

**An examination of the drafting-responding process
used to develop students' writing in an English
Language for Academic Purposes Course.**

Thesis

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Lynn Quinn

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Abstract

Many students when they arrive at university do not possess the “cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1977) which is favoured by the institution. The purpose of the English Language for Academic Purposes (ELAP) course and the drafting-responding process is to help students to begin to acquire the “cultural capital” required to succeed at university. The research reported on in this thesis examined the drafting-responding process as it is used to develop students’ writing in the ELAP course at Rhodes University. The process involved students submitting drafts of their essays on which they received constructive and formative feedback from their ELAP tutor. This feedback was then used to revise their essays before a final version was submitted for assessment. The research took the form of a case study with an essentially interpretive orientation. I examined the drafts (with the tutor’s comments) and final versions of seven students’ ELAP essays. Additional data was obtained by interviewing the students and the tutor.

Underpinning my beliefs regarding the role of writing in learning as well as my orientation to research is an understanding of knowledge and learning as being socially constructed. All writing is embedded in and dependent on, not only the immediate social circumstances, but also the broader social and cultural context. In analysing and discussing the data in this research I used Halliday’s (1985) definition of context, in which he draws a broad distinction between the immediate context of situation and the broader context of culture. The research findings showed that the drafting-responding process can help students with the process of developing the academic literacy they need in order to write essays within specific situational contexts, in this case, the context of the ELAP course. In addition, at a broader level, it can help students to begin the process of being initiated into the culture of the university as a whole.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Every time a student sits down to write for us he has to invent the university for the occasion – invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Economics, or Anthropology or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the various discourses of our community, since ... a student ... must work within fields where the rules governing the presentation of examples or the development of an argument are both distinct, and even to the professional, mysterious (Bartholomae 1985:134).

The research reported in this thesis was located broadly within the field of Academic Development and more narrowly within the field of the development of academic literacy. The objective of the research was to examine how comments made at the draft stage of academic essays can assist students in developing the academic literacy required for the context in which the essays were written. The essays (draft and final versions) examined were written by students as part of their coursework for the English Language for Academic Purposes (ELAP) course at Rhodes University.

1. Academic literacy

The term “academic literacy” has gained common currency to describe the set of cultural understandings or the “rules and conventions” (Ballard and Clanchy 1988) shared by most academics, to which students, if they wish to succeed in academia, need to conform. These understandings refer not only to textual conventions; they also define what counts as knowledge; how knowledge is constructed within the university as whole and within specific disciplines (Boughey 1994:24). This understanding of academic literacy reveals a social constructivist view of the world in general and knowledge in

particular. This view “emphasises the cultural and social dimensions which enter into the formation and constitution of language and of texts” (Kress 1993:22). Geisler explains academic literacy as consisting of the content of the discipline as well as the rhetorical processes. She says

... domain content - is not a set of facts simply ‘found’ by the discipline
... but socially constructed by the discipline’s members and intimately
related to the rhetorical processes underlying the reading and writing of
texts
(1994:211).

Many lecturers at university do not see the close connection between discipline content and rhetorical processes. They believe that it is their responsibility to “teach” the former and that the latter will be gained through a process of osmosis. Ballard and Clanchy believe that

They [the ‘rules and conventions’] are nowhere codified or written down, and yet they mediate crucially between the student’s own knowledge and intentions, and the knowledge and potential meanings that exist within the university. Becoming literate in the university involves learning to ‘read’ the culture, learning to come to terms with its distinctive rituals, values, styles of language and behaviour...cultural understandings are rarely addressed directly in exchanges between academics and their students
(Ballard and Clanchy 1988:8).

They go on to argue that most students benefit by having the “rules and conventions” made explicit to them by the practitioners of the disciplines. Most of the students who do the ELAP course are English second language (ESL) learners and have come through the ex-Department of Education and Training (DET) system. Therefore they have to deal with the dual problems of studying in a second language and the fact that they have been inadequately prepared at school for tertiary study. The main purpose of a course like ELAP is to make the cultural understandings of the university explicit to the students and introduce them to the range of genres and registers used at university.

2. English Language for Academic Purposes (ELAP) at Rhodes University

The ELAP course was introduced at Rhodes University in 1994 in response to increasing student diversity, in terms of cultural, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds as well as levels of underpreparedness for university. It is a one-year credit-bearing course for students from the Commerce, Humanities and Science faculties. The course is compulsory for students enrolled for the BCom foundation course. In addition, students with low matriculation symbols who are felt to have “language difficulties” are strongly advised by deans to register for the course. The majority of students who do ELAP speak English as a second or even a third language.

The aim of the course is to improve students’ English competence and develop their academic skills (Dison and Rosenberg 1995). Like the English for Academic Purposes course at the University of Cape Town, ELAP “focuses on the needs of students whose language and educational histories create barriers to their acquisition of academic literacy” (Moore, Paxton, Scott and Thesen 1998:13-14). The underlying belief is that the course will equip the students to cope better with the demands of their other academic subjects. This is based on the assumption that there “are some common practices, goals and values among discourse communities” (Kuriloff 1996:487). In other words, that there is a common academic literacy which the course can help students to acquire. Dison (1997b:3) says

Our current position with regard to content is based on the assumption that there is a common academic literacy that students need to develop, and that we cannot, in a general course, aim to teach them the specialised literacies of specific disciplines.

As a result of the understanding (on the part of the lecturers who have designed and conceptualised the course) of the crucial role of writing in learning (developing academic literacy), a large part of the course is devoted to developing students’ writing. In chapter 2 I outline the various approaches to developing writing that have prevailed at universities. The approach to

developing writing in the ELAP course is based on an understanding of writing as a process and a social constructivist approach to knowledge.

3. Context of culture and context of situation

The idea of the “autonomous text” (that writing is context-free) has been challenged by writers in many fields (for example Geisler 1994; Street 1995; Clark and Ivanič 1997). It is now much more common to acknowledge that all writing is embedded in and dependent on the immediate social context in which it is written as well as the broader cultural context (Clark and Ivanič 1997). Halliday (1985) calls these the context of situation and the context of culture (Halliday and Hasan 1985). There are three features that operate in the context of situation which determine the language choices made by writers and speakers. Firstly, *field* which refers to “what” is being spoken or written about, *tenor* which refers to “who” is taking part in the interaction and finally *mode* which refers to the “how” of the text, that is, written or spoken. These choices are further constrained by factors in the wider context of culture which determine which genres are appropriate for the purposes (the “why” of text) they need to serve (Eggins 1994).

In this research, the immediate context of situation in which the writing took place was the ELAP course and the context of culture was the university as a whole. In my analysis of the data I examined how the ELAP tutor,¹ through her comments on the students’ draft essays helped the students to develop the academic literacy “appropriate” to both the context of situation and the context of culture. My understanding of the acquisition of academic literacy as a process of acculturation underpins the research.

¹ The ELAP tutor is most often referred to as the respondent and sometimes by her name, Carol, in the thesis.

4. Responding to writing at the draft stage

One of the beliefs which underpins the use of writing in ELAP is based on research in the field of writing which shows that when writing is viewed as a process, as opposed to a product, it can be a tool for clarifying and extending thought (see sections 1.2 and 2.1 in chapter 2). In addition, if the feedback given to students on their writing is process-oriented, that is, given at the draft stage of the writing process rather than before or after writing, it is most effective (Flower 1979; Paxton 1995).

Once the essays have been responded to they are returned to the students who then have the opportunity to redraft their essays, using the constructive and developmental feedback provided by the respondent. The final versions of the essays are then assessed by the tutors.

