience which s/he has of the social world around him/her. S/he not only has to acquire a sociological approach to the world, but s/he has to 'defamiliarize the familiar' (Bauman, 1990:15). In substantiation of this point Anthony Giddens (1986:157) notes: "As critical theory, sociology does not take the social world as a given, but poses the questions: what types of social change are feasible and desirable, and how should we strive to

achieve them?"

Failure to accomplish this sort of critical thinking results in non-sociological or peripheral analyses of social issues. In a practical sense this could mean failure of the Sociology I course. Even when students begin to think sociologically the task ahead of them is not straightforward. This is because there is not a simple forthright way of doing things sociologically. As Sheldon Goldenberg (1987:224) points out: "No right answers characterise sociology; at least none that are right simply by fiat, right because the instructor or the book or an article says so. This is not to say, as some students misunderstand, that all opinions are equally legitimate and correct and that everyone has a right to their opinion." And so students need to find a midpoint between accepting a single theory as being correct (which is probably the approach they have learnt through their schooling) and some sort of ambivalent approach which regards all theories as being equally worthwhile.

While these two problems might seem elementary to the versed sociologist, they certainly are considerable obstacles to the firstyear student who becomes easily confused in the midst of apparent 'facts' which they are taught in lectures, and oft repeated instructions that s/he think sociologically and not just regurgitate lecture notes in essays and examinations.

5.3.2.3 Critical thinking as a means to critical consciousness

It is for this reason that lecturers are often heard to tell students that university is different to school because at

university they will have to think critically. Critical thinking is regarded as an important if not defining aspect of academia within the university. This is certainly the case with sociology. While some (Mazrui, A., 1978; Moulder, J., 1988) have argued that such emphasis on academic excellence is elitist within the context of an unequal South African society (with special attention given to the vast differences in primary and secondary education), and that 'Oxford standards' should be replaced by something more appropriate to South African universities through a process of Africanisation, arguments by Henry Giroux (1983) and Craig Howard (1991) emphasise the importance of a critical consciousness as an interpretive tool within cultural and political struggle.

Certainly, in Habermasian terms the need to foster a critical consciousness within students is crucial in developing communicative discourse within departments and within the university and society more generally (cf. 7.7.3.4). Unless communicative discourse is developed and subsequently takes place, democratic processes will be hampered, whether at the site of formal education or in other contested sites of political and cultural struggle.

5.3.2.4 The importance of critical education

The problem at hand is not that of questioning the value of critical thinking (although many students and some staff would no doubt prefer to tackle the problem from this angle!) but rather to consider ways of lecturing in a manner which promotes a critical atmosphere in the educational context. This is a crucial problem for lecturers in sociology, given an

educational setting which sees most students matriculating from schools which do not encourage nor foster a critical climate. As a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology commented: "I think that all educational systems in South Africa are problematic in the sense that even with white students there's a lot of rote-learning, students are not really taught to think critically." In agreement with this comment, a Sociology III student commented that:

"We come into university from school and immediately are told to 'critically discuss this' and 'critically discuss that'. Yet we don't even know what it means to critically discuss anything. I've been at university for three years and I don't think I've ever critically discussed anything."

Yet it is not only students who are hazy about the notion of critical thinking. Some lecturers lack clarity as to what it is that is meant by critical thinking and the extent to which it should be encouraged. For example one lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology confessed that:

"When it comes to marking at the moment for me its a gut-feeling thing. It's just an impression. I have got an image in my mind of a good piece of writing, and I often don't know how to distinguish between someone who's thinking critically and someone who is not. What I tend to reward, more probably than critical thinking - because as I said I don't know how to identify it - is originality and uniqueness: where a student tells me something that I don't know or adds something from their

personal life where you can see that they have integrated the knowledge I have given them in class into their own lives. That is when I reward a student. That for me is important."

This quote is useful because it illuminates a definite sense of confusion regarding the nature of critical thought, while simultaneously providing a clue as to the nature of the problem. The point that lectures are used to 'give' students 'knowledge' in 'class' is significant because such terminology implies a lecture situation in which an active lecturer provides a passive and docile audience with knowledge. That knowledge (which could well be regarded by the lecturer as indisputable) must then be internalised and applied to everyday examples in something of an academic 'I-spy' contest.

There is not much critical activity in that! In fact a student partaking in critical discourse with such lecturers might well fail, if there is nothing new contained in their argument. This can only add to the confusion which is presently overwhelming both concerned students and staff alike. It means that lecturers within individual departments are not always united on the expectations which they demand of students, as well as there being similar disparities between different departments.

Such differences create problems: on the one hand students will fail some sections if they do not provide rigorous critical discussion; while on the other hand they would do best to polish-up on their spotting and rote-learning skills

for other sections which focus more on content than ability to present well-structured arguments. In any case examinations generally depend on extensive memory skills no matter what the emphasis on argument is. All in all students are confronted with a quagmire of lecturer and departmental expectations and contradictions, all of which make it difficult for them to know what to do, let alone how to do it. As Head of Department, Jan Coetzee, noted⁹: "We have an academic standard, and we have some idea as to what we regard as a good examination answer, yet students seldom have that same picture or even a similar picture."

Despite this confusion there have been few well-structured and thorough attempts by the Department to ensure that students are taught what critical thinking is nor how to engage in such activity. Students who experience obvious difficulties have usually been referred to the ASP tutor who runs an integrated critical thinking module for students. In 1992 the first four Sociology I tutorials were aimed at teaching students some of the central aspects of critical thinking. But these did not meet with much success, given the lack of time in dealing with a complex issue. And while students are often asked to "critically discuss" issues in examinations and essays, very few really know what critically thinking entails.

While the integrated tutorials which were introduced in 1992 are undoubtedly an improvement on programmes which are abstracted from the context of course material they are nevertheless abstracted from the way in which critical

⁹In an interview in June 1992.

thinking normally takes place. Critical thinking should involve a way in which all readings, lectures and discussion can be approached. It should not have to be taught in a contrived manner, whereby teachers have to search for appropriate readings which will 'fit' the different critical thinking exercises. This might provide the student with a better idea as to what arguments are, and how to recognise very overt arguments in readings, but it does not equip students with the sort of critical consciousness which is available to them in all situations, no matter the context, no matter the reading or speaker.

As Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (1987:66) has argued "...one of the main goals of university education is to develop a critical mind, rather than to accumulate a vast amount of factual knowledge. Rather than memorizing facts, university students should try to...understand, to reflect, to analyze, to interpret, to discover and eventually to create new knowledge." Yet Ivan Illich (1973:44) contends that within schools and universities teaching is confused with instruction to the extent that "...students are taught that the value of learning increases with the amount of input." Ira Shor (in Shor and Freire, 1987:48,49) likens this situation to one in which students "eat knowledge" in a traditional lecture situation where "...there is a tiredness, a 'burn-out' in the traditional feeding of knowledge to students". Thus it is how much knowledge students can cram into their memories that is important, and not how much they are able to critically engage with the theories with which they come into contact.

And it is within this context that such skills courses are being taught to students. Even if they integrate skills with course content they cannot succeed if the only place such ideas about thinking occurs are within these courses. The university needs to be a critical environment itself, and that means the whole university.

It is debilitating to have lecturers who cover work in lectures which they intend students to internalise before repeating the same general points (possibly elaborated on with the help of additional reading) in well-structured essays during the course and in the examinations. And some who even insist that students present arguments in these essays, yet their method of teaching at worst indicates that they do not know what critical thinking is, or at best, that they do not know how to teach in a way which promotes critical thinking.

Even though lecturers might commit themselves to critical thinking as an ideal, in actual practice they often retreat to a traditional non-critical approach to teaching. Lecturers might intend a formal curriculum which demands "...originality, problem-solving, independent thought, and analytical skills" but their actual teaching methods and assessment procedures "...encourage question-spotting and rote-memorization of facts and theories considered important by the teachers (Entwistle, 1984: 4)."

To complicate the issue further, it may be obvious that rote-learning does not involve critical thought, but many students do rote-learn essays which themselves contain arguments, often

arguments which they did not write, or if they did, which they do not understand. Yet to the marker such an essay contains critical discussion, and thus seems to be indicative of a thinking student. As another lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology commented:

"You know jolly well that in first year you are going to have the student's course essay, or maybe someone else's essay, which has been learnt off by heart thrown back at you. It doesn't prove anything, it proves that a person can maybe learn five pages off by heart, but it doesn't prove that they can think about it. So certainly you have to have a different approach."

A different approach is no doubt crucial. It is clear that hallmarks of university education such as one-way instruction and rote-learning do not involve critical thought. As Craig Howard (1991:118) has argued, "...the teacher is not the subject who 'possesses' what the listening objects must dutifully accept ...(and) the students are not passive receptacles into which deposits are made for later withdrawals." Instead the student must be actively involved in the learning process. "If values are presented as received truths, rather than as the consequences of arduous critical thinking by particular people struggling with timeless questions of human existence, those upon whom such truths are bestowed certainly will become 'value illiterate'; they will be unable to 'read' the signs and symbols of their times."

The argument here is that if students are to be taught a critical consciousness, it is going to involve far more effort

and initiative than simply providing them with additional academic skills modules, whether integrated with course content or not. While there is not total agreement amongst academics on whether critical thinking is something which can be consciously taught in classes, there is no doubt that an uncritical university environment is debilitating to students who have experienced very little creative thinking during their school education.

It is not sufficient to expect students to suddenly be able to cope academically on entering the university, given the nature of South African schooling, and as has been argued it is not sufficient to simply leave it to ASP to teach students in their spare time in remedial fashion. There are numerous factors which count against such an approach working, the most obvious of which is that this approach has not yet worked on campus, despite all the effort put in by ASP.

But in any case it must be re-iterated that many students are not convinced that critical thinking is even necessary. They can definitely pass examinations without critical thought, and most do not see any inherent value in it other than as a means to passing examinations. And even then they are quite sceptical.

This all points to the need for a completely holistic approach in which departments themselves initiate the movement towards critical thinking. This is a point recognised by a lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology who argued that:

"It's much more interesting for everybody (students and the lecturer) to teach in a more creative, critically oriented way, where you actually take students with you and challenge them in a way which is accessible to them, and in a way where you are actually developing skills and not just showing off how much you know."

But to do this involves challenging traditional notions of teaching. Paulo Freire (in Shor and Freire 1987:33) stresses that liberatory education is distinct from traditional methods because it is:

"...fundamentally a situation where the teacher and the students both have to be learners, both have to be cognitive subjects, in spite of being different. This for me is the first test of liberating education, for teachers and students both to be critical agents in the act of knowing.... *In the liberating moment, we must try to convince the students and on the other hand we must respect them, not impose ideas on them.*"

This would suggest that within the lecturing context the lecturer needs to be well-prepared, having considered the most effective way of presenting material in a critical, creative and exploratory manner. Yet there needs to be a sense of taking students through a critical journey whereby the hidden curriculum of the lecture situation is one of critical thought. Students need to be taken through arguments and challenged by a lecturer "...who needs to model an active, sceptical learner in the classroom who invites students to be curious and critical...and creative" (Shor and Freire,

This approach may seem to be an ideal and it might seem easier to simply carry on searching for the perfect ASP module and leave lecturers alone! But as has been stressed, if departments and lecturers are left out of this process the process of teaching students in an holistic manner will be even more of an up-hill battle, if not impossible.

This is not to locate the entire problem in the hands of the lecturer, nor even the department. All those concerned (ASP, students and concerned departments) need to challenge the administration to be more concerned with what is happening in lecture and seminar rooms. Staff training needs to become an integral aspect of selection and promotion procedures. As one Sociology lecturer commented:

"I think a serious problem is that lecturers are simply expected to know how to lecture. They get their Masters and then they're suddenly unleashed onto the first-year students. And NLOC (New Lecturers' Orientation Course¹⁰) is too short, being only two days long. That should be a priority of the University, researching latest teaching techniques and so on. My personal feeling is that such courses which evolve from this research should be made compulsory, although perhaps, rather than make them compulsory, people should be offered incentives."

¹⁰A Course which was set up at Rhodes University as a means to providing a training programme for new lecturers joining the University.

Thus even individual lecturers find themselves in the midst of uncertainty as to how best to teach students. This points to the idea that some sort of initiative needs to be taken by the Department as a whole, not only in organising its own training workshops, but also in putting pressure on the administration to incorporate training of lecturers into its structure.¹¹

Unless the university and individual departments become geared towards a more critical approach, and unless students experience critical lecturing and critical education more generally, the type of critical consciousness which leads to communicative discourse (cf.3.3.4; 7.6; 7.6.3) is not going to be attained.

5.4 Conclusion

It is this sort of holistic integration process, which challenges the existing standard and style of education which needs to be incorporated if students are to experience the type of critical and complete education to which the university and certainly the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology should be committed.

However, the problem of teaching students is a complex one which will not necessarily be completely solved by a more holistic and critical approach to teaching. If we were to

¹¹According to Carter it is intention of ASP that this task will be attempted by the IDT-funded Faculty Educational Development Officers. In his funding application to the IDT Carter (1991a:5) stated that: "Their activities would include working closely with faculties, the Teaching Learning Support Committee, Academic Skills Programme and Departments. They will assist with the development of faculty and discipline-specific content tutorials, the development of new undergraduate course structures, the design of courses to replace normal first year work and ultimately the restructuring of degree programmes."

believe that a different style of lecturing and teaching is all that is required in order to equip students with a critical consciousness, we would not adequately surpass the *tabula rasa* view of students which characterises the very educational model we need to transcend. While it is important to avoid a syndrome in which the victim is blamed (Ryan, 1976) as far as students are concerned, such an approach cannot simply be replaced by an assumption which views students as passive and innocent participants of whatever type of education they experience. Education is never so narrow and deterministic.

Instead all those who are involved in any educational setting need to be regarded as enigmatic participants who seldom act as rational and coherent actors. This applies to the student body, ASP, lecturers, departments and the University administration. All areas of the university setting are a quagmire of interests in which individual and group dynamics play a crucial role in determining particular outcomes. We need to take cognisance of this fact if the type of changes which have been suggested are to be implemented in a realistic manner.

It is clear therefore, that the sort of change which is envisaged here is very dependant on staff and students within respective departments. While ASP might be convinced that such changes are the most suitable, it will not be possible to implement any new policies without the strong support of departments and the enthusiastic response of students enrolled within those departments.

For this reason the attitudes and perceptions of Sociology 1 students and staff were explored by means of a survey and interviews respectively. It is the findings of this research that the next chapter explores, in an attempt to examine the extent to which the type of integration process which has been discussed here is acceptable amongst those who are affected most - the lecturing staff and students.