In terms of the context of situation, the purpose of responding to students' writing is to help them acquire academic literacy through engaging with the content, concepts and arguments of a particular discipline (see section 2.2.1.1 *Experiential Meaning* in chapter 2). It is also the role of the respondent to provide writers with a sense of audience in order to develop the "appropriate" interpersonal relationship with their readers which is required in the particular context in which the essay takes place (see section 2.2.1.1 *Interpersonal Meaning* in chapter 2). Finally, it is the role of the respondent through her feedback, to help students to express their ideas in the formal written (as opposed to oral) mode as is required of them in academic study (see section 2.2.1.1 *Textual Meaning* in chapter 2).

In terms of the context of culture, the respondent through her feedback can help students with the process of enculturation, that is, to adapt to the different literacy practices required at university in comparison to those required in their schools and homes. Often at school the only academic reading materials which many students are exposed to are textbooks (Johns 1997) and the kind of writing they do requires summarising (or regurgitating) "facts" from a

textbook or writing from common knowledge. For many students, especially those doing ELAP, the demands of academic essay writing at university are bewildering and unknown. The process of drafting and responding can help them to “create” and “transform” knowledge by understanding better what is expected of them (see section 1.2.1 in chapter 2).

4.1 “Responding” as opposed to “marking”

Responding to students’ writing at the draft stage of the essay writing process serves a very different function to comments made on the final version of a piece of writing as they are geared at revision rather than an “autopsy” (Elbow 1997:11). Responses are designed to help students approach writing as a process. The idea is that the respondent enters into a dialogue, has a conversation, in writing, with the writer of the essay. In this way student writers can be helped to become much more aware of the readers of their writing.

Research has indicated that there are some aspects of writing, which if focused on by a respondent seem to be more successful than others in terms of achieving the purpose of the drafting-responding process (Straub 1996). For example, comments which focus on the ideas and concepts which the writer is expressing as opposed to surface errors, seem to be more meaningful (Taylor 1988; Paxton 1994; Boughey and Goodman 1994). Comments which use a questioning mode seem to be more effective in terms of setting up a facilitative relationship between the writer and the respondent and allowing the writer to retain authorship over her own writing (Goodman and Paxton 1994). (See section 2.1 in chapter 2).

The research reported on in this thesis examines how “responding” as opposed to “marking” can contribute to student learning. Hodges (1997:78), as a result of her research on responding, believes that

The margins of students' written work are the ideal site for teacher-student conversations ... we can do some of our most successful teaching in the margins and end spaces of students' written work, perhaps more than we can in any other site.

5. The structure of the thesis

In chapter 2 I provide a brief historical account of the various approaches to developing students' academic writing in order to explain how these approaches have influenced the theory underpinning responding to students' writing. The chapter ends with an explanation of how responding works, using the systemic functional linguistics framework developed by Michael Halliday.

In chapter 3 I describe the research as being essentially an interpretive case study. The research methodology, data collection and data analysis are described. In addition, the research process is outlined.

The discussion of the data, in chapter 4, using the Hallidayan framework explained earlier, is divided into two main sections. The first section deals with ways in which the drafting-responding process contributed to the development of academic literacy "appropriate" to the context of situation, that is, the ELAP course. The second section discusses how the process helped students to adapt to the context of culture of the university.

In chapter 5 I look briefly at some of the shortcomings of the research orientation, the ELAP course and the drafting-responding process.

In this thesis I have chosen to use the pronoun "she" to avoid the clumsiness of using "he/she".

Chapter 2

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RESEARCH

To show how the approach to teaching writing in English Language for Academic Purposes (ELAP) course fits into broader theories about teaching writing, it is necessary to outline the various approaches to developing writing that have been prevalent during this century. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a detailed historical account of the various approaches so I have chosen to describe briefly three broad approaches to the development of writing, namely the current-traditional approach, the process approach and the social constructivist approach. Approaches to developing writing are reflections of general educational assumptions held at a particular time. Cope and Kalantzis (1993) outline three eras in pedagogy: traditional pedagogy, progressivist pedagogy and pedagogy influenced by post-modernism/ post-structuralism. I shall place the various approaches to developing writing within these broad categories. In describing each approach I will point out its strengths and weaknesses. After that I explain how these approaches have influenced the drafting-responding process, ending with an explanation of the process based on Halliday's systemic functional model of "language in use" (Macken and Slade 1993:205).

1. Approaches to developing writing

1.1 Current-traditional approach to developing writing

During the first part of this century the current-traditional approach to developing writing, as part of traditional pedagogy, was dominant. The main objective of teaching generally and writing specifically was to transmit a fixed body of cultural and linguistic knowledge. Christie (1993) talks about the "received tradition" of English language teaching where the focus is on teaching *about* the language, that is, grammar or form as opposed to meaning. At the heart of the curriculum was the written text in the form of the

classics (the “canon”); what was considered the model of good writing (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). These texts were generally formalistic, didactic and non-negotiable. Teaching writing consisted of examining these finished products and hoping that students would emulate these models (Van Zyl 1993). The focus in research as well as in classroom practices was on the written products which the students produced. There was a prescriptive approach to the teaching of writing with the focus on form and correctness (Zamel 1982). Writing instruction consisted of analysing writing into words, sentences and paragraphs with the emphasis on correct usage and mechanics. Correctness, in Berlin’s words, was the “most significant measure of accomplished prose” (1984:73 in Rose 1985:343). At the text level, instruction concentrated on the traditional modes of discourse such as narration, description, exposition, persuasion, and sometimes poetry (Applebee 1986; van Zyl 1993). The underlying assumption of this approach to developing writing seems to have been that writers generally know what it is they wish to say and that it is just a matter of getting the mechanics and the style correct. In this view writing is incidental to the production of knowledge, and language as a semiotic system is independent of context (Saussure 1983 in Moore 1998).

The effect of this focus on the product of writing hides the fact that writing is a messy process, sometimes leaving students feeling inadequate. As Shaughnessy says, students “tend to think that the point of writing is to get everything right the first time and that the need to change things is the work of an amateur” (1977:79). Orr, as a result of her research at UNISA on student writing, says, “Students’ writing abilities are thus unlikely to develop, or their writing processes to flourish for as long as they, and their instructors, fixate on the propriety of the written product” (1995:63). If writing instruction ignores the fact that writing is a long and hard *process* and places an obsessive emphasis on correctness, it is likely to inhibit novice writers and to strangle creativity (van Zyl 1993). Langer and Applebee in criticising the traditional approach say:

It emphasises the teacher as transmitter of knowledge, rather than the students as active agents who must interpret and reinterpret what they are learning; it emphasises testing and evaluation, rather than work in progress; and it emphasises declarative rather than procedural knowledge (knowing *that* rather than knowing *how*) (1987:138-139).

From my own experience of working with mainstream lecturers as well as research (for example van Zyl 1993 at UNISA) this approach still influences many of the things lecturers do, or believe should be done, to develop students' writing.

Johns (1997) points out that despite the obvious criticisms of traditional theories and pedagogies, they do serve to remind us of the importance of form and classroom practice, especially for second language (L2) students. But she goes on to say, "...they are insufficiently rich to provide a complete understanding of what it means to be literate or to teach literacies for academic contexts" (8).

1.2 Process approaches to developing writing

Early in the 20th century, influenced by people like Dewey and Montessori, many educators began to reject traditional literacy pedagogy and embrace a paradigm of progressivism. According to Christie (1993), the emphasis in curricula was on "personal growth": there was concern for the individual as being unique and distinctive. This was the era of learner-centredness. The focus in writing was on students finding their "own language" (and their own "voices") through which to make sense of the world. In literacy teaching this meant that grammar and other forms of formal language teaching were replaced by "process writing" and "whole language", with the focus on meaning, on what the child wished to communicate (Cope and Kalantzis 1993). This heralded a major paradigm shift in writing theory: writing was now viewed as a *process* as opposed to merely a finished product. The focus on process was also aided by "new" research methodologies like think aloud protocol analysis which involves getting research participants to "think aloud"

while they are writing. The researcher records what is said and matches that to the writing which is produced. A famous comparison to describe the process is that of watching a porpoise jumping out of the water: the observer only sees the porpoise at intervals but is able to use what is seen to trace its movements (Cohen and Hosenfeld 1981).

The writing “process” has been differently conceived and described by various theorists but essentially the process is seen as consisting of a number of steps including some form of pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and final drafting. Initially the process was believed to be linear but Emig’s study (1971) in which she analysed students’ think aloud protocols of their writing processes showed the process to be very complex, cyclical and recursive. Contrary to earlier beliefs that writers know what they want to say, Emig found that the process of writing involves a continuing attempt to discover what it is that one wants to say. Zamel puts it like this:

As one writes and rewrites, thereby approximating more closely and more accurately one’s intended meaning, the form with which to express this meaning suggests itself
(1982:187).

The process approach treats writing as a whole rather than a composite of words, sentences and paragraphs as in the product approach. There is more focus on the purpose and meaning of the writing than the mechanical aspects. Applebee (1986:95-96) says:

Process approachesare marked by instructional activities designed to help students think through and organise their ideas before writing and to rethink and revise their initial drafts. Instructional activities typically associated with process approaches include brainstorming, journal writing, focus on students’ ideas and experiences, small-group activities, teacher/student conferences, the provision of audiences other than the teacher, emphasis on multiple drafts, postponement of attention to editing skills until the final draft, and elimination and deferment of grading.

There are two paradigms which have influenced various approaches to writing within the process approach. These are the expressivist and cognitivist paradigms which will be described in the following sections.

1.2.1 The expressivist paradigm

In this paradigm, language was regarded as a personal resource with the emphasis on personal creativity and growth; the focus was on the individual. Learning to write was seen as a natural process. This is the theory of writing which underpinned the teaching of writing in many secondary schools and Basic Writing Courses at College level in the United States in the 1960's and 70's. Students were encouraged to write about themselves, to express their feelings and focus on the meaning they wished to communicate (van Zyl 1993). Rigg (1991:522 in Johns 1997: 10) says that in the expressivist paradigm "writing [was seen] as a means of discovering for oneself what one thinks". Instruction was not prescriptive and the teacher's role was to facilitate the writing process, be supportive and offer guidance at each stage of the writing process. This approach to developing writing has been used at some secondary schools and it underlies some of the work done in Writing Centres at some universities in South Africa (for example, Katz 1995 and Parkerson 1997).

It is often claimed that the main strength of this approach (with its focus on the process rather than the product) is that it empowers writers. But constructivists argue that it ignores both the immediate context in which the writing takes place and the broader social context (Grabe and Kaplan 1996); it ignores the cultural construction of writing practices in which students are differently positioned. An approach such as this does not give students equal access to the powerful genres of their society or even of the university. (The genre approach to teaching writing is explored in section 1.3.2 of this chapter.) At this stage I will mention a few of the criticisms levelled at the process/expressivist approach to writing. Cope and Kalantzis (1993), for example, argue that the process/expressivist approach, with its emphasis on narrative writing, denies students knowledge of factual writing which is a much

more powerful way of communicating scientific knowledge. In addition, they argue that in the process approach students are encouraged to develop their own voices but there are unacknowledged criteria regarding which voices are and aren't acceptable. Some writers (see Johns 1997:10 for examples) have expressed the opinion that "voice" is an Amerocentric concept which is not understood or seen as relevant to cultures in which group identification is very strong. Delpit (1988) argues that teachers do students a disservice by suggesting that product is not important: students are after all judged on the product regardless of the process.

Finally, Grabe and Kaplan (1996) argue that the problem with the expressivist approach is that it assumes that the cognitive processing of immature writers and expert writers during the writing process are the same but research has shown that more skilled writers use a qualitatively different kind of writing process (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987). The basic differences between skilled and less-skilled writers are captured in Bereiter and Scardamalia's two models of the writing process: the *knowledge-telling* model and the *knowledge-transforming* model. Less-skilled writers tend to use the knowledge-telling model which generally involves simply telling what they have retrieved. The strategies involved work well for the kind of writing most students are required to do at school, for example, writing about personal experiences or opinions. However, when writing tasks (such as those required at university) are more demanding, more skilled writers use the knowledge-transforming model which enables them to do things like order information, assess the relative salience of information, gauge audience expectations and use logical patterns of argument organisation.

1.2.2 The cognitivist paradigm

The theory underpinning this paradigm comes from work done by cognitive psychologists in collaboration with writing theorists using think aloud protocol analysis to see what strategies individuals employ during writing. In other words, the emphasis is on what happens in the mind of the writer while she is composing. This research led people like Hayes and Flower (1980) to see

writing as a form of problem solving. They found that the difficulty for writers, especially novices, lies in the fact that the writer has to pay attention to so many things at the same time, for example, content, linguistic conventions and rhetorical issues. They describe writing as an act of juggling a number of constraints simultaneously rather than as a series of discrete stages or steps that add up to a finished product.

Flower and Hayes have, as a result of their research, described appropriate strategies for writers. For example, they believe that if students analyse a writing task in terms of the needs of the audience, the goals of the writer, available choice of tone, and the limitations and opportunities of the circumstances of the writing, their writing improves (1980 in Nightingale 1988a). The principle then, as I understand it, is that it is possible to teach students certain metacognitive skills which will help them with the process of writing. Silva (1990:15 in Johns 1997:12) describes the teacher's role:

...to help students develop viable strategies for getting started (finding topics, generating ideas and information, focusing, and planning structure and procedure), for drafting (encouraging multiple drafts or readings), for revising (adding, deleting, modifying, and rearranging ideas); and for editing ...

In their discussion of this approach to writing, Clark and Ivanič say that skills (like procedures) "suggest a set of neutral technologies or techniques that are somehow separate and separable from the social context..." (1997:84). Boughey (1998), as a result of her experience as an academic development (AD) practitioner at South African tertiary institutions, believes that simply teaching students a set of writing skills or strategies is not the solution. She has found that the problem lies in the fact that often students do not perceive the value of writing in the same way as their lecturers. She cites an example of a biochemistry student whose perception of what "being a biochemist" was, did not involve writing. She asks "What chance, then, that he will take on board the 'skills' introduced in his writing class unless his perception of what 'being a biochemist' involves also incorporates writing?" (397). The problem

with this “skills” approach to developing writing is that it does not take into account the socially-situated nature of language in use.

In the 1980s when Academic Development programmes and centres were first established at universities in South Africa the adjunct or add-on model (Warren 1998:77 calls it “separate forms of intervention”) was most often employed. In many cases this involved academic development (AD) staff running extra tutorials, separate from mainstream curricula, in which various skills, including writing skills were taught to students (for examples see Starfield 1994; Hartman and Warren 1994; Drewett 1994). On the whole, these were found to be unsuccessful because they did not take into account that “reading and writing are not merely ‘skills’ which can be dealt with in a remedial fashion; they constitute the very means through which academic learning and knowledge construction occur” (Warren 1998:77).