CHAPTER 6: TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATION.

6.1 Introduction

It has been argued that if the Rhodes University Academic Skills Programme is to effectively counter difficulties experienced by students in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, any proposed plans should take into account the perceptions of students and staff within the Department. In seeking a workable solution to student difficulties, paramount importance needs to be placed firstly on the extent to which both staff and students recognise student difficulties, and secondly how they feel such difficulties might best be combated. These two issues will be examined in this chapter.

If the majority of either group does not perceive any major academic problems within the discipline as it is taught in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, or if the majority of either group is strongly opposed to the idea of integration as a means to dealing with student difficulties, then it is unlikely that integration will work. This in turn would have serious implications in terms of ASP's ability to act as agent of significant change in the area of academic development within the university.

6.2 Methodology

Appealing to the opinions and perceptions of staff and students, while helpful in constructing a context in which to situate a programme of action, is not entirely unproblematic. While both lecturers and students experience difficulties in

the process of education, very few members of either constituency have attempted to provide a sophisticated and thorough analysis of these difficulties, nor have they entirely considered ways of alleviating such difficulties. Given this lack of thorough analysis of the complexities of the difficulties experienced, it follows that the sort of perceptions which staff and students hold are subsequently cursory responses to a multifarious and deep-seated issue.

To point to a certain superficiality in the perceptions of staff and students is not to discount the significance of what they think about difficulties experienced in the discipline of sociology. Instead it is argued that their perceptions should be taken seriously, but that they alone should not inform the process of determining the path to be taken by ASP in the future. What this means is that students and staff need to be viewed as the central protagonists in the area of academic development, given that they are the ones who teach and who are taught. But the issue of academic development is an intricate one which warrants a critical analysis of academic development within the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

6.2.1 The critical interpretive framework

This more intricate approach would employ student and staff perceptions in a general manner whereby the essence of their views is sought and incorporated within a broad framework which considers the likelihood of the integration strategy actually working. The integration strategy is one which academic specialists argue is the most suitable direction in

which ASP should head (cf.4.6.3; 4.6.4; 5.2; 5.3). The critical approach to research which is implied here views staff and student perceptions in the light of the integration process. In other words the essence of views expressed would provide an indication of the degree to which the student body and staff members would be prepared to interact within an integrated department.

Using this form of critical interpretive or "action research" (McKay and Romm, 1992:89) framework, unstructured interviews with staff and questionnaires completed by Sociology I students, are used to assist in establishing broad trends rather than empirical 'truths' supported by significance tests. Indeed, McKay and Romm (1992:76) note that: "The 'new' interpretive pedagogical approaches developed in opposition to the traditional canons of positivist research - in opposition, that is, to its notion of causation and its relegation of experience to the realm of the observable as measured in terms of scientific indicators." In substantiation, Robert Bogdan and Steven Taylor (1975:8) note that "...truth is an evasive concept. One person may describe an experience one way and another person may describe that same experience in quite another way. Yet both may be 'telling the truth' according to their own perspectives: their own rationalisations, fabrications, prejudices, and exaggerations." The action research framework in use in this research therefore avoids overly-positivistic preoccupation with the truth value and significance of the questionnaires and interviews under discussion.

In analysing the questionnaire, rather than incorporate inferential statistics to measure people's experiences of academic development, this approach adopts a more descriptive approach, "...which summarises patterns in the responses of people in a sample" (De Vaus, 1990:126). It therefore follows that these patterns or "central tendencies" (De Vaus, 1990: 135) are not used to "...unpack the meaning and nature of bivariate relationships and to develop adequate causal and meaningful explanations" (De Vaus, 1990:187). Instead these patterns are used to establish a broad understanding of students' perceptions of academic development. This understanding itself is open to interpretation and needs to be viewed as part of an ongoing process, in which life conditions and knowledge are in a state of continuous flux (Denzin, 1970: 298).

In using this critical interpretive approach, the unstructured interviews with staff members will be used in a qualitative manner. Once again these interviews are used not in a "search for causes" (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975:2) but in an attempt to yield descriptive data which will be used to discover the perceptions of staff members in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

6.2.2 Multiple triangulation

Both these research methods have been used in this chapter in a case of "multiple triangulation" (Denzin, 1970:297). By referring to different sources through the use of varied (appropriate) research methods, a holistic overview of integration can be achieved. As action research, this research

is viewed as being part of a commitment to educational emancipation whereby the issue of integration is explored as a means to realising emancipatory education (cf. Chapter Seven).

In order to accomplish this task it is necessary to determine, firstly, the peculiarities of student difficulties within sociology, and secondly, the different responses to these problems which are offered by lecturers and students. These views will then be able to be considered in terms of their compatibility with moves to integrate ASP with departmental teaching.

6.2.3 The student survey

Sociology 1 students were approached in order to discover what their perceptions of their own difficulties were. 183 out of a class of 251 students completed a general ASP questionnaire¹ (see Appendix Two) during a lecture period in September 1990. Through the use of the Likert scale format (see De Vaus, 1990:236), students were asked to rate responses to two issues regarding two themes. The first of these two themes had to do with the extent to which particular academic skills had been and continued to be a problem for them. In other words, they were asked to rate their level of difficulty according to two sets of criteria. The first question was as follows: Since you have been at Rhodes, have you **at any stage** had difficulties with or have felt that you have needed assistance with any of the following academic skills? (See Table One, page 153). The

¹A questionnaire was compiled which sought information from students to be used by central ASP as well as by the researcher. The questionnaire which was used was therefore not compiled and administered for the exclusive purpose of this present study.

second question was similar, but evaluated their present level of difficulty (in September - the beginning of the final term). This second question asked: To what extent are these still a problem for you? They rated their perceived level of difficulty on a rating scale of one to five. One represented 'no problems', while a rating of two meant that students experienced 'slight problems', three represented 'average' difficulties, four depicted 'a few serious problems' while five symbolised 'major difficulties.'

The second of these issues had to do with perceptions around academic development. Students considered statements concerning ASP and Rhodes University and to say whether they: 1) strongly agreed; 2) agreed; 3) had no opinion; 4) disagreed; and 5) strongly disagreed. In this closed-ended way it was felt that the essence of student opinion could be elicited with regard to certain important issues which were covered by the statements included in the questionnaire.

6.2.4 The staff interviews

In open-ended interviews with staff members of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology a number of central concerns were discussed. These were: firstly, who should take responsibility for the problem of academic skills within the university; secondly, whether or not integration is a workable solution; thirdly the extent to which lecturers themselves can play a more important and direct role in academic support; and finally, how members of staff themselves would personally react to changes which integration might bring about.

6.2.5 Preliminary discussion

Before the presentation and discussion of the results of the research takes place, it will be necessary to consider a few factors which will facilitate a better understanding of the results than would otherwise be the case.

Firstly, it is common for people to portray themselves in a better light than is the case. This incidence of "social desirability" occurs especially around controversial questions (in this instance academic skills difficulties) where people "...give acceptable rather than true² opinions" (De Vaus, 1990:102). Although this questionnaire was anonymous it is possible that students underestimated their level of difficulty with problems. This is not particularly problematic in this instance because of the nature of the scale. The ratings which were required of respondents were an indication of how they rated different academic skills **in relation to** each other. The actual rating itself (represented by a particular number on a questionnaire) was not particularly important, except in relation to how respondents rated other academic skills according to the same scale.

What this means is that while two students might objectively have the same level of problem in writing an examination (by way of the fact that they both attended lectures, put some effort into learning and then both got only 40 per cent for the examination), one might rate her/his exam-writing ability at the level of 'a few serious difficulties' while the other

²Truth here refers to what people really think, rather than to truth in terms of what is real in a realist sense.

rates her/his situation as experiencing 'major difficulties'. This disjunction is insignificant **provided** the same level of inconsistency (broadly speaking) takes place across the board, in terms of all the other ratings.

The reason for this is that the main issue is to gain an overall impression of how students perceive various academic skills difficulties **in relation to each other**. In this way it is possible to gain an overall impression of what student difficulties are, without making truth claims about the exact level of difficulty which they possess. So, for example, while it would be meaningless to say that students experience particular rating of difficulty in writing tutorials as a statistic on its own, it becomes meaningful in terms of the rating which they give themselves in the area of study skills. The issue is in terms of degree, not exact figures. This is obvious, given that it is impossible to really measure academic difficulties numerically!

Secondly, because there were many respondents who did not feel that they had any problem at all with each of the academic skills listed, and that few students admit to having 'major difficulties' (a rating of 'five'), the general pattern is for the ratings to be lower rather than higher.³

³This is borne-out by the fact that in the case of past difficulties 52,9% of the students thought that they had no or slight difficulties, while 28,4% perceived themselves as having had 'average' difficulties. Only 19,7% thought that they experienced a few serious or major difficulties. In terms of present difficulties, 64,3% of the respondents rated themselves in the first category, 22,4% thought that they experienced 'average' difficulties, and a mere 10,1% felt that they still experienced a few serious or major difficulties.

Despite this inclination towards low scores, it is useful to bear in mind that any rating above 'one' reflects at least some difficulty with particular academic skills, the overall ratings (which range between 1.34 and 3.43) indicate that there are a significant number of students who experience difficulties in each of the academic skills categories listed.

6.3 Student difficulties in sociology.

First-year students entering the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology at Rhodes University encounter a spectrum of difficulties which encompass both general study problems and difficulties which relate specifically to sociology (as well as - in some instances - to some of the other social sciences). This discussion focuses on both general and specific academic skills problems. Herbert Vilakazi (1987:2) has argued:

"The crisis of education in this country...is a general one, embracing the education of both blacks and whites. It is a terrible mistake, misleading oneself as well as others, to focus only on black education, when discussing the educational crisis in South Africa. White South Africans have no right to boast of their education, by way of the assumption that the solution to the educational crisis in South Africa is the abolition of present black education, and the extension of present white education to the entire country, so that everyone gets the limited education currently available in white educational institutions. Sure, blacks and whites have to be educated together; but it has to be a new education from what is currently available in both black and white

educational institutions, from primary school to university."

This means that, to some or other extent, it is common for most Sociology I students to battle with various academic skills during their first year of study. As has been noted, this is especially true given the nature of sociology, and the particular process involved in sociological thinking (cf. 5.3.2.2).

This is not to say that all students are equally disadvantaged when confronted with university education. This is clearly not the case. As one lecturer in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology noted: "I think all educational systems in South Africa are problematic in the sense that even with white students there's a lot of rote-learning, students are not really taught to think critically, but its especially bad in black schools because of the combination of home backgrounds and bad education." Certainly, the 1990 Sociology I class indicated that they felt that they generally improved in their ability to cope with all the academic skills listed in the questionnaire (see Table One, page 153). The fact that there was this widespread awareness of improvement during the year would seem to substantiate the argument that most students are not properly prepared for university when they enter their first year of study.

The most striking aspect of the overall Sociology 1 students' perceptions of their academic skills difficulties (see Table One), is that many of the academic skills which ASP has

traditionally pinpointed as key areas and focused most attention on, are rated as amongst the least troublesome to students. Lecture note-taking, understanding lectures, reading skills, listening and anxiety management are some of the skills which have been very much the centre of Rhodes University ASP's student support agenda.

TABLE ONE: SOCIOLOGY 1 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF ACADEMIC SKILLS DIFFICULTIES.

AVERAGE RATING OF ACADEMIC SKILLS DIFFICULTIES		
	Past	Present
Taking lecture notes	2.03	1.77
Tutorial assignment writing	2.1	1.86
Study skills	2.69	2.32
Self-expression in writing	2.69	2.38
Understanding lectures	2	1.84
Understanding readings	2.26	1.96
Exam writing	2.75	2.6
Constructing an argument/ critical thinking	2.91	2.54
Listening skills	2.17	1.9
Time management	2.78	2.34
Anxiety management	2.51	2.13

Although of the five most problematic areas earmarked by students, time management, study and exam writing-skills have been stressed by ASP, self-expression in writing has received very little attention, and only very recently has critical thinking become a focus of attention for ASP. Yet the fact that self-expression in writing and critical thinking rate so highly as problem areas suggests that these have deserved far more attention than areas such as lecture-note taking which have been overly stressed in the past.

These ratings also indicate the need for ASP to begin to concentrate more heavily on the deeper level skills which students require, as these seem to be the most troublesome. As has already been indicated, this is particularly true in studying sociology. While it could be argued that borderline students could pass without these deeper level skills, if the Department is to commit itself to liberatory education (cf. 5.3.2.3 and 7.6), it should attempt to foster a critical consciousness within all students.

6.3.1 Sociology-specific skills

Some of these skills with which students struggle are general skills problems, while others could be regarded as specific-skills problem by means of degree. By this it is meant that certain academic skills problems are both general and subject-specific, but the extent to which they are a problem in any particular subject is a matter of degree. For example, while reading is recognised as a general academic skills problem (it is a necessary skill in all courses at university), it can be even more of a problem when applied to a particular subject.

That is, students may vary in terms of their ability to read, but when reading sociological texts they may experience even more of a problem, which could be as a result of various reasons, for example sociological concepts, the style of writing and so on.

Apart from specific skills problems by degree, there are also those skills which tend to stem solely from the type of academic activity which a particular discipline or group of disciplines entail. These skills would be necessary in some or one course(s), but not in others. These could be regarded here as 'sociology-specific academic skills' which include higher order academic skills which are a necessary part of grasping sociology as a discipline. It will be useful to consider these categories when focusing on various skills difficulties which are discussed by staff and students.

6.3.2 Writing sociologically

Certainly, the ability to write sociologically is the most fundamental skills area for students needing to pass at the end of the year. It includes both critical thinking and self-expression, and is the culmination of a number of preliminary skills necessary if students are to acquire what C. Wright Mills (1970) refers to as the 'Sociological Imagination'. Spack (1988:38) emphasises the difficulty which writing poses to students in his argument that: "The teaching of writing in a discipline... involves even more specialised knowledge and skills than does the teaching of the subject matter itself." And given the particular difficulties which sociology itself poses to students it is no wonder that the predominant

difficulties expressed by students relate specifically to the area of writing arguments and in a way which is indicative of self-expression.

The ability to write sociologically involves the realisation of a number of prior academic skills which each play an integral part in a student's academic preparedness. And that this ability to write sociologically is necessary if students are to pass. In recognition of this point Thornton (1980:8) notes that "...it is by their ability to write that pupils will in the end, succeed or fail in the educational system. The most significant judgements are made in written examinations. If we help students to write better, we help them to success within the educational system." Students are no doubt aware of the immediate importance of exam-related (including writing) skills: it can be seen that the five most serious difficulties (both in the students' past and at the time of completing the questionnaire) can all be seen to relate almost directly to skills necessary to pass the November examination. The ability to construct an argument, time management, exam writing, studying and self-expression in writing are obviously all very closely related to writing and passing examinations. It seems quite clear therefore, that students perceive exam-related skills as being the ones with which they are most concerned.