Despite the criticisms mentioned, the developing understanding of writing as a process has had a dramatic influence on how AD practitioners view and teach academic writing. Process approaches have changed the focus in writing development from linguistic and textual form to a focus on individuals “whose meaning-making and individual text processing are central” (Johns 1997:13). However, they do not take into account the broader context and “may not provide adequately for all students, particularly those who are culturally, socially, or linguistically distant from English academic languages and discourse”. For this reason, in some parts of the world, since the early 1980’s there has been a paradigm shift in literacy theory towards a social theory of language.

1.3 The social-constructivist approach to developing writing

According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996:94) socially oriented views of writing were influenced by a number of sources such as sociolinguistics, Hallidayan functional linguistics, elementary education research, socially based rhetoric, and the sociology of science. The focus in the social-constructivist approach is away from the individual as a writer as in the previous approaches onto “a

complex matrix of writer, community, and the knowledge constructed by the whole" (van Zyl 1993:52). This approach to developing writing fits into the broader post-modern views on pedagogy which emphasise the importance of the wider social, political and cultural context in which education takes place. In this view the role of the teacher is that of "transformative intellectual", as opposed to merely a facilitator, who helps students to challenge the grounds on which knowledge and power are constructed and legitimated (Aronowitz and Giroux 1991).

In terms of literacy, this approach shows an understanding of the nature of knowledge, reality, language and texts not as something "out there" but rather as *constructed* or created socially. Reading and writing are understood as learned social practices (not "natural"). Writing is viewed as an aspect of literacy. Grabe and Kaplan say:

... writing is both context constrained and context creating; not only is writing a response to some need to express, but it is also simultaneously contributing to, reinforcing, and redefining notions of what may be construed as part of the knowledge-canon and of what may be construed as 'writable' (1996:162).

The implication of the so-called New Literacy Studies for teaching is a recognition that there needs to be a move beyond the technical features of language "functions" and the private cognitive "skills" of individuals (Gee 1990) towards an awareness of the social nature of literacy and an understanding of writing and reading as a set of socio-cultural practices, not skills.

The social-constructivist paradigm considers the writer, the reader, the text and most importantly, the context in which the writing takes place. Johns explains the connections like this, "There is no artificial separation between what is in a text, the roles of readers and writers, and the context in which the text is produced or processed" (1997:15).

1.3.1 Systemic functional linguistics (SFL)

A view of language which is important to an understanding of writing development from a social constructivist perspective is that derived from Michael Halliday's functional theory of language (Grabe and Kaplan 1996): it provides the *functional* perspective on the constructive use of language. SFL tries to explain the ways in which language is related to its social environment; to "... show how people use language to make meaning in order to get on with their lives" (Martin and Rothery 1993:139). SFL is based on four main theoretical claims about language:

... that language use is functional; that its function is to make meanings; that these meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged; and that the process of using language is a *semiotic* process, a process of making meanings by choosing (Egins 1994:2).

For students learning to write in their various disciplines, this means learning to choose the linguistic patterns which are appropriate to the meanings they are trying to make. Christie (1989:17) points out that "Success in mastering a content area is actually a matter of mastering the necessary linguistic resources with which to deal with the content – this implies knowing how one's discourse is to be structured " (in Grabe and Kaplan 1996:134). Language and content are therefore integrated by the writer in order to make meaning. As certain discourses become more deeply embedded in a particular context, they become conventionalised and then become recognised as *genres* which serve particular functional purposes.

In order to be successful, students must learn how language is used to convey content through the genres which are valued by the university generally and within specific disciplines.

1.3.2 Genre approach

The genre approach to the teaching of writing is thus based on Halliday's functional systemic views of language and his social semiotic theory of language development (Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Hasan and Williams 1996). Genre theorists believe that genres are culturally formulated activities which are used to achieve particular goals in society. Martin (1984:25 in Eggins 1994:26) defines a genre as "a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture". Genre theorists recognise that language form, as it reflects genre and writing purpose, is an important component of writing development. Thus, according to Grabe and Kaplan (1996:133), "The development of genre knowledge, in Halliday's functional sense, plays a particularly important role in a student's writing development beyond the knowledge-telling stage" (see section 1.2.1 in this chapter). Genre theory is about how language functions to say things in ways which are most appropriate to a writer's purpose and to the specific context in which the writing takes place.

The academic essay is an example of the expository genre which is a recognised form of assessment in our culture. Essays in most disciplines have a similar structure: starting with a statement of thesis, followed by presentation of evidence, dismissal of counter evidence, summary of evidence and finally reiteration of thesis statement (Eggins 1994). Swales (1990a), in his research on the genre of the research article, found that introductions generally consist of three moves: establishing a territory, establishing a niche and occupying a niche. Each of these contains a number of steps. Swales believes that for students, the ability to use genre effectively will transform their ability to learn and function successfully in academic contexts.

Thus, according to Eggins (1994), genre theory involves making conscious unconscious cultural knowledge by describing how language is used to achieve particular things. Making genres explicit and showing writers how to write them will, in the process, show them more fully how knowledge is constructed in different disciplines. Cope and Kalantzis' argument for a genre

approach to teaching writing is particularly powerful in the context of South African tertiary institutions. They say:

For those outside the discourses and cultures of certain realms of power and access, acquiring these discourses requires explicit explanation ... Students from historically marginalised groups, however, need explicit teaching more than students who seem destined for a comfortable ride into the genres and cultures of power (1993:8).

There are various criticisms of the genre approach and generally the social-constructivist paradigm (for example, Williams and Hasan 1996; Hasan 1996; and Carter 1996). Some feel that it may encourage a move back to traditional approaches in which the focus is on correctness and the mode of instruction is transmission. Some writers have also expressed the concern that the focus on genres will stifle originality and creativity. This need not be the case: genres should be taught as guidelines rather than as rigid patterns which must be adhered to. Students also need to be taught how and when it may be appropriate to flout the conventions; they should be encouraged to find their own voices. Theorists writing from a critical perspective (for example, Brannon and Knoblauch 1982) have expressed the concern that genre teaching will encourage students to accept the status quo in an uncritical way; without considering whose interests are served by doing things the way they are done. The counter to this is that genres should be taught critically; students should be encouraged to “analyse, critique, and negotiate intelligently the texts, roles, and academic contexts in which they operate” (Johns 1997:18). Street (1995), in his discussion on the problems with the genre approach, cautions that even if students are taught the powerful genres of a society it doesn’t mean they will necessarily become empowered; the goal posts may simply be moved so that they continue to be marginalised. He believes that

An approach that sees literacy as critical social practice would make explicit from the outset both the assumptions and the power relations on which these models of literacy are based (1995:141).

Nonetheless, the genre approach to developing writing challenges practices which “focus *exclusively* on the process of writing and deny the value of teaching explicit knowledge of writing” (Hyland 1992). It is more useful to see genre-based approaches as supplementing or adding to the process approach rather than as being in opposition to it. Raimes (1991) makes a valid point when she says that it would be more useful to see the process/product debate in both/and terms rather than either/or terms.

In the next section I situate the drafting-responding process (as used by tutors in the ELAP course at Rhodes) into the approaches outlined above. I concur with John’s when she says, “...I will argue for a view that texts are primarily socially constructed and that we should make this argument the centre of our classroom practices” (1997:14). However, like Johns, I believe that this view can be enriched by the traditional, process and cognitive theories discussed earlier. I don’t believe that it is right or fair to students to pretend that form isn’t important but it cannot be seen as separate from the various contexts.

2. The drafting-responding process

The theory underpinning the drafting-responding process, as it is used in the ELAP course, has been most influenced by the process and social constructivist approaches to developing students’ writing. I shall briefly look at how each of these has informed the drafting-responding process.

2.1 The influence of the process approach on the drafting-responding process

The change in focus in approaches to developing writing at tertiary institutions was very much influenced by the *writing across the curriculum* (WAC) movement. In the late 70’s, as a result of changing perspectives on writing (mainly the role of process), the WAC movement became popular first in the United Kingdom and then in the United States (see Nightingale 1988a and Walvoord 1996 for a history of the development of the WAC movement). The

main idea underpinning WAC is that it is not only the job of the language teacher or writing “specialist” to help students to develop their writing but rather it is the role of all teachers and lecturers.

Among proponents of WAC, two very different, and seemingly contradictory, orientations have emerged. Kirscht, Levine and Reiff (1994) call these two: *writing-to-learn* versus *writing-in-the-disciplines*. In the former, the emphasis is on how writing (within disciplines) can contribute to the learning process. Zinsser (1988:16) expresses the link between writing and learning well when he says, “Writing organises and clarifies our thoughts. Writing is how we think our way into a subject and make it our own. Writing enables us to find out what we know – and what we don’t know – about whatever we’re trying to learn” (in Radloff 1994:2). I quote extensively from Langer and Applebee to further explain this orientation:

The role of writing in thinking can be conceptualised as resulting from some combination of (1) the permanence of the written word, allowing the writer to rethink and revise over an extended period; (2) the explicitness required in writing, if meaning is to remain constant beyond the context in which it was originally written; (3) the resources provided by the conventional forms of discourse for organising and thinking through new relationships among ideas; and (4) the active nature of writing, providing a medium for exploring implications entailed within otherwise unexamined assumptions (1987:4-5).

This understanding of the role of writing is informed by an understanding of writing as a *process*. The process approach as it is implemented at universities by AD practitioners, teachers on courses like ELAP and some mainstream courses has been adapted. The focus is not on the students’ personal experiences. Students are helped to understand that at university it is not acceptable to write only about everyday, common sense knowledge. In addition they are encouraged to view writing as a thinking process; a means of exploring and constructing knowledge.

Sommers’ research (1980), with novice writers at university has shown that they often don’t have the strategies for coping with the demands of essay

writing: “They lack procedures or heuristics to help them reorder lines of reasoning or ask questions about their purposes and readers” (383).

Therefore, as Boughey, points out:

In order for this process of writing, revising, and rewriting to be developmental, ... some form of constructive feedback on successive pieces of writing is usually desirable, and often necessary (1997:127-128).

The emphasis on process in the process approaches has influenced the teaching of writing in that the idea of revision has assumed a central position. Another positive influence of the process approach has been the “thorough rethinking of responses to student writing” (Grabe and Kaplan 1996:378).

The role of a respondent is thus to help students to learn the content, concepts and ideas in their disciplines through the process of writing, receiving constructive feedback on their writing, and then using these comments to revise their work in order to better understand and organise their thoughts in writing.

Grabe and Kaplan (1996, citing research by Fathman and Whalley 1995 and Ferris 1995) believe that there is persuasive evidence that written feedback is a viable and effective approach to developing student writing when it is used appropriately. They say:

Responding to students’ writing can greatly influence student attitudes to writing and their motivation for future learning. Students can easily become confused by unclear, vague, or ambiguous responses and can become frustrated with their writing progress. Alternatively, students can be positively motivated to explore many areas of knowledge and personal creativity through supportive and constructive responses to their writing (1996:377).

Unfortunately there are no universal “rules” about how to achieve the latter. The next part of this section examines some of the research through which insights have been gleaned regarding what works for student writers in terms of the *focus* of feedback .

Many of the writers on this topic have stressed the importance of respondents deciding what it is they value about students' writing and commenting mostly on that level. Much of the research has shown that comments need to focus more on *what* the student is saying (that is, ideas, concepts, arguments, and so on) as opposed to more surface issues such as spelling and punctuation (Sommers 1982; Paxton 1994; Grabe and Kaplan 1996; Hodges 1997). These researchers are not denying the importance of form but as Paxton (1995:195) says: "You could eliminate all surface level errors ... and still leave other vital aspects of the literacy problem untouched".

Straub, as a result of his research says: "Comments that recognise the integrity of the student as a learning writer and that look to engage him in substantive revision are better than those that do not" (1996:248). Thus if the respondent's focus is on the meanings being expressed by a writer then her concern will be with helping the writer to *revise*, not just edit her work.

Hodges sums it up: "In a very real sense, the best response always addresses content and presentation of content above all and always speaks to the writer in terms of revision" (1997:85). Elbow (1997) believes that students can seldom benefit from criticism of more than two or three problems in one piece of writing and therefore the crucial decision is which problems to focus on. Ferris (1997:333), on the other hand, cites research which found that:

Simultaneous attention to content and form (a false dichotomy, in any case) does not short-circuit students' ability to revise their ideas but may in fact improve their end products, because they receive more accuracy-oriented feedback throughout the writing process.

The following are some of the areas which have been suggested as being important. Feedback should focus on helping students to:

- understand and acquire the "rules and conventions" of specific disciplines
- clarify their understanding of concepts and their way of expressing them
- understand how and when to use and acknowledge sources in their writing

- include their own voices (where it is appropriate) or to include the voices (viewpoints) of others
- argue more effectively, by for example, challenging unsupported assumptions.
(based on, for example, Paxton 1994; Boughey 1995; Sořcinelli and Elbow 1997).

For many respondents the rationale behind giving feedback at the draft stage is to provide writers with a sense of audience. Writers need, for example, to be aware of the need to provide an explicit context for the reader so that the reader can successfully negotiate the meaning of the text (Boughey 1997) (see section 2.2.1.1 *Interpersonal meaning* in this chapter). They also need to provide sufficient cohesive devices in the text to make it coherent for the reader (see section 2.2.1.1 *Textual meaning* in this chapter).

2.2 The influence of social theories on the drafting-responding process

The second orientation in WAC, *writing-in-the-disciplines*, views writing from a social constructivist point of view. The emphasis is on the teaching of writing based on an understanding of writing as a social practice embedded within specific discourse communities. Vygotsky sees language as a social and communicative activity and he believes that in becoming literate the child internalises the structures of “socially meaningful literacy activities” (Langer and Applebee 1987:139). In an academic context this means that students need to master the academic discourses, each with their own conventions and modes of inquiry, of the disciplines they are studying.

As Angelil-Carter (1995) points out, academic discourses are deeply, yet often unconsciously, understood by lecturers but they are seldom made explicit to students. Academic literacy can only be achieved by engaging with the discipline content, especially in writing. In ELAP “there are themes which are ‘academic’ in nature and that require progressively abstract thinking” (ELAP co-ordinator, personal communication, 1999). It is through grappling with the ideas and concepts while they are writing academic essays that students are initiated into the general academic literacy which will enable them to gain access to specific disciplines.

Kirscht *et al.* believe that the dichotomy between these two orientations (writing-to-learn and writing-in-the-disciplines) is false and that if viewed from a social constructivist perspective, they can be reconciled.

They [writers such as Meyers, Bazerman and MacDonald] are taking the 'learning' in *writing-to-learn* beyond the assimilation of content into questions of how knowledge itself is constructed. If conventions are seen as rhetorical, as the way that questions are asked and answers sought in a given field, writing becomes a way not only to interact with declarative knowledge, but also to develop procedural knowledge concerning that field – to learn *how* knowledge has been constructed as well as *what* (1994:374).

It is this dual understanding that forms the theory behind the drafting-responding process which is used to develop writing in the ELAP course. The objective of the process is to initiate students into an understanding of both *what* knowledge is required as well as *how* it is constructed.