6.3.3 Deeper level difficulties

Yet it could be argued that there are possible underlying problems beneath at least some of the issues which have been expressed here. For example, while the problem for the student

might be studying, the problem could be traced back to not understanding lectures, poor lecture notes, or lack of concentration, or even non-academic issues such as loneliness and depression. So while these ratings provide a picture of what students perceive as their immediate problems on an academic level, they obviously cannot be completely accepted at face-value.

In substantiation of this point, Jordan (1989:151) points to the fact that:

"A considerable body of evidence now exists to show that many students have difficulties with their studies on account of inadequate background in study skills appropriate to their studies. This is particularly so for taking notes in lectures, writing in an appropriate academic style, and taking an active part in discussions or seminars."

This would suggest that ASP has not been incorrectly focusing on the more basic skills - these are indeed a crucial part of any academic undertaking - but that these precursory academic skills should not be singled-out as the exclusive areas of difficulty. This is because proficiency in a course like sociology cannot be achieved solely on the basis of more rudimentary academic skills, despite their initial importance. Any academic development programme in sociology therefore needs to provide a thorough schedule which incorporates all levels of academic skills, no matter which level of the spectrum of difficulty they occupy.

6.3.4 Critical and sociological thinking

All lecturers in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology were in agreement on considering critical and sociological thinking to be the most crucial sociology-specific academic skills which students experience difficulties in grasping. This is in agreement with student perceptions on critical thinking and constructing an argument. As has been shown (cf.5.3.2.1 and 5.3.2.2), critical and sociological thinking are not distinctly different types of thinking, nor are they one and the same. But in general the various staff members used the terms in a somewhat inexact and complimentary fashion. For one lecturer it meant that students lacked: "An ability to separate substance from content. They can't draw the essence from an argument", while for another it meant that a student had "...to be able to do a number of readings, understand them, and then integrate them properly, and then at the same time make some kind of critical judgement about them."

Head of Department, Jan Coetzee, summed-up widespread departmental awareness of the problem of critical thinking in saying that "...very few students can evaluate arguments, because in the school system in general emphasis on critical analysis and critical thinking is very weak. Certainly analysing arguments is a new experience to students. So a problem in sociology is that students have to start to deal with a different perspective...sociology is something which is new to students, and they are not aware that there's more to sociology than just common sense notions."

6.3.5 Language as debilitator.

Staff felt that an important debilitating factor for some students is that of language. R. Jardine (1986:58) argues that: "Language and learning are inextricably linked..." so that students who are not proficient in the use of a particular language are disadvantaged when educated in that language. English is very rarely the first language of black students, which means that "...for the majority of blacks who enter South African universities the language they are exposed to at academic level is most often a second or a foreign language..." (Jardine, 1986:58).

Head of the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, Jan Coetzee, recognised this problem in saying that he did not think "...that one can really overestimate the problem that students experience when studying in a second language, especially in disciplines where they have to approach words and concepts that they need to use in order to reason. It is very difficult to cope. I think that critical thinking and language go hand in hand - to evaluate arguments requires the ability to use a language."

Moreover, apart from the problem of black students having to learn through a medium of instruction which does not coincide with their home language, Jardine (1986:59) argues that there is a link "...between language and social class and a concomitant link between these and school performance. There are many who contend that middle-class children perform better at school than do working-class children. The apparent superiority of the middle-class children is explained with

reference to a superior language capability, both in terms of an extended language vocabulary and effectiveness of use." Given the close relationship between race and class in South Africa (cf. 1.4) the difficulty of the working class student as discussed here is the difficulty of black students, many of whom have working class backgrounds.

Vilakazi (1987:9) postulates that for a long historical period when the working class was 'hidden', "...university people formed a sort of a caste, far removed from the daily lives of ordinary working people, but due to the division of labour and professionalism, they developed a new language, or jargon⁴, only understood by themselves. A new 'Latin' was in fact created, which was in contradiction to the creation of national languages and democratization of language during this period."

Students (working class students in particular) can thus be viewed as entering the university system from a background that places them at a considerable disadvantage, in terms of both academic (including language) skills with which to compete in the new environment, and social conditioning. This can result in students suffering from severe motivational problems which can lead to anomie (see Habermas, 1990:122-

⁴In explaining this point Vilakazi (1987:9) notes that: "All the disciplines in higher education have developed and cultivated what is called 'jargon', something different from day-to-day language, and something largely artificial and unnecessary to conveying the truth about whatever it is about. The gap between this jargon and daily language is enormous. Sociology textbooks, economic textbooks, and psychology textbooks, just to give examples, are written in a language, or in languages, that the individual sociologist, economist, or psychologist, does not use outside the lecture hall, as a father, husband, wife, friend, or lover."

130). This means that disadvantaged students may well perceive the university system as being elitist, too results-conscious and inflexible in taking cognisance of the pressures experienced in a lifetime of discrimination and deprivation.

Steve Biko quite lucidly expressed this academic alienation in describing the sort of contact which black and white students shared in NUSAS in the late 1960's when he said that:

"English is a second language to you...before you conquer it you must apply it now to learn discipline at university (sic). As a result you never quite catch everything that is in a book; you certainly understand the paragraph...but you are not quite adept at reproducing an argument that was in a particular book, precisely because of your failure to understand certain words in the book. This makes you less articulate... (than the white student)...you may be intelligent but not as articulate, you are forced into a subservient role of having to say yes to what they are saying, talking about what you have experienced, which they have not experienced, because you cannot express it so well. This in a sense inculcates also in numerous students a sense of inadequacy. You tend to think that it is not just a matter of language, you tend to tie it up also with intelligence in a sense, you tend to feel that that guy is better equipped than you mentally" (Biko, 1988: 123, 124).

This discussion stresses the inaccessibility and alien nature of the university for many students to which Vilakazi

referred. While aspects of Vilakazi's argument might be regarded as being extreme by some, it needs to be viewed as important in the context of (for many students) the large gap between school and university education and between home background and university culture. His argument is one which places responsibility on the university to change, in strong opposition to the dominant approach within universities which is to blame the student, or their home background and schooling. While the students' environment and experience is important in shedding light on why they are not coping with academia, this needs to be regarded as a separate issue to that of *explaining* the academic problems of students more generally.

A comprehensive analysis needs to take into account the dynamics within which students have been educated, but in addition, and of quintessential importance, it requires an understanding of the environment in which the university finds itself. Because it is this latter area, when explored, which suggests that the university needs to change in order to move away from an 'ivory tower' existence, to one which fulfils its obligation to the community in a more sensitive and democratic manner.

The use of language can be an important factor in the success or failure of students in some courses in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. This is borne out in the following quote by a member of staff who remarked that:

"Black students do tend to write very poorly and it is difficult for me to mark their scripts - extremely

difficult. I do believe that grammar and the proper way of speaking is absolutely essential in every discipline - whether it's Pharmacy or Zoology or Sociology. *I think it's something we should expect of every student regardless of their background.*"

This sort of sentiment, when put into practice through student evaluation, obviously affects students severely, both in influencing their achievement in a particular subject, as well as, to at least some extent, determining their life chances.

6.3.6 Further general academic skills difficulties

Apart from language and writing being problematic general academic skills required by students entering the university, staff felt that there were other areas which were possible problem areas. One lecturer thought that students experienced problems in taking down notes, that they "...do not know what to put down, and that they do not know how to discriminate between what is important and what is not." Two of the other lecturers felt that the general culture of the university is a problem. The idea of working in the sort of free environment which the university provides means that many students find it difficult to work as much as they should, especially given the amount of social opportunities available to them. There could also be "psychological" factors involved, especially for black students who feel out of place and lost in an alien environment, and as a result "people just withdraw". As can be seen in Table One, students did feel that anxiety was a relatively problematic area for them to have to deal with. Nelson and Foss (1992) therefore stress that staff should

therefore take into account, and be sensitive to, deeper emotional and psychological issues which could underlie academic difficulties.

6.3.7 Academic difficulties caused by differences in expectation?

In addition to the various factors that have been discussed thus far the issue concerning the extent to which staff and student expectations correlate. The suggestion that students are not fully aware of departmental expectations implies that there is an incongruity between what students think the department wants from them and what individual lecturers do actually want in an examinable piece of writing (whether it be an essay or exam script). And this discrepancy could lead to particular students incorrectly assuming that they do not have any major academic skills difficulties when in fact they do.

This sort of discrepancy is certainly a problem in sociology, especially if sociology is approached in the content-driven rather than process-oriented manner in which it tends to be approached in South African universities (although not exclusively so) including the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. This means that a distinction can be made between what it is to think sociologically and the material with which students are presented in lectures. The mistake which departments make is to overly emphasise the volume of content covered in lectures rather than to focus predominantly on the process of being

sociological⁵. Sometimes the 'sociological imagination' (C. Wright Mills, 1970) itself is something which is conveyed to students in lectures as though it were simply more content, rather than as a way of thinking, viewing the world, researching and so on.

Students therefore begin to think that what is expected of them is the rote-learning of all the content dealt with in lectures, rather than to learn to think sociologically. This is tantamount to language students in the French Department for example, learning as many French words as possible, without understanding the language and its complex grammar itself. It has already (in the previous chapter) been shown how much confusion persists in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology in terms of what critical and sociological thinking is. Amidst all this confusion many students fall back on the safest option, which is to memorise as much sociological content as they can. If their rote-learning skills are well-tuned they will think that they do not experience any particular difficulties with academic skills, when in fact they do.

Jaffray (1992) in her research in the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology found that there were extensive discrepancies between the views of lecturers and students in terms of a number of important

⁵This is not to create a false dichotomy between content and sociological thinking. It is certainly the case (for the well-versed sociologist) that content and sociological thinking cannot be separated. But it is quite common for first-year students to write essays which discuss sociological theories in a matter-of-fact, non-sociological way.

issues concerning sociology as a discipline as well as, more importantly, what lecturers in that particular Department expect of students. One question in particular warrants examination. Lecturers were asked: "If there were any abilities, or particular expertise, they were hoping to develop in Sociology/Industrial Sociology students" while the students were asked: "What abilities or expertise they thought the lecturers were trying to develop in them" (Jaffray, 1992:10). The lecturers included such notions as developing: "a sociological imagination"; "pragmatism and a willingness to question"; "the ability to approach any sociological theory (in particular) or other material and to understand what is being said, what the context of the material is, and how to weigh-up what is being said or argued", and "an understanding of society which is both critical and nuanced yet at the same time vociferous." The most common responses elicited from students included: "attending lectures"; "general knowledge or everything one knows"; "facts and actual knowledge as opposed to theory"; "one's own view/interpretation"; "observing changes in society"; "research projects" and "human interaction" (Jaffray, 1992: 10,11).

This type of difference⁶ in views referred to earlier is explicitly revealed in Jaffray's research findings. Although a limited degree of agreement could be interpreted from these views, there is a general lack in consensus between lecturers and students.

⁶Although not necessarily mutually exclusive these views indicate a strong difference in expectations.

6.4 Staff and student awareness of areas of student difficulty

It becomes clear that the lecturers in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology are aware that academic skills difficulties amongst students do exist, and that they are most often the result of social dynamics beyond the control of the individual student. In terms of Vilakazi's (1987) argument, the extent to which some of these problems remain a problem to students and to the Department is partly in the hands of the Department. This means that if the Department becomes more accommodating and sensitive to student difficulties, many of the problems which have been outlined above will cease to perturb students in the future.

While this may perhaps sound straight-forward, as has been argued, the issue of solving students' academic skills difficulties certainly is not a simple one. Instead it has been suggested that the complex network of academic skills difficulties which abide within the university would best be tackled through the process of integration which has become the predominantly accepted solution to the problem of academic skills difficulties within the university.

6.5 Perceptions of integration

This section takes as its starting point the various academic skills difficulties which have been expressed thus far and once again considers staff and student perceptions, this time with the purpose of exploring lecturers' and students' understanding of the context in which academic skills exist. Bearing in mind this context, various solutions to academic skills difficulties which have been offered by staff and

students will be addressed, and in addition to this, these groups' attitudes towards integration will be examined, so as to explore the extent to which a common acceptance of integration is likely.

While academic skills difficulties have been pinpointed, and vague ideas as to solutions have been discussed, unless the issue of "what is to be done?" is explicitly addressed, the extent to which the Rhodes University ASP is able to realistically act as an agent of effective change in the area of academic development in sociology will not be clear. This task now becomes the focus of attention.

On a general level, ASP has already committed itself to a policy of integration with mainstream departments, while students have shown a strong need for academic support apart from departmental teaching and guidelines. The Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology has thus far experimented with a number of ASP-initiated support attempts, including an integrated tutorial experiment, while the administration has begun to provide increased support, and are presently encouraging a process of integration in eight departments (such as the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology and the English Department).

Given that integration as an approach to student support is presently in its initial stages of implementation within certain departments, the question which needs to be considered is whether or not it will meet with the sort of accommodation by staff and students which is necessary for it to succeed. Up

to this point ASP and some Heads of Departments have pushed ahead with a programme of integration in general, but there has often been a lack of consultation with lecturers and students. A programme of integration needs the acceptance of both lecturers and students if it is to work effectively. For this reason Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology student and staff opinions were consulted in order to gain a comprehensive picture as to their initial impressions concerning ways of rectifying the various academic problems outlined in the previous chapter.

6.6 Who should take responsibility for the problem of academic skills teaching?

In considering responsibility for the academic difficulties of students entering university the subsequent discussion will take into account both the macro-level educational scenario in terms of the state and educational institutional deficiencies, and micro-level education dynamics within Rhodes University itself.

6.6.1 Broad educational responsibilities

Staff and student opinion was sought in terms of the extent to which the government, because of the provision of inadequate schooling, was responsible for the academic difficulties experienced by students, particularly at first year level.

6.6.1.1 The problem of South African school education

To begin with, student opinion was sought on their perceptions of the state of school education in South Africa, by asking them to respond to the statement: "Because of the state of

school education in South Africa, all students are underprepared for the demands of university, and therefore require some assistance with academic skills."

The average response to this statement⁷ indicates that students in general agree with the statement. When considering the difference between those students whose first language is English and those whose first language is an African language⁸, it is interesting to note that both groups tend to indicate agreement with the statement. However, English speakers are notably in stronger agreement with the statement⁹ than are the latter group¹⁰. It makes sense that African students should feel that white schools provide a better (even adequate) education, given how much more money is spent on white schooling than on black. English speaking students on the other hand are obviously aware of the shortcomings of their own education and thus return a stronger agreement response.

All staff were agreed that unequal and inadequate education before university is the most crucial reason for academic skills problems within the university. In this sense the core issue which needs to be addressed is that of providing free, equal and compulsory school education for all South Africans.

⁷With a central tendency of 1.74 which indicates a slightly stronger than general agreement.

⁸Hereafter referred to as 'African students', although it is acknowledged that there are some African students whose first language is not an African language.

⁹With a central tendency of 2.6

¹⁰With a central tendency of 2.0

Given that it is the government which usually takes this sort of welfare responsibility in society, it follows that on a very basic level all members of staff feel that the broader education crisis is ultimately responsible for many of the academic skills problems which beset the university.

For example one staff member commented that:

"At the most basic level I would argue that it's too late by now (at university level) to really make a difference, and that the problem should have been dealt with at primary school level - that's where the real problem starts. Bad grounding and secondary education, in combination with a non-supportative learning environment at home. I think that these kinds of problems are going to become more and more apparent at universities as the ratio of black students to white students increases."

6.6.1.2 Inability of government to respond to educational deficiencies

All staff members were nevertheless aware that the government would not be able to rectify the situation immediately, and even if they did, it would take at least ten to twelve years for changes at school level to filter through to the university. Hartshorne (1992:334) takes forward this point by arguing that:

"...moves towards political negotiation have brought even greater instability to the process of education, in both black schooling and in white. In the next three to five years, while the centre of the stage is taken up by political moves, black schooling will deteriorate and

crumble even more rapidly."

Indeed, Sebidi (in Hartshorne, 1992:340) stresses that "...however instant political coups d'etat may be, they cannot bring about instant radical educational changes...there are no educational coups d'etat." Hartshorne (1992:340) concludes that:

"Even a radical change in the political environment is no guarantee that a new government will be able to restore the positive learning environment crucial to a democratic South Africa, except over a considerable period of time. We shall be paying the costs of apartheid well into the future."

Even if doubts concerning the speed of educational reform are set aside, there are likely problems. In the very unlikely situation that state initiatives, such as Model C schooling, prove to be successful within the urban areas, given the large dependency of South African children on wholly inadequate farm schools, the impoverishment of rural education means that problems at the tertiary level will remain.

6.6.2 The responsibility of the university

It has been accepted that the state should ideally take responsibility for educational problems by improving the school system. Yet there is also a counter awareness that it is unlikely to be able to do this in the immediate future. As a result, members of staff did feel that the university ought to take responsibility for the problem of educational disadvantages caused by inadequate schooling.

6.6.2.1 The university's involvement in educational research

The university could do this in two ways: Firstly, as one lecturer suggested: "...in the long-term all universities in South Africa should start looking very seriously at the problem of schooling, and to start making an input into that process, for example through NECC." This fits into the broad framework of a 'socially responsible university' which, according to Khotseng (1992:92):

"...should have as its basic goal the organisation of knowledge for action. To relate its research to community problems, the university should strive to make its research accessible to its external clients and be involved in a variety of projects. Such across-the-board participation of faculty and professional staff is important in bridging the gap between what goes on inside the university and community."

By using its resources in this way, the university could ensure that effective and efficient schooling methods are introduced. An example of this is the way in which the Institute for the Study of English in Africa (ISEA) together with the Molteno Project have impacted widely on primary school teaching, both in terms of material and staff development (see Walters, 1988c). This sort of effort is an indication of the sort of involvement which the university needs to be making in terms of South Africa's educational inequalities.

6.6.2.2 The university's involvement in academic development

The second way in which the university can take responsibility

for educational deficiencies at the school-level is the one which is of most concern in this thesis. Once again, all staff agreed that the university should take responsibility for academic skills difficulties which its students are experiencing. Although these are not the fault of the university, it was felt that the university nevertheless needed to address the effects of the inadequacies of the broader South African educational scenario.

Head of Department, Coetzee, captured the tension surrounding this issue when he argued that:

"In order for the university to be relevant to the community, it has to take responsibility for rectifying some of the problems of educational weaknesses before university. However, I think that we should be careful not to think of the university as an institution that is supposed to cure the problems that primary and secondary education caused, because students have to grow into an academic environment right through their primary and secondary schooling in order to be prepared for university. So the university is in the situation where it firstly has to get the students to the point where they can be effective participants. And this creates various problems because the university is also supposed to strive towards excellence. We have students who can benefit from a higher level of teaching, yet we have to cater for students who really are not able to operate effectively within the environment of the university."

This is a problem with which other Sociology Departments are

also having to grapple. For example, Laura Dison and Terry-Ann Selikow (1992) noted that the Department of Sociology at the University of Witwatersrand have expressed a keen interest in introducing combined academic support/course content tutorials into their departmental tutorial system but that the Department is concerned that academic excellence might suffer, especially given that there are many students who would resent a system which in any way results in tedious and boring tutorials.

The struggle between academic excellence and academic support is central to any attempts at integration, but cannot be used as a reason for not attempting a process of integration. This is because academic excellence and academic support are not mutually exclusive, and that ways of exploring a method of teaching which does not seriously compromise either support or excellence needs to be pursued.¹¹ Indeed, academic development involves excellence in teaching, rather than a drop in teaching standards. This point is accentuated by Khotseng (1992:90) who maintains that South Africa needs to develop a network of universities: "...that is widely and equitably accessible, that offers students diverse and flexible courses, *that maintains standards of competence over a wide range of teaching, research and public service*¹²."

What is clear though, is that while a tension exists between the need for both academic support and academic excellence,

¹¹This is something which will be considered more fully in Chapter Seven.

¹²My emphasis.

there is nonetheless a general agreement amongst staff that unless the university does take responsibility for academic skills deficiencies through academic support and development, not only will academic excellence become unattainable for most, but academic failure will undoubtedly ensue. As Coetzee succinctly noted:

"If you evaluate a department on the basis of maintaining academic standards, while also maintaining a high success rate at the end of the year, then our existence is at stake when our success rate drops below a particular level. I think that we will be forced to think in terms of integrated academic support in the near future. There is no way in which we can escape the pressures of the institution in which we find ourselves."

Students were in agreement with the staff in terms of the university needing to take responsibility for academic skills difficulties caused by inadequate schooling. They were asked to respond to two statements regarding the university and its response to inadequate schooling. The first of these statements was as follows: "The university must maintain a high standard, and therefore is under no obligation to deal with problems which were caused by the school system".

Their average response to this statement was indicative of a disagreement with the statement¹³, although not a strong disagreement. Students in general do therefore feel that the university is under some obligation to deal with problems

¹³With a central tendency of 3.9.

caused by the inadequacies in the type of schooling which students received. Once again closer examination of the question reveals important insights. English-speaking students agreed more with the sentiments of the statement¹⁴ than did African students¹⁵. African students evidently feel that the university needs to take responsibility for the fact that they are at a disadvantage when compared to students with a more advantaged educational background.

In the second of these statements regarding the university's response to inadequate school education, students responded to the statement: "By not accounting for the weaknesses in South African schooling, the university is in effect blaming certain students for problems which are not of their own making".

The average answer here represents a very weak agreement with the statement¹⁶. This suggests that while students do feel that their school education was not adequate and that to a certain extent the university should deal with these problems, by not doing the university does not necessarily blame students for their weaknesses. Students could feel that the university is aware that they experience academic problems which are not of their own making, but that the university nevertheless does not feel that it is its responsibility to deal with these problems.

Once again there is a stronger sense of agreement amongst

¹⁴With a central tendency of 3.8.

¹⁵With a central tendency of 4.3.

¹⁶With a central tendency of 2.5.

African students¹⁷ than amongst English speakers¹⁸ who were more ambivalent. Feeling blamed for weaknesses is certainly a normal response for a group of students who are in the minority on a campus such as Rhodes University. The research conducted amongst black students on Rhodes University by Bekker and Mqingwana (1983)¹⁹ as well as subsequent research conducted on similar lines by Donna Mackenzie and Lerato Makhele (1992) definitely show that black students feel especially ostracised and discriminated against on a predominantly English and white campus.

If it accepted therefore that staff and students similarly feel that the university in general needs to take responsibility for academic deficiencies (at the very least in the short term) the question which follows is which sectors of the university need to assume this responsibility?

6.6.2.3 Which sectors of Rhodes University need to take responsibility?

There was agreement amongst staff members that everybody needs to take responsibility. In this sense four sectors were pinpointed, namely: the administration, ASP, individual departments and the students. One lecturer argued that:

"...everybody has to take responsibility. And I think that there's a very good reason for that. ASP is obviously the major focus, but I don't believe it can achieve anything unless it is integrated with every other

¹⁷With a central tendency of 2.0.

¹⁸With a central tendency of 2.6.

¹⁹See Chapter Three

aspect of the University. Otherwise you get conflicting messages between the ASP saying one thing and the Department saying another. But Administration has to play a much more important role in the sense that they should be constantly - in conjunction with departments and ASP - commissioning research and liaising with other universities. There is obviously a lot of research which ASP itself can never do because of lack of money and staff, which should be the responsibility of the University."

All lecturers responded along similar lines, maintaining that the University definitely needs to take certain initiatives if student academic difficulties are to be effectively dealt with, while the ASP should act as the vehicle through which academic development programmes are practised. This would suggest close co-operation (certainly on the level of research and staff training) between ASP and the University Administration. There was also a general consensus amongst staff that there should be close liaison between ASP and departments.

By placing responsibility on ASP, the University Administration and the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, is not to exonerate students entirely from responsibility for difficulties with academic skills. Students tended to feel that academic skills difficulties were not completely their responsibility. An overwhelming 80.9 percent of the 1990 Sociology 1 class felt that the Department ought to take responsibility for academic skills difficulties,

whereas only 15.8 percent felt that it should not. A mere 3.3 percent were unsure or did not respond. This supports the general opinion of staff members. One of whom commented that: "Academic skills problems are the Department's responsibility. I'm afraid the buck stops here." Given the peculiar nature of problems in sociology there is indeed a crucial need for the Department to lead the way in terms of providing effective academic skills support for its students. As has been noted, this needs to be done in conjunction with ASP and the University Administration, while students must participate in their own education as far as possible, especially when Department initiatives depend on such participation for their success.

6.7 Is integration a workable solution?

If the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology is indeed to take responsibility for academic skills difficulties, it has thus far been argued that the most effective way of doing so would be through a process of integration of academic skills into content teaching within the Department. Broadly speaking this would take on the form described by one lecturer as a system in which "...at first year level there should be the integration of academic skills and content of courses. This is because there is no point in going to lectures on content and then dealing with skills separately in ASP tutorials."

Students agree with this viewpoint, indicating a fair amount of disagreement²⁰ with the statement that: "Academic skills

²⁰With a central tendency of 3.84.

should only be taught in ASP, separately to departmental courses." This student opinion clearly follows from their earlier view that students shouldn't have to deal with academic skills difficulties in their own time, and along with the opinion of staff members, suggests that there certainly is a strong basis for believing that some form of integration will be acceptable to both staff and students.

6.7.1 Departmental tutorials as a vehicle for integration

In Chapter Five the form of integration which is envisaged was described as one which affects both the tutorial system and lectures (cf.5.3.1). Lecturers indicated a similar structure for an integrated department. One lecturer felt that integration "...could be done through tutorials especially, by taking students through specific stages of skills, slowly building people up to more and more complex types of comprehension. Those tutorials obviously have to be very closely related to what's going on in lectures." Jan Coetzee took this point further, suggesting that there is a need "...to introduce staff involvement in tutorials so that there are compulsory tutorials for all students where members of the teaching staff conduct tutorials. Often the Department expects too much of tutors to get students to the point where we want them. I think that we need real experts introducing students to sociology."

This is an important proposal because it takes forward the idea of an integrated tutorial system to its ultimate conclusion, of offering to students a tutorial environment in which they are able to explore both academic skills and

content along with fellow students and lecturers, who will have considered the most effective way of teaching the content and skills in an integrated manner. Tutorials thus become a more acceptable and central part of the Sociology 1 course. Even integrated tutorials, if conducted by student tutors, lose a considerable amount of credibility in the sight of students, who tend to place more importance on what lecturers have to say (given that they are the ones who set and mark their examination questions).

Students certainly expressed a need for an integrated tutorial system. They were asked to respond to a statement which suggested that: "Individual departments should build the teaching of relevant academic skills into their first year course partly through lectures but particularly through the tutorial system, in a way which is not separate to course content." The general response to this statement was favourable, with students expressing a fairly strong agreement²¹. This was especially the case for those in their first year of study who agreed with the statement more than did those Sociology I students in their second and third year of studies²². This is important because the integration strategy is aimed especially at those students coming into the University for the first time. But regardless of differences in the extent of agreement, all groups still indicated agreement with an integrated system.

²¹With a central tendency of 1.7.

²²The central tendency of those students in their first year of study was 1.7, while for those in their second year of study it was 1.8, and for those in their third year of study it was 2.0.

6.7.2 The role of lectures in integration

Integration between skills and content, in addition to being located in tutorials, also needs to take place in lectures themselves. One lecturer said that this is "...very important in first year, because I think we assume too much. In most courses there is too much focus on content and not enough on skills which people can use to access relevant content in the first place." This relates back to an earlier argument (cf. 5.3.2.3.and 5.3.2.4) whereby it was contended that unless lecturers instruct students in a critical manner students will find it exceedingly difficult to work out what it is they are supposed to do with the material presented to them in lectures, other than memorise it in rote-learned fashion.

Jan Coetzee agreed that it is important to use lectures in a manner which promotes the integration of skills and content. He suggested that:

"In every lecture - especially at first year - we should focus more on the framework. In particular we should focus on the exact structure of what we regard as the important key concepts. This can be done on overheads or even in hand-out material. We can't just do it verbally and expect all students to form in their minds the structure or framework."

Staff were in agreement that lectures should be innovative and well-structured, but that while the style of lecturing is important, integration should not involve direct attempts at teaching skills in lectures. It was rightly pointed out by one lecturer that such an approach had been attempted in the past,

but had proven to be unsuccessful. This is because separate lectures on particular academic skills had nevertheless not been integrated. Just because one combines two elements - academic skills teaching and lectures - one does not achieve an integrated lecture. At best the result can be described as separate academic skills teaching on a large scale.

Integration as a process necessarily impacts on the approach towards and form of lecturing, so that content is never over-emphasised at the expense of process²³.

If integration is accepted along the lines alluded to so far, the question which needs to be addressed is whether staff and students think that it is a workable solution to academic skills difficulties?