At a broad level the approach to writing in the ELAP course has thus been strongly influenced by both the process and social constructivist approaches to developing students' writing. Still within a social constructivist approach I now explain how responding works at a deeper level, using Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics framework (Halliday 1985; Halliday and Hasan 1985; Eggins 1994; Clark and Ivanič 1997; Eggins and Martin 1997).

2.2.1 A theory of how responding works from a systemic functional linguistics perspective

Eggins says that systemic functional linguistics (SFL) "... is increasingly being recognised as a very useful descriptive and interpretive framework for viewing language as a strategic, meaning-making resource" (1994:1). By quoting Halliday (1995:xx), she goes on to explain that the most generalisable application of SFL is "to understand the quality of texts: why a text means what it does, and why it is valued as it is". I therefore found, within SFL, a

useful theoretical framework for explaining how comments made by a respondent at the draft stage of the essay writing process can help a student to develop her ability to write academic texts.

According to Halliday the *forms* of a language are organised with respect to the *functions* that language serve the users. In other words, each element in the language can be accounted for by describing how it functions (Butt, Fahey, Spinks and Yallop 1995). All language form is thus associated with *meaning* and meaning can only occur within a specific *context*. Systemic functional linguists describe texts as being written within a context of culture and within a context of situation. Both these contexts influence the language choices writers make in order to create meaning in their writing. Figure 1 shows the relationship between text and the context of situation and the context of culture. Each of these contexts will be discussed in turn.

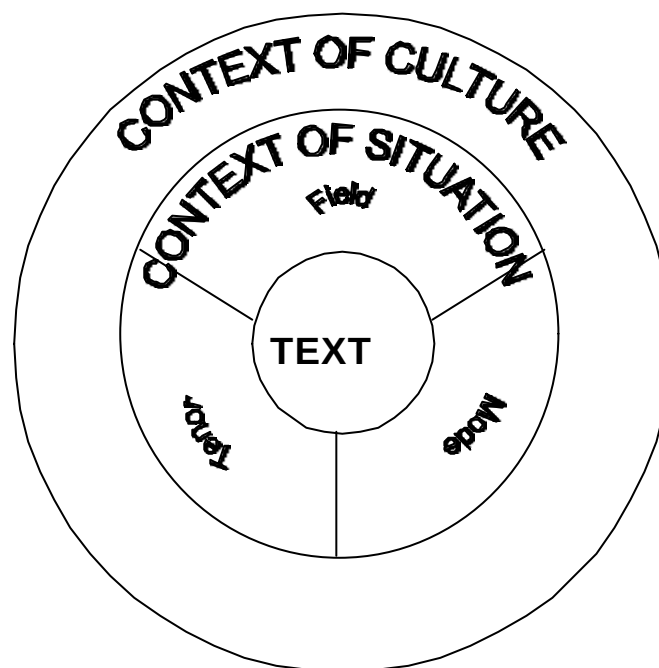


Figure 1: The relationship between text and context of situation and context of culture (based on Butt *et al.* 1995:12).

2.2.1.1 The context of situation

The context of situation is “the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning” (Halliday and Hasan 1985:46). The fundamental purpose of language is to make meanings and within a context of situation any text makes three types of meaning simultaneously. Halliday calls these metafunctions of language: *experiential* (or ideational) meanings, *interpersonal* meanings and *textual* meanings. These metafunctions are reflected by three aspects or parameters of the context of situation, namely, the *field*, *mode* and *tenor* of discourse. The implication is thus that there are systematic links between the organisation of language and the organisation of the context. The relationship between the two is realisational (that is, the text is used to predict the context and the context is used to predict the text) and dialogic (see Table 1 in section 2.1 in chapter 4). Macken and Slade (1993:212) explain the relationship like this:

It is the hook up between three aspects of the context of situation and three general kinds of meaning which a text makes that enables linguists to move in a predictive way between text and context.

Experiential meaning is used to construct field, interpersonal meaning is used to negotiate tenor and textual meaning is used to develop mode (Eggins and Martin 1997:238-243). I will now explain the three types of meanings (with the contextual features associated with each one) and how I believe responding can help students to express these meanings.

Experiential meanings

Experiential meanings refer to the “real world”; to the *field* or discipline within which the writing is situated. In effect, what the text is about; how it reflects reality.

‘Field’ discovers in text the subject specific lexis and other textual features such as the metadiscourse through which a discipline’s preferred argument structures are made explicit (Al-Ali and Holme 1999:8).

Experiential meaning and mode are linked to the discussion earlier in this chapter (section 2.1) of the respondent's role in terms of helping students with "writing-to-learn"; helping them, through their writing, to learn more about the domain content (subject knowledge) of a particular discipline. Feedback at the draft stage is most useful when the focus is on the meaning, the concepts, and arguments that the writer wishes to convey rather than surface errors. As Paxton (1995:195) says, "Surface level errors are often an indication of a deeper problem in understanding the concepts and being able to express them in their own words".

Much of the feedback given at the draft stage of essay writing concentrates on helping students to understand how knowledge is constructed in academic essays. It is designed to help them to see writing as a knowledge-transforming process and not merely as a knowledge-transmitting process (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987) (see section 1.2.1 in this chapter).

Linked to the above is another difficulty often encountered by students coming into academia, namely that of distinguishing between common sense understandings of concepts and more technical "academic" understandings of concepts and issues. Both Eggins (1994) and Geisler (1994) talk about "experts" needing to go beyond everyday understandings in terms of the domain content of specific disciplines.

Academic writers incorporate these "academic" understandings through the use of sources and referencing. As Thesen (1994:30) says, "The convention of referencing is what characterises the academic essay more than any other feature" and Angelil-Carter (1995:99) argues that "... referencing is a fundamental part of the academic discourse ... essential to ... an understanding of knowledge as constructed, debated and contested". Referencing thus has a strong epistemological basis but students, especially novices in the academic world, don't necessarily understand epistemology in the way that "experts" in academic disciplines do. They tend to see knowledge as clear cut and uncontested. Carson (1993 in Johns 1997:63), in

a large-scale study with undergraduate students, found that “drawing from and integrating textual sources were two of the major challenges students face in attaining academic literacy”. A respondent can thus play an important role in helping a novice writer to know why and when it is necessary to reference in an essay.

Domain content is not a set of fixed facts simply “found” by the discipline but it is socially constructed by the discipline’s members and “intimately related to the rhetorical processes underlying the reading and writing of texts” (Geisler 1994:211). If knowledge is treated as something to be constructed then both rhetorical process and domain content will necessarily be involved.

Therefore, the two-fold objective of responding to students essays at the draft stage are, firstly, to assist students with using writing to learn in the discipline (*what* knowledge) and secondly to help students to begin to write like “experts” in the discipline (*how* it is constructed) (see section 2.2 in this chapter).

Interpersonal meanings

Interpersonal meanings are linked to the dimension of *tenor* which refers to the social role relationships played by the participants (for our purposes this is the writer-reader relationship). Part of the purpose of feedback on draft essays is to help the student to have a clearer understanding of the writer-reader relationship in order to understand fully what is involved in writing (Clark and Ivanič 1997). It is also to help students to see how their language choices convey their feelings and attitudes (towards the field and the reader) and how they might better control the identity and attitudes they want to reveal (Ivanič and Simpson 1992).

There seem to be two related aspects to this function of language. Firstly, the writer needs to bear in mind who the reader is; to have a clear sense of audience. Secondly, the writer has to establish a relationship with the reader;

to position herself in relation to the reader. I will briefly discuss each aspect in turn.