6.7.3 Student response to integration

Given that students were not familiar with the concept of integration, they were not asked to respond directly to the issue of its feasibility. Instead statements to which they had to respond were concerned with aspects of the integration strategy. Some of these have already been discussed in this chapter (cf. 6.7 and 6.7.1). Apart from those which have already received coverage, a further general statement concerning integration was included in the questionnaire.

Students were asked what they felt about the statement:

"Course content and academic skills should be combined in a relevant way as far as possible". Here student reaction was

²³The role of lecturers in the integration process will be looked at in more detail in a subsequent section of this chapter (cf. 6.8).

again favourable, with students returning a positive agreement²⁴. This compares closely with the opinions concerning integrated tutorials and, to a lesser extent, lectures (cf. 6.7 and 6.7.1). From this it would seem that students in general would prefer a system which is integrated to one which is not.

6.7.4 Staff response to integration

Lecturers in the Department all felt that the integration strategy had its merits, although much depended on the way in which this implementation took place. To an extent some felt that integration was an easy way out for Administration because it might absolve the University Administration from exploring and perhaps providing a feeder college, bridging year or bridging course. One lecturer felt that a bridging English course was the best way forward.

Another lecturer argued that integration is definitely the solution to academic skills problems but pointed to some of the difficulties which the integration process could entail by noting that:

"...it's problematic in that some departments are going to see it as an infringement, and some will say that they have already got a hell of a teaching load and that students are battling to finish their courses without something extra like this. So you are going to have to deal with those sorts of problems. In this sense I don't see it becoming a university-wide solution in which all departments will liaise with ASP and become integrated.

²⁴With a central tendency of 1.8.

But it will work in those departments which are willing."

The Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology is one such department, as it has keenly attempted to put various aspects of integration into practice over the last three years, although progress has been slow. This has not been for lack of faith in the strategy, but rather because of the need for stronger direction and research into how best to go about it. Jan Coetzee certainly has no doubts as to the importance of integration. As he argues: "I don't see how we can deal with academic skills difficulties in any other way. Content and skills can rarely be separated."

The Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology has committed itself to a policy of integration in its teaching, and this approach has met with general approval amongst staff members within the Department. But agreeing to it in principle is different to all staff members together reaching an agreement on what lecturers need to do within an integrated department, and this general agreement is similarly different to actually accepting the conditions of integration in practice. For this reason these two issues will be considered in further detail in the following two sections.

6.8 The role of lecturers in academic development.

6.8.1 The structure of courses

Head of Department, Jan Coetzee, felt that the main ways in which lecturers can play a more important role is through structuring their courses more carefully, bearing in mind the

needs of students. This includes structuring lectures and course hand-outs in a manner which acts as a clear and useful guide to students. The Sociology I lecturers need to ensure that all aspects of the course, in terms of content and skills are clearly explained to students. In addition, lecturers can play a more direct role through the tutorial programme. Both in terms of planning and structuring tutorials, as well as providing lecturer contact for students (cf. 6.7.1).

Brown (1978:62) emphasises the importance of structuring lectures in saying that:

"A lecture is a set of key points with associated examples, illustrations, elaborations and qualifications. The sets of keys may be ordered in several ways, and each order represents a different lecture method. Just as the order of keys in music can provide variations upon a theme, so the order of keys of a lecture can offer varying emphases on information, understanding and interest. And just as we can identify various structural forms in music, so we can identify structures of lectures."

Brown argues that the type of structure which is chosen for conveying certain information to students can determine to a large extent the effectiveness of that lecture. The suggestion therefore, that lectures need to be structured, implies that lecturers need to plan their lectures carefully and creatively, always searching for the most effective and appropriate way in which to teach material in an integrated manner.

6.8.2 Staff training

Lecturers in the Department were in general agreement with the idea of providing more structure to lectures. Yet none of them stipulated how exactly they went about ensuring that their lectures were indeed structured. In any case, a structured lecture need not be easy to follow or even integrated with academic skills teaching. There evidently is a need for staff to hold staff training workshops and discussions on lecture strategies. For example, this would include issues such as the balance between content and process, the level at which lectures should be pitched, how to teach in a way which promotes critical reasoning, how to teach in a manner which incorporates the class through feedback in lectures, and so on. While lecturers spoke of structure in a broad sense, there was often very little indication that they had thought about the matter in great detail, certainly not to the extent that they were able to talk in anything but broad terms.

A point of agreement between some lecturers was that lecturers are quite limited in terms of the standard of student, the size of the class, and their level of training. The last of these points can obviously be dealt with through staff training, which is what almost all the lecturers suggested should take place, while the first two need more careful consideration. Obviously lecturer involvement in tutorials will enable the size barrier of the first year class to be managed more effectively, while the standard of student issue can be gauged through reading tutorial, essay and exam answers, and using these as a basis for evaluating the level at which students are operating.

On the issue of staff training, one lecturer pointed to the central importance of such training in saying that:

"I don't know if one will succeed in improving lecturer's ability to lecture unless they themselves want to improve themselves. Unless you make it obligatory for all lecturers. I think it would be extremely beneficial to both experienced and inexperienced lecturers if a yearly course on lecturing were introduced for all lecturers throughout their careers. Rather than having an approach of pinpointing bad lecturers and wanting to help them, we should adopt an approach whereby it is felt that all lecturers are in need of a course which can help them to improve their abilities."

The idea of intensive staff training combined with staff workshops and discussions are a central part of the integration process. Unless this happens, it will be almost futile for ASP to attempt skills teaching. Unless students are attending lectures which take their difficulties into careful consideration, ASP's task will be one of bailing water out of a sinking boat, rather than fixing holes on a long-term basis!

6.9 Reactions to changes which integration might bring about.

6.9.1 Student reactions to possible changes

In order to get a clear idea as to the extent to which students would indeed prefer an integrated system two questions were asked. The first was intended to provide an indication as to the extent to which students felt that they would personally benefit from an integrated departmental

system, while the second question sought an idea as to the degree to which students would actually object to an integrated system.

Firstly students responded to the statement: "I think that I would personally benefit from a system which teaches academic skills along with course content". Here the average response was indicative of a fairly strong agreement with the statement²⁵. African students²⁶ expressed stronger agreement than did English-speaking students²⁷. In both instances it is clear that students feel that it would be in their interests, and they would more effectively handle the course work, were the Department to teach sociology in an integrated manner.

These findings are substantiated by the fact that students responded to the second question negatively. There was a fairly strong degree of disagreement²⁸ with the statement: "I would object to a system which teaches academic skills along with course content." African students expressed stronger disagreement²⁹ than did English-speaking students³⁰. But once again the responses certainly favour the general conditions of an integrated system.

²⁵With a central tendency of 1.9.

²⁶With a central tendency of 1.7.

²⁷With a central tendency of 1.9.

²⁸With a central tendency of 4.2.

²⁹With a central tendency of 4.4.

³⁰With a central tendency of 4.2.

6.9.2 Staff reactions to possible changes

In general, students have expressed an acceptance of, and in fact need for, an integrated Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. And to a large extent, so have the staff. But the telling question which remains is whether or not staff will submit to possible changes which might result from an integrated system being implemented in the Department.

In response to this issue, Jan Coetzee asserted that how individual lecturers respond:

"...is not simply something that they can decide on in terms of what they prefer or what would be a nice way to earn a living! It is a matter which we are forced to address not only in terms of the expectations within the university but also in terms of broader society. In other words I think that there are so many implications, and pressure from different angles, that no staff member can really argue that these necessary changes are against the principle of academic freedom and hide behind the ivory tower concept of the university."

Some lecturers agree totally with these sentiments, providing responses such as: "I'm totally for it myself. It can only improve one's teaching." and: "I think most people are open to recommendations. Unfortunately some people would be opposed to changes, but I would think that it's fine." All in all individual lecturers gave the impression that they were enthusiastic as far as changing their style and method of lecturing, and that they were interested in staff training. But they were confused as to how to go about implementing the

sorts of changes which the integration approach might entail. This obviously underlines the need for discussion between relevant parties, so as to achieve a framework in which to build an integrated department which impacts on all aspects of departmental teaching. As Jan Coetzee contended:

"If we really want to move forward in terms of integrated policy then I would have no problem in using the practical principle of exchanging ideas around a table to see to what extent we can move towards a workable solution, and also to bring in experts from either the ASP or other sectors of the University to try to facilitate this whole process. So I think that there will definitely be a need for a departmental strategy to decide on options for integration. If we want to be part of a University that is relevant for the community and that is relevant for a 'new South Africa', we have to be drawn into the activity of making the Sociology Department relevant. Relevance is not something that is given, or that is just there, it is the result of co-operation between many parties."

6.10 Conclusion

With this positive approach toward investigating ways in which to go about implementing integration, it is evident that there is a great deal of scope for the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology to become more effective in dealing with the sort of academic skills difficulties which have traditionally been the domain of centrally-based ASP. Both students and staff have expressed a need and desire for this to take place. The question which now remains to be dealt with

is whether the move towards integration can take place in a progressive manner whereby the real interests of students are met, and whereby integration is not co-opted for conservative purposes, for example, so as to avoid structural change within the university (cf. 4.6.2) or to provide extra personnel within departments, and so on. This issue, of the degree to which integration can be successfully used by ASP to ensure appropriate student-oriented institutional change within the University, will be considered in the Chapter Seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN: A CRITICAL APPROACH TO ASP AS AN AGENT OF PROGRESSIVE CHANGE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY.

7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapters it has been established that ever since 1981 when the Academic Support/Skills Programme first began to operate on Rhodes University campus, it has steadily progressed in its ability to deal with the complex and intricate problems which student academic skills difficulties pose. These difficulties stem predominantly from inadequate school education which affects all students entering the university. So much so that (as has been revealed) first-year sociology students have expressed the need for an integrated academic skills programme in their first-year course, in order that they be able to become better equipped to deal with academic skills difficulties, which are at a very different level to those which they acquired during school (see Chapter Six).

The most significant and essential process which has evolved from ASP's experience over its twelve years of operation on the Rhodes University campus has indeed been one which explores ways of integrating the task of academic development with departmental teaching. ASP has increasingly come to the realisation that a strategy of integration is the most appropriate (if not only) approach to effective academic development at Rhodes University. ASP's commitment to the integration approach is coupled with a clear awareness amongst lecturers in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology at Rhodes University that students are indeed in need of comprehensive academic skills support, and in

addition, the staff expressed a general acceptance of the integration strategy, given that the Department needs to remain relevant to the needs of a community which is subject to varying levels of inadequate pre-tertiary education.

On the surface these revelations would seem to suggest that all bodes well for future first year students entering the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. Certainly, the conclusion reached at the end of the preceding chapter was that the general conditions were conducive for integration to be implemented within the said Department. Yet there is no guarantee that the intentions and wishes of the various parties concerned will actually result in a form of integration which will secure the sort of critical academic development needed to ensure excellence in both instruction and student performance.

There is no doubt that the changes towards integration which have been able to be introduced recently as a result of the Independent Development Trust's financial backing could have very little impact on the present quagmire of student academic difficulties which pervade Rhodes University, unless certain safeguards are taken to guarantee sufficient and relevant change in the area of academic development.

This chapter explores the contentious nature of integration in the light of critical Marxist theory. It will be shown that the hazards to which structuralist Marxists deterministically allude are indeed a potential danger to ASP, but that these can be avoided. Moreover, given the thorough critique of the

structuralist Marxist position in the first chapter, it will be argued that the critical Marxist approach (with particular reference to the work of Jurgen Habermas) wholly accommodates the delicate nature of the integration process, through exploring the distinct way in which the success or failure of this process rests heavily on the intricacies of local circumstances.

7.2 Structuralist explanations of ASP

As was outlined in the first chapter, much established radical theory has tended to have a strong structural functionalist bias. One of the most influential radical thinkers has been Louis Althusser who has argued that education forms a part of the broader capitalist superstructure ensuring suitable supplies of labour and future capitalists. Althusser's influence on South African educational theorists has been quite extensive, although direct acknowledgement to this particular genre of thought has not always been included in the works of those who are most influenced by it.

The Althusserian tradition focuses predominantly on the manner in which ASPs fulfil the role of merely 'supporting' students who are not coping with the academic demands placed upon them in a band-aid manner, and thus can be seen as "...a strategy, or set of strategies, for avoiding organisational change" (Moulder, 1988). ASPs therefore, as part of the educational State Ideological Apparatus, obscure the inequalities and weaknesses of primary and secondary education in South Africa, as well as the inappropriateness and inefficiency of the present university structure for dealing with students'

difficulties. This is particularly problematic given that Herbert Vilakazi and Botlhale Tema (1985:3) argue that the problem of student difficulties lies solely with the "...social structure, the power structure, and collective personality of the university itself."

In agreement with this structuralist analysis, Penny Enslin (1984:139) contends that:

"Louis Althusser's 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' offers penetrating insights which illuminate education in South Africa. Althusser's analysis, while not theoretically unproblematic, *clarifies the dominant position of the educational ideological apparatus, including the most obvious examples of schools and universities, in the reproduction of the ruling ideology, and thus of the relations of production in capitalist social formations*¹."

While Enslin, like Althusser, does provide scope for "the resistance of the exploited classes" (Althusser, cited in Enslin, 1984:139) within the site of formal education, she nevertheless analyses education in a predominantly structuralist framework, whereby it is part of the dominant ideological structure of society. Her unquestioning treatment of education (tertiary education in particular) as part of a rational and coherent Ideological State Apparatus fails to question such "...positivistic tendencies between knowledge

¹My emphasis.

and interest"² (Pusey 1987:119) and does not allow for the myriad of "...processes of agreement, discussion and negotiation that go on all the time in ordinary social interaction" (Pusey, 1987:106).

7.3 Critical Marxist critique of structuralist explanations of ASP

The ideological role of education cannot be reduced to being the mono-causal effect of the economic base which such an analysis suggests (cf. 2.3.1.3). Pusey (1980:47) notes that during a process of legitimation crises in state education systems:

"Unresolved economic and structural problems of the wider society are displaced into the education system. It is then simultaneously charged with the responsibility for the redress of inequality and the pursuit of excellence; work-training and self-actualization; respect for public values and the cultivation of self-expression and initiative and so on."

In this way various interest groups make demands on the ideological role of the education system "...by asserting their own different or conflicting demands" (Pusey, 1980:47) such that it is clear that there is an ongoing "...tug of war between the lifeworld and the system" (Pusey, 1987:107).

²As Carter noted in a discussion with the researcher in December 1992: "The state never agreed to fund ASPs nor are they part of the subsidy formula. One can argue that there is no tertiary education system in South Africa, at least no coherent one".