One of the main aims of responding to students' writing is to give the writer a sense of audience. Flower (1981 in Bartholomae 1985) believes that one of the major difficulties experienced by novice writers is negotiating the transition between "writer-based" and "reader-based" writing. Experienced writers are able to imagine how a reader will respond to their writing; they have developed a sense of audience awareness. Kuriloff (1996) believes that the role played by audience awareness in effective writing cannot be overestimated. Bartholomae suggests that "Teaching students to revise for readers, then, will better prepare them to write initially with a reader in mind" (1985:139). Mallonee and Breihan (1985) express a similar idea when they suggest that comments at the draft stage could help the writer to be two people at the same time: writer and critical reader. I like the way Graff (1992b in Hillocks 1995:7) expresses himself:

... a deconstructive view of writing suggests that to write well, you have to become a reader, to divide yourself from the text (from self), to generate a second, third or fourth self to see what is written from the outside.

The respondent, by providing a sense of audience and setting up a dialogue through questions and comments, can help the writer to negotiate meaning in much the same way as a participant in a conversation (Sommers 1982; Goodman and Paxton 1994; and Boughey 1997).

Writers use words to establish the relationship they want to create between themselves and their readers. Clark and Ivanič point out that:

Texts are more or less authoritative, more or less believable, in part because of the language choices that writers make in connection with the certainty of their assertions. This aspect of language is called 'modality' by linguists such as Halliday and Fowler, and it is central to the writer-reader relationship (1997:171).

They go on to suggest the following categories of modality: modal adverbs (e.g. perhaps, questionably); evaluative adjectives/adjectivals (e.g. undeniable, tentative); modal auxiliaries (e.g. can/could, may, must); lexical verbs (e.g. think, suggest); context-dependent nouns (i.e. nouns that summarise and categorise previous text, e.g. problem, explanation); passivisation; appeals to authority (e.g. Kress argues that ...); lexical choice (e.g. “collateral damage” as opposed to “civilian death”) (171-172).

Geisler (1994) talks about the fact that this kind of *metadiscourse* (discourse about discourse) is generally only encountered in academic writing where it is used as a tool for extending, questioning, overturning, etc. claims. Academics use metadiscourse to suggest conditional status (e.g. “According to Smith Democracy is”... rather than “Democracy is ...). In this way knowledge is presented as socially constructed and contested. Many students will arrive at university only having read text books in which this kind of metadiscourse is absent and knowledge is presented as being fixed and uncontested. Through challenging sweeping statements and generalisations a respondent can teach a novice writer about how tentativeness works in academic writing.

The function of interpersonal meanings is inextricably linked to how writers perceive their identities in their writing. Ivanič and Simpson put it this way:

For us the question: ‘Who’s who in academic writing?’ is one of the keys to being able to write. Through experience of reading and writing academic texts we have begun to realise that the identification of ‘I’ is critical to meaning and credibility. Students need to identify the people behind the texts they read, establish an identity for themselves as readers and writers, and recognise the relationship between themselves and the tutors who will read their work (1992:142).

It is part of the aim of a respondent to help students to distinguish the different “voices” in their writing; to help them to gauge how much authority and authorial presence is appropriate according to the discourse conventions of different disciplines in which they are required to write; to help them to understand what “giving one’s own opinion” means in academic discourse

(Boughey 1999). Students can be guided to understand when and how to use the ideas of others according to the appropriate academic conventions and so avoid being accused of plagiarism.

Linked to identity is the issue of the relations of power between the participants in the context of situation. For example, a student writing for a lecturer who has more power and status and is perceived as having more knowledge and experience than the student (Clark and Ivanič 1997). Being given the opportunity to have their drafts responded to at a stage prior to marking, may reduce the power differences between students and lecturers and hopefully allow students to feel more confident about their writing.

Textual meanings

Textual meanings are linked to the dimension of *mode* which is the role that language plays in the interaction. Different linguistic patterns correspond to different modes. The most obvious differences in terms of mode are between the spoken and written mode. In Western cultures written language differs from spoken language in terms of organisation and structure, grammar and lexical choices. Cope and Kalantzis make the point that "...the most powerful genres are those generically and grammatically most distant from orality – for example, scientific reports which attempt to objectify the world, or arguments which are specifically designed to persuade" (1993:6).

Many students entering academia struggle to differentiate between these two modes and write as they speak. In addition, academic writing is different from the writing most students are required to do at school (for example Geisler 1994; Johns 1997; Hutchings 1998). Academic writing is more ordered than speech: it has a definite beginning and an end and moves from one idea to another in a logical, linear sequence. The ideas in academic writing need to be relevant to the topic and need to be expressed in a clear and exact way. Academic writing needs to be explicit, uses "prestige" lexis and standard grammar (Eggins 1994).

Many of these features of academic writing can be explained using the ideas of Chafe (1982; 1985) and Tannen (1982; 1985). Chafe believes that the two main dimensions that distinguish written language from spoken language are determined by two basic differences in the processes involved in writing and speaking. Firstly, because the process of writing is slow and speaking is much faster, writing has an *integrated* quality whereas speaking has a *fragmented* quality. Secondly, because writing takes place alone and speaking is part of social interaction, writing has a *detached* quality whereas speaking has a quality of *involvement*.

As a result of the slower pace in writing, a writer has time to concentrate on the conscious organisation of linguistic resources, resulting in more complex and sophisticated use of linguistic devices (also Tannen 1982). As Chafe says, "In writing we have time to mould a succession of ideas into a more complex, coherent integrated whole, making use of devices we seldom use in speaking" (1982:37). For example, he found that formal written language contains more nominalizations, genitive subjects and objects, participles, attributive adjectives, conjoined phrases, series, sequences of prepositional phrases, complement clauses and relative clauses. Because a writer has time she can use these devices to integrate more content into her writing (1982:44).

The face-to-face nature of spoken language inevitably means that there is greater involvement among speakers and listeners than there is between writers and readers who are isolated in time and space. In a similar vein to Chafe's ideas about detachment and involvement, Tannen (1982) talks in terms of the *relative focus on interpersonal involvement* in discourse. If one thinks of a continuum with everyday conversation on one end and academic, expository prose on the other then there is almost no interpersonal involvement in the latter. The focus in academic writing is far more on the information being conveyed than on the interpersonal relationship between the writer and the reader. In face-to-face speech situations the interactants can make use of the immediate context to negotiate meaning, they can ask for

clarification and often they share similar social backgrounds. Whereas in writing the reader has to rely heavily on the text itself to provide the necessary clues to meaning (Swales 1990b:189). Tannen (1985:140) says

successful writing, which seeks to lexicalise necessary background and cohesive relationships, requires not production of discourse with no sense of audience but rather the positing of a hypothetical audience in order to fulfil its needs.

A respondent, through her comments, can help a writer to be aware of a hypothetical audience and encourage her, through words, to provide the necessary contextual information to convey her message successfully.

The ways in which a writer can assist a reader to negotiate the text, are realised differently in different genres but in conventional academic writing one of the obvious ways is through providing cohesive devices (“signposts”); through making the links between ideas clear. Cohesive devices are the surface manifestations of the underlying relations that contribute towards the coherence of a text. Grabe and Kaplan in their summary of the research name the following means by which cohesion operates in texts: reference, substitution, ellipses, conjunction, and lexical relationships of repetition, inclusion, synonymy/antonymy and collocation (1996:56).

Tannen (1985:140) says that expository prose “depends for its impact on impressing the audience with the strength and completeness of its argument, that is, with aspects of the lexicalised message”. The respondent can assist a writer in this regard by helping her to be more aware of the need to write in an integrated way, to provide an explicit context for readers and to guide readers through her writing by providing explicit signposting.