7.3.1 Legitimation crisis

Michael Pusey (1980:47) argues that these conflicting demands result in a legitimation crisis which leads to a "...dissolution of the demarcation between organisation and community. Where now is the boundary between the two, and who can say where the responsibilities of the school begin and end?" In terms of ASP this would suggest that the situation is by no means simplistic. ASP needs to be regarded as complex and flexible. After all, it is particularly significant that ASPs in general developed out of a *dysfunctioning* of the system. Even in Althusserian terms the fact that ASPs were brought into being demonstrates that the education system as it stood was no longer able to meet the needs of capitalist society. In the mid-1980's it certainly was not the case, as Enslin (1984: 140,141) maintained: "The Bantu Education apparatus functions to reproduce the relations of production necessary for the continued exploitation of blacks in South Africa." It is similarly crudely deterministic to assume that ASP will automatically function in a manner totally concomitant with the needs of capital, bearing in mind that the broader educational system did not.

7.3.2 Relative autonomy of ASP

The complexity of the situation is borne out by the fact that all the ASPs at the liberal universities experience a degree of relative autonomy in the sense that they have the freedom to formulate their own policy and direction³. This is definitely the case on the Rhodes University campus, where ASP

³Questionnaires completed by ASP representatives countrywide confirmed this point.

has a high level of autonomy to operate as it sees best, although as Director of ASP, George Carter noted:⁴

"...departments can be restrictive, depending on the Head of Department." It therefore follows that this autonomy is restricted by the constraints of the university setting in which ASP operates. Given this space in which ASP operates, it has indeed proved that it possesses the capacity to be moulded by local circumstances to such an extent that it cannot be accommodated in Althusser's overly structuralist and inherently functionalist analysis of the site of formal education within capitalist society. In contrast, the focus needs to be "...on revealing the way in which definitions of classroom situations, definitions of 'worthwhile' knowledge, and definitions of people emerge in human interaction" (McKay and Romm, 1992:87).

7.3.3 Rationality crisis

In this sense it would be too simplistic to disregard the importance of ASP by viewing it as simply one part of the state apparatus. In fact the existence of ASP clearly demonstrates that "...structures of control and domination do not always work in the manner intended" (Drewett and Wood 1991:9), resulting in what Habermas refers to as a "rationality crisis" (Merquior 1986:171) "...which results from a gap between the rationality of decision-makers and the outcomes of their activities" (Pusey, 1980:46). What this means is that "...the *unintended* consequences of planned or purposive bureaucratic action have become so serious that they outweigh the visible accomplishments, and in this way give the

⁴In a questionnaire response completed in June 1991.

lie to the 'rationality' which is advanced in justification of the government's policies" (Pusey 1980: 46). This can be seen to be the case with ASPs in the sense that within the context of the systematic dysfunction of South African formal education, their very existence bears witness to the beginnings of a rationality crisis. If ASPs are able to mobilise opposition to conservative tendencies within universities and to the inadequacies of education more generally, through promoting people's awareness concerning formal state education, ASPs' progressive action would indeed be an unforeseen circumstance of the government's inadequate and incoherent education policies.

And herein lies Rhodes University ASP's capacity to 'do otherwise' and to influence a 'pre-existing course of events' (Giddens 1982:30). Its relative autonomy within a formal educational environment which is conducive to academic developmental innovations amongst staff on the one hand, and the needs of students for a more effective system of academic instruction on the other (as discussed in the previous chapter), provides the sort of conditions which would foster a coherent and planned strategy for change within the university (cf.3.3.4). By turning the present national education crisis into a crisis of rationality, ASP would be able to reclaim areas of the lifeworld (Pusey 1987:106,107) of the university "...that might, eventually, lead to more rational structures (to authority without fear of exploitation and thus to changed organizational principles that would be based on the interests of all and so deserve the genuine legitimacy of consensual agreements)" (Pusey 1987:107).

7.4 The reclamation of areas of the lifeworld

Yet the extent to which ASP is able to reclaim areas of the lifeworld of the university is tentative, given the haziness of the ethereal boundaries of ASP operations. This is especially pertinent when considering the goals, aims and objectives of ASP. While ASP itself may have a formal statement of intent, individual interpretations of that intention can differ substantially, with the result that ASP operates in different ways according to those varying individual interpretations. For example, ASP staff have significantly different ideas as to the exact nature of the problem with which they are dealing, and the disagreement concerning the solutions to these problems is even stronger. Solutions to academic skills difficulties are often more geared towards the particular preferences of individual ASP staff members or to the dynamics of departments, than to the needs of students, based on thorough research and investigation into their difficulties (cf. 5.3.2.4).

It is clear that Bantu Education is inferior. Indeed, George Carter notes that the pilot bridging science programme conducted by the Rhodes University ASP "...reveals that the gap for D.E.T. students is wider than we thought."⁵ However as Michael Drewett and Geoffrey Wood (1991:10) argue: "More problematic is the question as to in what areas its greatest shortcomings lie, and whether these problems can be redressed by essentially reformist action at a localised level. A second question stemming from this is what the exact focus of ASPs should be - to help people pass exams, provide the broader

⁵In an interview in July 1991.

educational experience that was denied them, or to take on a far broader role?"

Yet the focus of ASP involves a return to the prior question, concerning the nature of the academic skills problem, not only with the seriousness of the problem confronting D.E.T matriculants but with most students entering the university. As was shown in Chapter Six, lecturers have a fair idea as to the general problems confronting students. So too do ASP staff. But these ideas are ones which have been gained through a nebulous process of experience with students. As was argued in that same chapter, these ideas are very often lacking in a substantial understanding of the nature of the problem at hand. For example, is it really a language problem? And can one best teach academic skills in tutorials or in lectures, or on an individual basis? Are there general academic skills which are applicable to all disciplines? If so, are they transferable from one discipline to another?

Marius Vermaak (1992:3) emphasises the importance of exploring these initial premises in his focus on the transferability of thinking skills, through considering further crucial issues which require attention. These include: "What are thinking skills?; Are they innate or can they be taught?; Can we give a taxonomy of them?; What are general as distinct from discipline-specific thinking skills?; How are they transferred?; Can transference be stimulated or taught?; What are the (best) ways of doing this?; How can not only thinking skills but the disposition to use them be encouraged?; What are the social, cultural and institutional constraints?; What

difference, if any, can an approach focused on general thinking skills make to education in this country?"⁶

Unless questions on this deeper level of enquiry are researched and answers to them formulated, ASP's endeavours in individual departments will remain on a cosmetic tier, not attune with the latest developments in academic skills research, and definitely not on a level in which ASP is able to fundamentally change the way in which students presently experience their education. And this is because these issues are ones which fundamentally affect the sort of policies which ASP adopt, and which in turn affect the direction in which its aims and objectives take it. Above all, the decisiveness in policy which will result from such research will ensure that ASP's short and long-term goals do not work against each other.

7.5 Obscured by clouds: The need to supersede instrumental solutions

There is a distinct danger that this sort of incoherency might permeate ASP's future direction, so that reforms which take place will fail to rise above the level of one-dimensional "instrumental solutions" (cf.3.2.2), in which "...(t)he

⁶The issues raised here are merely examples and to explore them would be beyond the parameters of this thesis. This is not to undermine issues such as those regarding transferability. Indeed R. Jordan (1989) Zuber-Skerrit (1987), Gavin Gibbs (1977 and 1981) also stress the importance of these issues. For example, Gibbs (1977:117) questions whether one can teach study skills at all. He noted that "...conventional attempts to teach students how to study - in the sense of *telling* them how to study - have tended to cause a multitude of problems for students". The point raised here is that these issues need to be researched and explored if staff are to get to understand the nature of academic development in a comprehensive manner.

practical has come to mean the 'expedient' or the technically possible..." (Howard 1991:75-81). This danger stems from the way in which ASP's future (and indeed present) direction is seemingly obscured by the clouds of uncertainty and incoherency which themselves are the result of a lack of research and debate aimed towards a well-informed policy in which all ASP staff can have faith, and to which they all need to adhere.

Given the way in which ASP habitually operates in this desultory and reactive manner, its activities are often shrouded in a kind of 'fog', so that it becomes difficult to gauge ASP's exact long-term direction. This is because "...the knowledge of preceding and concurrent events (concerning ASP)⁷ is based on not only certain information, but on a number of conjectures and suppositions" (Clausewitz 1968:224).

ASP ventures can subsequently be seen to be dynamic in nature, so that:

"At a particular moment, at a particular location, the activities of ASP may be focused in a certain direction. In the broader order of things (in terms of social structures) ASP at a particular moment may fulfil a specific function. In a moment, as the relationship between student and teacher changes and/or is constantly re-established the functions of the ASP will change, intentionally or not. What may have been the original objective of ASP will become obscured either due to uncertainty of the exact material conditions, or as a result of shifting needs and (hopefully) constant

⁷My parenthesis.

readjustment to meet those needs" (Drewett and Wood 1991:10).

It needs to be the task of central ASP that individual ASP specialist lecturers and the departments in which they operate work within a well-defined framework so that the particular focus of their activities corresponds with certain long-term objectives, while nevertheless taking cognisance of local and immediate dynamics.

7.6 The quest for democracy and emancipation: communicative action

For Jurgen Habermas (1970:92) these long-term goals depend on "...the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of intentions and (are) secured by the general recognition of obligations." This process is an inherent part of what Habermas (in Howard 1991:83) refers to as the 'emancipatory interest' which "...can be realised only in a social context in which self-understanding is attained through dialogue with others who are striving for the same kind of understanding." Such 'communicative interaction' is necessary if "(n)ew social and organizational structures, and indeed the very work of emancipation" (Pusey 1987:120) are to develop. But these attempts to generate such social and organisational emancipatory structures must, necessarily, be cooperative achievements. In other words:

"Emancipation can only be achieved through democracy and a regeneration of the public sphere (where) ... democracy means all that is done 'in' and 'through' communicative interaction, through action that is genuinely oriented to

reaching an understanding.... In short, we should think of democracy as a process of shared learning" (Pusey 1987:120).

Thus approaches to academic development will be thwarted if all the actors involved do not cooperate in a democratic way. In other words, ASP needs to ensure that all those who are affected by academic development changes are included in the process, and that all have equal weight in determining the outcome. They also need to be wary of actors who, for whatever reason, work with a hidden agenda, for example, a department which agrees to the idea of integration, but only in order to be given an extra staff member who can release other staff members of their teaching burden.

Such an approach to academic development is not unproblematic. Some participants in the communicative process might feel strongly that certain outcomes should definitely be guaranteed. In other words, they would like to place on the agenda specific non-negotiable outcomes. For example, departments might want to specify that lectures not be affected at all by integration, or that the bulk of academic support be conducted outside of department time, separately in the students' own time. At the same time, however, academic development staff might want to be given assurance that staff training will become compulsory.

While it is expected that different parties to communicative interaction will have different ideas concerning the type of academic development that they would like to see, this becomes

a problem if any one, at any time, has more power to determine specific outcomes. As Pusey (1987:121) notes:

"...communicative action presupposes the very kind of equality and mutuality among the interacting participants that it is supposed to achieve." Yet such equality and mutuality does not exist in reality: ASP cannot bring about integration in a department without that department's permission. Likewise every subsequent development related to integration within a department requires the department's approval. This places the department in a powerful position in terms of determining final outcomes. Students are in a less powerful position than any of the other parties involved. Despite these inequalities Habermas argues "...that the mutuality is already guaranteed, if only in an anticipatory way, in the very structures of communication, and, further, that in any case the individual always resists total absorption in the system" (Pusey 1987:121).

In this way Habermas overcomes the problems to which structuralists succumb, not allowing the structures to be omnipotent and overbearing. At the level of ASP this means that the potential does exist for actions which may not exclusively serve the interests of departments at such times as these interests do not coincide with students' academic development interests. Also, in broader terms, it means that ASP may serve interests other than those of the ruling elite. But this is only possible if communicative action relationship is indeed a shared one, enabling a flexible situation which reflects the actual (and ever-changing) needs of students, and not one which simply reflects elitist perceptions of student

problems.

In essence, any programme geared towards academic development should involve an inherent flexibility which allows for cooperative achievements to prevail, regardless of their outcome. As Habermas (in Pusey 1987:121) notes: "Every intervention in complex social structures has such unforeseeable consequences that processes of reform can only be defended as scrupulous processes of trial and error, under the careful control of those who have to bear their consequences."

This can be seen by the way in which, in many senses integration itself has not been proven. Within South African universities it remains untried although (as was argued in Chapter Five) it does make the most short and long-term sense in dealing with student academic difficulties. The IDT initiative (cf.5.2.6) and initial consent of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology does allow for integration as a generalised process to be implemented, but it will be up to the various participants to test various programmes and methods, without having a definite idea as to how successful these might be. Through a procedure of trial and error within a communicative action framework, various plans might succeed or fail, and eventually be replaced (where necessary) by improved ones. All the while the participants take risks, in that unfortunate side-effects such as staff tension, increased failure rates or a decrease in student numbers are always possible. But these risks take place within a controlled environment whereby interventions are both advisable and

possible. The level of risk can therefore be minimised by relevant intervention when the need arises.

7.6.1 Potential obstacles to communicative action

But while risk-minimalisation can be built into academic development policies, ASP might nevertheless still be faced with the problem outlined earlier (cf 7.6) whereby the department might not be prepared to take certain risks, especially (as was noted in the previous chapter) where academic excellence and academic freedom are perceived as being at stake. Habermas did argue that mutuality is guaranteed and that individuals can oppose total absorption into the system, but as Pusey (1987:121) argues: "...what should I do in an interaction with another individual who has power over me and who is hell-bent on relating to me only as a strategic actor in terms solely of his (or her)⁸ own purposes?" Or in more general terms: "What do we do about them when they relate to us only as instruments for their own purposes? (Pusey 1987:121). In terms of ASP, what does ASP (and perhaps students too) do if the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology relates to it only as an instrument of its own purposes?

7.6.2 The need for accountability to the community

The answer to this problem lies with the sorts of statements which were made by some lecturers in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, but particularly by Head of Department, Jan Coetzee, himself in the last chapter. These had to do with the *responsibility* the university and

⁸My parenthesis.

individual departments have towards the community which they represent. In other words, the focus needs to be on the type of consciousness of the various actors involved in the academic development process. Certainly some actors have more power than others in the communicative action process - or at best the different parties have varying degrees of power according to specific circumstances. But communicative action can nevertheless work (in other words mutuality can be assured) if all actors express a responsibility to the interests of the community. In this sense the idea of community interests stands above all those involved in the academic development process, and ensures that the concerned parties adhere to certain guiding interests. Any actor who acts outside of these interests breaks with the original commitment to act responsibly, and there is a subsequent breakdown in the communicative action.

Perhaps it could be argued that Habermas' theory is stronger when dealing with communicative action situations of common or at least similar interests than ones where conflict is acute, but it surely would seem to be the case here that each group's declared responsibility to carry out the overriding interests of a group other than their own (in other words, those of the community) obligates them to a democratic 'process of shared learning' (Pusey 1987:120).

In the integration process the Department is the area where change is designated to take place. Although this does not mean that it alone, of the various actors, will need to have safeguards designed to keep it in check. ASP too could want to

hold onto the autonomy in dealing with academic development which, until now, has been its almost exclusive domain. The process of integration needs to be approached with a willingness to change on all sides. All the while each group's strengths need to be used to the benefit of the whole process: the academic skills expertise of ASP staff, the lecturing and teaching experience and understanding of lecturers, and the understanding of their own difficulties by students, all need to be the focus of the integration process.

7.6.3 Communicative discourse

Thus will the communication process take place on two levels: firstly, on an immediate level of interaction within the already achieved consensus of meeting a perceived responsibility to the community (in other words communicative action), in which the communication is understood and assumes "truth, truthfulness, and rightness"⁹; and secondly, on a deeper level on which this background consensus can be thematised and questioned (in other words, communicative discourse). In all cases, and what for Habermas is absolutely crucial, "...the act of speech itself presupposes the possibility of understanding and consensus, and is aimed at producing such understanding and consensus" (Howard 1991: 85, 86).

Communicative discourse is different from other types of discourse because it requires all participants involved in

⁹'Truth' relates to "...statements made in relation to external reality", 'truthfulness' relates to "internal reality", while 'rightness' refers to "normative intersubjective reality" (see Howard 1991:85).

communicative discourse to agree to put aside all motives apart from those necessary for coming to a grounded agreement. In this sense, all those concerned with academic development enter into communicative interaction because of their assumed background consensus (the common background being an awareness of the need for academic development). This initial background is established through communicative discourse so that personal agendas are put aside in the face of the greater interests of the community to whom all parties are accountable.

Integration which takes place on the basis of communicative discourse is therefore qualitatively different to earlier (isolated) attempts at academic development. Not only is there a difference in strategy from academic development in isolation to integrated academic development, but there is also a shift from instrumental solution to critical solution. In this way "...all participants to the discourse genuinely seek to agree on the basis of the better argument, and not merely consequent to the accidental circumstances of their participation" (Howard 1991:88).

ASP's responses to student academic difficulties in the 1980's was typically 'consequent to accidental circumstances' which were ultimately a response to the need for 'something to be done about at risk students' (cf. 4.4). In contrast, the integration process offers the potential for solutions which are based on thorough and critical investigation. Solutions which evolve from this sort of critical approach are qualitatively superior to instrumental solutions which simply

placed responsibility on ASP to aid 'at risk' students. As has been argued, ASP has the ability to be more than a reaction to student difficulties (an instrument to support peripheral students while avoiding structural change). It can impact on the entire approach to teaching within the university (cf.4.6.3.and 4.6.4). Instead of viewing ASP merely as a haphazard means to an immediate end (quick-fix solutions for students), an approach based on communicative discourse views ASP as impacting on the way of life of the university through a process of critical theory which considers "what should be done" rather than "how to do things" (see Craib 1984:187).

7.7 What ought the critical integration process entail?

When considering the question of what ought to be done in terms of the integration process caution needs to be taken so as to avoid providing too many stipulations, lest too many strictures be placed on the process of determining the form of integration. What is clear though, is that basic guidelines and goals can be used as the basis from which to approach the intricate nature of the integration process.

The underlying reason for integration is the need to provide the sort of instruction in sociology which takes into account the deficiencies of all school education in South Africa. For this reason process and content both warrant special attention, neither of which should take place at the expense of the other (cf.5.3.2.2). Furthermore, education needs to be oriented towards the goal of fostering a critical consciousness in lecturers and students alike (cf. 5.3.2.3). These goals entail excellence in both instruction and academic

standards. They necessarily involve staff training in new areas of instruction which have not been required within the present and past systems of instruction, for example more goal-oriented tutorial development skills.

7.7.1 The ideal speech situation

Given these general areas towards which the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology needs to work, all those involved in the communicative discourse process need to focus specifically on the interests of the community when debating the exact form which the integration course will take. In this way an 'ideal speech situation' (cf. 3.3.4) can be assured whereby "...each participant will have the same opportunities to express opinions, to vent frustrations, to command, forbid, oppose, and so on" (Howard 1991:113). Howard (1991:113) argues that it is important that the group involved in the communicative discourse process "...must be structured so that the external power relations brought to the discussion from the university community do not interfere with the process of free speech. This may be the most difficult of all the requirements, and may be the point at which the entire project fails."

Not only must such free speech be guaranteed during the planning stage of integration, but it must also be assured in the subsequent implementation stage as well. Habermas (1990:116-118) underlines the importance of a shared "communicative framework" in which speech-acts must be oriented towards understanding rather than serving the speaker's selfish interests (Merquior, 1986:176). For

successful integration to take place, the integrated department needs to provide such "free space" - that is where students can interact with staff on a non-elitist basis in such a manner as to "reconquer" areas of the social world. Through providing "fairly resilient" channels of communication, the specialist (academic development) lecturer in the integrated department can take "...cognisance of the problems raised by students, providing a neutral vehicle through which students can air their views, and at a localised level provide specific solutions to academic problems" (Drewett and Wood 1991:16,17).

The process of creating an "ideal speech situation" between any negotiators is necessarily going to be a difficult one, no matter the circumstances. This is because of the different interests which are at stake. Yet, as has already been stressed, in this particular situation the varying groups (ASP, staff and students of the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology) have expressed similar sentiments which definitely provide the common ground with which to form the basis for communicative discourse.

7.7.2 The problem of power relations in communicative discourse

Once the planning stage is in process, the only complex issue remaining has to do with the contributions to integration which the varying participants are able to make. While it has been argued that unequal power dynamics must be avoided completely in communicative discourse, it is obvious that certain participants are far more experienced or educated in

particular areas than are others. Does the "ideal speech situation" mean that all contributions must be regarded with equal weight, and as equally important? The immediate response would obviously be that it makes sense to allow all participants to put forward their ideas, and that decisions be made "...on the basis of the force of the better argument" (Howard 1991:112). Yet it is very likely that the better arguments would emanate from those with more experience and education. Does this then mean that the conditions of "ideal speech" have not been met, because some participants exercise more power than others?

7.7.3 Curriculum development

In attempting to explore this issue further it will be useful to consider the question of curriculum development as an important aspect of academic development once the initial integration structures are in place. Bearing in mind the problem at hand - of ideal speech situations in decision making - is it possible for all participants involved in the communicative action process to enter debate around curriculum development on an equal basis?

7.7.3.1 The negotiated curriculum

McKay and Romm (1992) adopt a critical humanist perspective which provides important insights into the possibility of democratic education, but of concern here is their investigation into curriculum development. In a general sense they argue that curriculum construction needs to take place within a 'non-realist' framework whereby knowledge and truth are regarded in terms of Habermas's emancipatory interest. In

this sense knowledge is "...non-authoritative, discursive, and the product of dialogue" (McKay and Romm, 1992:103). In terms of curriculum development this non-realist framework gives leads to their argument for what they term the 'negotiated curriculum'.

With reference to the work of Paulo Freire, McKay and Romm (1992: 139,140) argue that the curriculum needs to be negotiated by both staff and students. There are two important spin-offs here. Firstly, such an approach views all participants as 'intellectuals' who are 'co-creators of reality/knowledge'. And secondly, the process or 'method' of learning takes priority over content. In other words content is used as a means to deliberating around a particular topic. The process of interpreting and discussing is what is most important. The negotiated curriculum is therefore of direct interest to a department entering into a process of integration between academic skills and course content. As McKay and Romm (1992:140) note: "What is important to Freire is that whatever content is contained in the curriculum, the method of approaching the content and *the skills learnt in the process of such 'appropriation'*¹⁰ are more important than the specific ideas or concepts which become 'gathered' by teacher-students and student-teachers."

The role of the teacher (or lecturer) becomes one in which s/he facilitates a classroom situation in which students play a part in determining their education. They are given the opportunity to decide:

¹⁰My emphasis.

"...what they want to know about a particular theme/topic...(and)...are invited to implement plans on how to find out more after negotiation with peers and teachers, and also to evaluate the success of their enquiries by reflecting on what they have learned in the light of their initial aims and plans" (McKay and Romm 1992:140).

McKay and Romm provide a coherent and insightful approach to curriculum development, and conclusively demonstrate how curriculum construction can achieve Habermas's 'ideal speech situation'. It can achieve this both in terms of the negotiation of curriculum as well as classroom dynamics in which that curriculum is explored. But the question which was initially posed still remains: to what extent is the negotiated curriculum able to overcome the tendency for staff to feel that students are unable to decide what content is best for them, and the tendency for students to lack confidence in their ability to decide on such issues?

7.7.3.2 Potential obstacles to the negotiated curriculum

Academic departments (or individual lecturers within those departments) could (and indeed do) maintain that they have an academic responsibility to include a certain amount of content covering particular areas, topics and theories. In a sense, they would argue that their role as academics makes them accountable to the university (and perhaps even to the community whom it serves), to use their (superior) knowledge to decide on the specific curriculum of a course. And that to negotiate this curriculum with students in the manner

suggested by McKay and Romm would be to irresponsibly abuse this accountability.

To substantiate this point, members of the 1992 Sociology III class, when discussing this issue, felt that they would prefer the Department to decide on their first and even second year curricula because - having just come out of school - they felt that in their first two years of study they did not have an adequate knowledge of sociology to be able to decide on what they wanted to explore in class.

Howard (1991:110) recognises the problems which can occur when curriculum changes are at stake. He notes that: "The initial stages of the process of curricular reform are particularly susceptible to distorted communication because the participants in the reform process have different agendas proposed by different constituencies, and each recognizes legitimacy only within a very narrow sphere of power and interest." Much of the problem has to do with the nature of undergraduate curricula: Howard (1991:112) argues that once the question of curriculum reform has been raised, the issue of what undergraduates "ought to know" is raised. Although this in turn "...assumes that there is something that the undergraduate student ought to know, and that we can agree on what it is through the process of rational discourse."

7.7.3.3 Rational discourse in curriculum development

The process of rational discourse is the key to finding a solution to this problem. As has already been discussed, communicative discourse involves a discussion or debate in

which a proposal is judged in terms of the argument(s) put forward in its motivation. In this way intersubjective agreement concerning the suitability of various proposals can occur, on the basis of the motivations supporting those proposals. In other words: "...merely uttering apparently self-evident propositions" (Howard 1991:112) will not suffice. For example it is not sufficient for a staff member in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology to say that we have to teach Marx because all first years ought to have an understanding of Marx. The motivation needs to include relevant reasons for a particular course of action.

This is an important process because it does provide a solution to the problem at hand. Sociology I lecturers need to provide lucid and thorough justification of the inclusion of areas and amount of work to be covered in a particular course, using their 'academic responsibility' to guide them. However, this course content and the manner of exploring it needs to be open to debate, so that students can impact on future changes (at the very least through effective course evaluations). Although this revised approach does not generate the same picture as does that evoked by McKay and Romm's idea of a negotiated curriculum, it nevertheless does incorporate the essential aspects of relevance and process. It also bears in mind the experience of lecturers and the dynamics of a first year class (in particular) which is large (in excess of 200 students) and unsure of the boundaries of sociology. This latter point though, does not justify failure to explore the curriculum in a critical, shared and equal manner.

7.7.3.4 Transmission of skills in the negotiated curriculum

It is important to stress that the negotiated curriculum is not an anarchic form of curricula development where chaos dominates the classroom situation! The experience and vision of lecturers (of a department in general) should be assured of at least some primacy in the planning of curriculum. This certainly is an inherent part of the negotiated curriculum suggested by McKay and Romm. They argue: "It is imperative that communicative discourse be explored as a fundamental skill in the people's education project" (McKay and Romm 1992:141). This involves a focus on language, concepts and critical thinking, the implication of which is that "...any subject in the curriculum should be taught in such a way that students learn the constructed character of the codes used to make sense of reality" (McKay and Romm 1992:142).

The underlying tenet here is that the department or lecturer is in a more powerful position in the sense that it is they who decide upon the skills which are to be transmitted through the process of communicative discourse which (again) they have chosen as the most appropriate approach to curriculum development. And the basis on which these decisions are made is the (more than often) superior experience and knowledge of the lecturing staff. In other words, ASP and lecturers in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology will come to an agreement as to the types of skills which the first year class ought to develop. In turn these skills have a direct bearing on the course content, with regard to issues such as how much emphasis should be placed on content as opposed to process, how best should the content be explored, how should

the tutorial system operate, and so on. While scope could be allowed for students to have some bearing on how tutorials and lectures best be used, the most important decisions regarding approach to curriculum development and the skills to be transmitted are placed in the hands of those in more powerful positions.

McKay and Romm do take cognisance of this problem that the critical approach to education might itself be said to have become a 'totalizing dogma' (Giroux and Simon, in McKay and Romm 1992:156). They agree that critical humanism is a 'totalizing dogma' because it "...hopes to affect relationships at all levels and in all spheres of society. Yet by dogmatising the notion of discourse as the route to human solutions, critical humanism leaves open, and indeed invites, spaces for discourse on all issues of relevance to people as thinkers-and-actors in society."

McKay and Romm's justification of a communicative discourse 'dogma' is crucial in the context of the process of integration (or any educational process for that matter) because, as they maintain, it allows students the space in which to think-and-act so that they are able to raise 'validity claims' which they can 'rationally motivate' and debate with fellow students and lecturers (see Habermas, in Merquior 1986:176). What is fundamentally important here is that the creation of a critical educational climate is likely to generate a critical consciousness in all participants of the education process (cf. 5.3.2.3 and 5.3.2.4), and it allows students to 'do otherwise' (Giddens 1982:30). Similarly, it

allows students to choose not to participate in decision-making and not to "...influence a pre-existing course of events" (Giddens 1982:30).

Whichever course of action particular students choose to follow, the critical approach to integration grants them channels of communication which can be used to alter, oppose or accept the type of initiatives which an integrated department would propose. These proposals could well extend beyond the issues of curriculum development, skills transmission and (to a far lesser extent) method of instruction which have been discussed here, into areas such as evaluation and staff and tutor training¹¹.

7.8 Conclusion

The importance of the preceding discussion concerning a critical approach to education in terms of Habermas's communicative discourse, is that it has been shown that the integration process can indeed take place in such a manner that it can bring about significant and progressive changes in the area of academic development in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology at Rhodes University.

While there is always the danger that communicative action might not take place because of a lack of 'pre-understanding' (Habermas 1984:100), Rhodes University ASP through the

¹¹Apart from staff training which would encourage new and different approaches to lecturing and so on, Howard (1991:113) suggests that "...individual participants to the process (of communicative discourse) will need to be educated to the special problems of discursive will formation - the process of curricular reform is itself an educational process."

integration process, has the capacity to act as an agent of progressive change in the area of academic development in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology.

The nature of this change is such that content and process (the transmission of skills) are seen as an integral part of instruction such that students will be encouraged to participate more fully in their own education. In this process they will be able to develop a more critical awareness of what constitutes reality. Relationships between staff and students need to be transformed so that a context in which communicative discourse can take place is encouraged. Departmental staff themselves need to explore improved ways of communicating, both in decision-making processes and in instruction. All the while ASP is required to investigate improved methods of dealing with the multitude of academic (and academic-related) skills problems which beset students.

That is one scenario. The other is that the Department makes no real attempt to reach a 'pre-understanding' by ignoring the need to take into account the community's interests. The immediate responsibility of academic difficulties which students experience could be placed with the student rather than with the University and Department. Staff could be left to their own devices and not encouraged to undergo any training. Student feedback could be limited, and the IDT-sponsored lecturer/specialist could relieve the mainstream Department members of some of their workload, while still dealing with 'problem' students in separate tutorials in a stigmatised manner.

The contrast between these two scenarios is both striking and a reason for concern. Although the integration process can formally go ahead, there is no guarantee as to the manner in which it will proceed. The issue of academic development and indeed ASP itself is a contested terrain within the broader site of struggle taking place within the university and formal education more generally. This explains ASP's conservative approach to integration thus far - under different circumstance ASP might have insisted on a certain (more progressive) framework within which integration ought to take place. (But then again it could have opposed integration altogether!)

It is for this reason - the contested nature of academic support and of the integration process itself - that it is argued that ASP has the capacity to use integration in a way which will fundamentally change the type of academic development offered to students in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. But progressive change is in no way guaranteed. Indeed Habermas "...has always said that the future is inherently open and that there can be no theoretical guarantee of rational progress" (Pusey 1987:118). However: ASP has initiated an integration strategy-in-general; the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology has agreed to implement it; and staff and students feel the need for such an integrated approach. These factors indicate that the process of change has begun. Habermas has argued that communicative rationality might lead to more rational structures, and that: "Every painful step in this direction involves a linguistification of reified (nature-like) system structures

that have to be re-appropriated through communicative action into the lifeworld" (Pusey 1987:107).

This is the task at hand for those who wish to implement a process of critical integration in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology. It has been shown that the necessary material conditions for critical integration prevail. It is also clear that integration has the potential to bring about the sort of academic development which critical theorists insist is necessary, if students are to indeed develop the academic skills which will make them 'thinkers-and-actors' (McKay and Romm 1992:156) in a university which itself can be transformed into "...a vital and critical part of society (which encourages and facilitates)... free and open communication" (Howard 1991:118).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

In this thesis entitled, The integration of Academic Skills/Support Programmes into university departmental structures : A case study in the sociology of education, the extent to which the Rhodes University Academic Skills Programme (ASP) is able to act as an agent of progressive change within the university, through a process of integration, was studied. The particular focus of this study was on the process of integration as a strategy for dealing with the academic needs of students within the context of South Africa as a society in transition.

The process of integration is one in which the traditional academic skills transmission function of ASP, and the course content instruction role of mainstream departments, become integrated so that academic skills are not taught to students in isolation from the course content which they experience in lectures, tutorials and readings. The purpose of integration is to provide students with a holistic form of academic development, in which they learn *how* to engage in academic endeavour in a way which relates integrally with their engagement with the course content.

While Chapter One was a general introductory chapter, Chapters Two and Three explored different theoretical approaches to formal education in an attempt at situating ASPs within an appropriate theoretical framework. In Chapter Two, an account of various structuralist theories was provided. It was argued

that structuralist accounts of education were too pessimistic and deterministic to allow sufficient space for the agency of individuals working within ASP or departments. The focus of Chapter Three was therefore on non-structuralist theories of education. Of particular interest was the Frankfurt School tradition, especially the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas. It was argued that critical Marxist theory allows sufficient scope for human agency to be a suitable framework within which to situate ASPs. It was noted, however, that the earlier Frankfurt School theorists (including Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) lacked a thorough analysis of society, but that Habermas did provide a comprehensive analysis of modern society which is able to account for the complex dynamics of local circumstances. It was argued that Habermas's concept of communicative action was of particular use in examining the potential of ASP as an agent of change within the university.

Chapter Four concentrated on an historical overview of the Rhodes University ASP, clearly demonstrating the progress which it has made in successfully dealing with student academic difficulties. The central trend in ASP's progression has been one in which there is a shift away from a situation of teaching academic skills in isolation of course content, towards a more integrated approach. It was noted that ASP has not been totally constrained by structures and forces beyond its control. On the contrary, it has made steady progress in the direction of integrated academic development. The issue of integration was the focus of Chapter Five, where the move towards integration at Rhodes University was investigated and examined in the light of prominent debates concerning

integration in all the traditionally liberal universities. In Chapter Six the staff and students in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology were the focus of an inquiry into central issues pertaining to university education and related academic difficulties. Both staff and students offered some penetrating insights into the relationship between the student and the university, and the student and sociology. The general consensus was that student difficulties in sociology did exist and that there was a need for a more integrated system of academic development in dealing with these difficulties.

Given this background it was possible, in Chapter Seven, to appraise the notion of integration in the light of Habermas's critical theory. The historical account of ASP and staff and student perceptions allowed for a foundational understanding in which integration was generally acceptable to staff and students in the Department. It was noted that although integration has already begun to be implemented in the Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology, there is no guarantee that a democratic and critical form of integration would result.

By this it is meant that integration is a contested terrain which could be used in the interests of academic development or which otherwise could be abused. In order to ensure that progressive change in the Department takes place, Habermas's concept of communicative action is considered. It is argued that the Department needs to ensure a process of rational discourse whereby all interested parties be given an equal

chance to influence events and practices within the Department. This process is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of critical integration, although it is not a guarantee that a process of critical integration will be realised. Instead it is argued that the future will depend on particular local circumstances, and upon those involved in communicative discourse.

The overall argument of this thesis is that ASPs are able to act as agents of progressive change in the university, and that the integration strategy is the most suitable and necessary means to achieving this goal. The most important issue now confronting ASP is that of ensuring that the future is one in which critical integration eventuates.

For this reason it is hoped that this study is regarded and utilised as the first stage in an intense process of emancipatory research. There is a need for further investigation into the area of integration. This is crucial if academic development is to progress along democratic and emancipatory lines.

There is a pressing need for Habermas's concepts of emancipatory interest and communicative action to be applied to the process of integration. It is important to ascertain the manner in which Habermas's critical theory will impact on the integration process in a practical sense. For this reason the most imperative area which needs to be earmarked for future research is that of establishing mechanisms which will ensure that a process of communicative action will develop

within the Rhodes University Department of Sociology and Industrial Sociology as well as elsewhere.

In particular there needs to be a focus on how exactly communicative discourse can be ensured, and how to prepare all concerned participants for democratic involvement in such a process. Subsequent issues relate to the building of appropriate departmental structures which will enable communicative discourse and to the process of determining who will participate in such action and on what basis. For example, what autonomy needs to be given to lecturers, how will the community's interests be determined, the extent of student feedback in influencing the future direction of the Department.

These issues will need to involve practical initiative in the form of experiments with regard to methods of improving instruction. In this sense different teaching and tutorial methods need to be explored, as do forms of effective staff training, and student, staff and course evaluation techniques, etc. In this way the process of critical integration will be able to be implemented on a thoroughly theorised and well-researched basis which will ensure that the outcome of effective student instruction is indeed realised.

APPENDIX ONE

Part A
for Departmental
Records

Date:

Mr/Ms referred to A.S.P.
Reasons for referral:

Part B
to be sent to
A.S.P. member

Date:

Dear
I have referred to you, Mr/Ms
Reasons for referral (i.e. test performance/tutorial
participation/written work, etc.)

Signed Dept.

Part C, below
to be given to
students

Date:

Dear Mr/Ms
May I suggest that you consult Prof./Dr./Ms./Mr.
..... of the Academic Support
Programme at Phone
on how to cope better with your work. Please
take with you some recent samples of your writing.

Signed Dept.

APPENDIX TWO

Sociology Academic Skills Programme: Questionnaire 1990

Your assistance in filling-in this questionnaire would be deeply appreciated. Please be as accurate as possible in your answers, providing me with an honest indication of your perceptions, attitudes and experiences.

Thanks
Michael Drewett

Where choices are given, please encircle the appropriate answer.

1. Degree and year of study: _____ 1()
2()
2. First (home) language: _____ 3()
3. June exam result: F3 F2 F1 111 11 11A 1 4()
4. Have you attended Sociology ASP at all this year? Yes / No 5()
5. Have you attended ASP in any other subjects apart from
Sociology? Yes / No 6()
- 6.1 If yes, please indicate which one(s) you attended:
Central ASP (Below SAN) : Yes / No 7()
- 6.2 If yes (to central ASP), which sessions have you
attended? _____ 8()
_____ 9()
- 6.3 Other departments (please specify) _____ 10()
_____ 11()
7. If you have not attended Sociology ASP this year, what would
you say is the most important reason(s) for not having done so?
_____ 12()
_____ 13()
_____ 14()

- 8.1. From your own experience or from what you have heard, do
you think that ASP teaches academic skills in an effective
manner? Yes / No 15()

8.2. Please explain your reason for saying this:

16()

17()

9.1 Do you think that the Sociology Department itself does enough to aid students with any academic skills - such as essay-writing and critical thinking - they might require for the course?

Yes / No 18()

9.2 Do you think that the Sociology Department should be responsible for teaching academic skills in anyway at all?

Yes / No 19()

9.3. If yes, then please say how you think this could be done:

20()

21()

22()

9.4.If no, then why do you think they should not be responsible?

23()

24()

25()

10. Since you have been at Rhodes, have you at any stage had difficulties with or have felt that you have needed assistance with any of the following academic skills?

1 = no problems, 2 = slight problems, 3 = average,
4 = a few serious difficulties, 5 = Major difficulties.

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| 10.1 | Taking lecture notes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 26() |
| 10.2 | Tutorial assignment writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 27() |
| 10.3 | Study skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 28() |
| 10.4 | Self-expression in writing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 29() |
| 10.5 | Understanding lectures | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 30() |

10.6 Understanding readings	1	2	3	4	5	31()
10.7 Exam writing	1	2	3	4	5	32()
10.8 Constructing an argument/ Critical thinking	1	2	3	4	5	33()
10.9 Listening skills	1	2	3	4	5	34()
10.10 Time management	1	2	3	4	5	35()
10.11 Anxiety management	1	2	3	4	5	36()

Other (please specify):

10.12 _____	1	2	3	4	5	37()
10.13 _____	1	2	3	4	5	38()

11. To what extent are these still a problem for you?

1 = no problem, 2 = a slight problem, 3 = average,

4 = a few serious difficulties, 5 = Major difficulties.

11.1 Taking lecture notes	1	2	3	4	5	39()
11.2 Tutorial assignment writing	1	2	3	4	5	40()
11.3 Study skills	1	2	3	4	5	41()
11.4 Self-expression in writing	1	2	3	4	5	42()
11.5 Understanding lectures	1	2	3	4	5	43()
11.6 Understanding readings	1	2	3	4	5	44()
11.7 Exam writing	1	2	3	4	5	45()
11.8 Constructing an argument/ Critical thinking	1	2	3	4	5	46()
11.9 Listening skills	1	2	3	4	5	47()
11.10 Time management	1	2	3	4	5	48()
11.11 Anxiety management	1	2	3	4	5	49()

Other (please specify)

11.12 _____	1	2	3	4	5	50()
11.13 _____	1	2	3	4	5	51()

12. In your opinion, are there any problems with the way in which ASP presently operates:

12.1. On campus? (If yes, please explain): Yes / No 52 ()
 _____ 53 ()
 _____ 54 ()

12.2. In the Sociology Department? (If yes, please explain):

Yes / No _____ 55 ()
 _____ 56 ()
 _____ 57 ()
 _____ 58 ()

13. The following are opinions which have been expressed about ASP and Rhodes University. Please indicate whether you:

1. Strongly agree, 2. Agree, 3. Have no opinion, 4. Disagree, 5. Strongly Disagree

- 13.1 By not accounting for the weaknesses in South African schooling, the university is in effect blaming certain students for problems which are not of their own making
- 13.2 The university must maintain a high standard, and therefore is under no obligation to deal with problems which were caused by the school system
- 13.3 Students who experience difficulties with academic skills should deal with these in their own time

1	2	3	4	5

59 ()
 60 ()
 61 ()

- 13.4 Because of the state of school education in South Africa, all students are underprepared for the demands of university, and therefore require some assistance with academic skills
- 13.5 Individual departments should build the teaching of relevant academic skills into their first year course partly through lectures but particularly through the tutorial system, in a way which is not separate to course content
- 13.6 Course content and academic skills should be combined in a relevant way as far as possible.
- 13.7 I think that I personally would benefit from a system which teaches academic skills along with course content
- 13.8 I would object to a system which teaches academic skills along with course content
- 13.9 Academic skills should only be taught in ASP, separately to departmental courses
- 13.10 ASP should try to change the university rather than change the student

14. If you have attended ASP at all this year, please complete the following section.

14.1 How often did you attend Sociology ASP this year (an estimate is fine)?

1-2 times 3-5 times 6-10 times More than ten times 69()

14.2 In which term(s) did you attend Sociology ASP?

1st term 2nd term 3rd term 4th term 70()

14.3 How useful did you find Sociology ASP attendance?

Not Useful / Occasionally Useful / Quite Useful

1 2 3

Very useful Excellent

4 5 71()

14.4 Elaborate: _____

_____ 72()

15.1 If you attended Central ASP this year, how often did you attend (an estimate is fine)?

1-2 times 3-5 times 6-10 times More than ten times 73()

15.2 In which term(s) did you attend Central ASP?

1st term 2nd term 3rd term 4th term 74()

15.3 How useful did you find Central ASP attendance?

Not Useful / Occasionally Useful / Quite Useful

1 2 3

Very useful Excellent

4 5 75()

15.4 Elaborate: _____

_____ 76()

16. What changes do you think ASP (and perhaps the departments and the university) need to make if students' academic skills needs are to be effectively dealt with within the university?

_____ 77()

_____ 78()

_____ 79()

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