In this section I have explained how responding can work to help writers to express three types of meanings. Using this conceptual framework emphasises the link between what Geisler (1994) calls “domain content” and “rhetorical processes”. In order for novice writers to become expert writers they need expertise in both these areas.

2.2.1.2 The context of culture

... making the intellectual culture explicit for new learners is the best way of helping them effect a successful integration into it (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:13).

The immediate context of situation in which the writing focused on in this research, took place was the ELAP course. But, as Halliday and Hasan (1985) say, there is also a broader background against which the text has to be interpreted: its *context of culture*. He goes on to say,

Any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor, and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality – a package, so to speak, of things that typically go together in the culture (1985:46).

In the case of this research, the context of culture, was the university as a whole. All written work done by students is done within the context of a specific discipline (situation) but their texts are influenced by and derive their meaning from the university as an institution in the culture. There are many factors which constitute the context of culture. Halliday describes the context of culture of school. I have adapted it to describe aspects of the context of culture of a university: the concept of education, and of educational knowledge as distinct from common-sense knowledge; the notion of the curriculum and of disciplines; the complex role structures of lecturers, heads of departments, deans, departments of education, and so on; and the unspoken assumptions about learning and the place of language within it (adapted from Halliday and Hasan 1985:46). Clark and Ivanič (1997:67) describe the context of culture as

... the whole historical and socio-political context in which language is used; the 'cultural knowledge', the competing systems of values and beliefs of which writers need to be aware and which condition the choices they make in any act of writing.

All of these aspects of the context of culture, together, determine how a text is interpreted in its context of situation. Clark and Ivanič go on to say that the context of culture therefore consists of values, beliefs, different constructions of reality and an array of social roles and relationships and the associated practices such as genres (see section 1.3.2 in this chapter) and discourses. For students to begin the process of becoming “experts” in the disciplines it is necessary for them to acquire the genres and discourses of the university. Gee (1990:147), influenced by Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of learning, believes that Discourses are mastered by:

... enculturation (‘apprenticeship’) into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the Discourse.

The scaffolding can be used to encourage learning in what Vygotsky calls the zone of proximal development (ZPD) which he defined as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (1978:86).

Bruner (1977) used the term *scaffolding* to describe the assistance provided by an adult to a learner in the ZPD. The respondent creates a ZPD and provides scaffolding, through the feedback on writing, in order to enculturate her “apprentice” into the context of culture of the university. Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) talk about “cognitive apprenticeship” in which knowledge and skills are handed down from a mentor or master to an apprentice in the context of everyday use. The respondent could be viewed as a mentor whose feedback on essays serves the purpose of mediating new understandings or conceptions, both in terms of “domain content” and “rhetorical processes” (Geisler 1994). Paxton (1994), using Vygotsky’s ideas, talks about a tutor guiding “the student by questioning and clarification so that she learns to express her meaning more effectively” (15). She goes on to say that possibly at a later stage, the process will be internalised and student writers will

become critical readers of their own writing (see section 2.2.1.1 *Interpersonal meaning* earlier in this chapter).

The following is a description by Dison and Rule (1996:87) of the experiences of many students at the University of the Witwatersrand. It could apply to students at many universities as they try to adapt to a new context of culture and new contexts of situation:

Students enter into these institutional and disciplinary cultures with their own backgrounds and assumptions about knowledge and learning. The novice student has to engage in a complex mediation between his or her own language and experience and the authoritative discourse of the institution, and this is often an extremely difficult and traumatic process. Whereas at school an ability to memorise and reproduce key content is often sufficient to excel, these strategies can lead to failure in the culture of tertiary education.

The context of culture, the university, provides the range of possibilities (“appropriate” behaviour) in the contexts of situation, the various disciplines. As Halliday and Hasan say, a separate linguistic model of the context of culture does not yet exist, “But in describing the context of situation, it is helpful to build in some indication of the cultural background, and the assumptions that have to be made if the text is to be interpreted or produced in the way ... [the system] intends” (1985:47). For that reason, the interpretation and discussion of the data in chapter 4 will focus predominantly on the context of situation. For clarity the two contexts are dealt with separately, but in reality, when examining the impact of the context on writing, it is difficult to separate out the two contexts – both affect the writing process and outcomes (Clark and Ivanič 1997).

3. Conclusion

Becoming literate involves becoming acculturated: learning to read and write the culture. For academics wishing to hasten this process, the key to success lies in developing practical ways of making their own understanding of the university culture explicit and accessible to their students (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:19).

In this chapter I provided the theoretical background against which to examine how a tutor in the English Language for Academic Purposes course, through feedback on draft essays, tried to make her “understanding of the university culture explicit and accessible” to her students. In order to do this I first outlined the three major approaches to developing writing, namely the current-traditional, process and social constructivist approaches. I argued that the drafting-responding process is most influenced by the process and social constructivist approaches. Because SFL provides a theoretical framework for how language is related to its social environment, I used it to explain in more depth how the drafting-responding process can work to develop students’ writing. I placed particular emphasis on the notions of the context of situation and the context of culture as both are necessary for an adequate understanding of texts.

Not all of the theory presented in this chapter is actively drawn on in the analysis and discussion of my data in Chapter 4. I believe though, that it is important to include it as background to understanding how the drafting-responding process works.

In the next chapter the research methodology and the research process are outlined. In that chapter I explain in more detail how the theoretical framework based on SFL was used in order to analyse and discuss the data.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I locate the research within a broadly interpretivist orientation with some elements of a critical orientation. The methodology, data collection methods, analysis and interpretation of data and how the research was written up are briefly discussed. Having sketched the theoretical background, the chapter concludes with an outline of the research process.

1. Research orientations

It is important for researchers to be conscious of the way in which their underlying beliefs (values, assumptions, and so on) influence how they frame the research, how they do the research and how they interpret the findings. Fien and Hillcoat (1996:31) discussing van Manen's ideas (1990:27) say:

... it is the paradigm or tradition within which the research question is framed and which guides the selection of research objectives, and consequent data-gathering and analysis techniques. It thus comprises 'the fundamental assumptions' about 'the general orientation to life, the view of knowledge, and the sense of what it means to be human' that direct the particular mode or method of inquiry in a study.

Different orientations to research begin with very different assumptions about knowledge, reality and values. This results in different ways of constructing research problems and different choices of methodologies. Guba (1990) believes that researchers need to understand the basic ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions of the various research orientations or paradigms. He suggests that in order to do this, it is useful to answer the following questions: What is *knowledge* and how does it come to be? What is the *research interest*? What is the nature of *reality*? What *values* underlie the research? What *methodology* and *methods* are used in the research?

In examining research orientations it is useful to look at Jurgen Habermas' theory of knowledge which arose out of his desire to show that there are many different types of legitimate knowledge other than a positivistic understanding of knowledge. He calls it a theory of "knowledge-constitutive interests" because knowledge is constructed ("constituted") on the basis of three fundamental human interests, each of which represents what kind of knowledge "counts". He calls them the "technical", the "practical" and the "emancipatory" interests. Interests develop as a result of the needs of people and are shaped by specific historical and social contexts (Carr and Kemmis 1986:133-135; Kember and Gow 1992:298).

In order to situate my research, the next section will look very briefly at the major orientations to research in terms of these knowledge-constitutive interests and the other questions raised above. There are different ways of categorising orientations to research. I (like, for example, Usher 1996) have chosen to categorise them broadly as follows: positivistic (empirical-analytical) orientation; interpretivist (hermeneutical) orientation, critical orientation and postmodern/ poststructural orientation. The first three are closely linked to Habermas' knowledge-constitutive interests described above. The non-Habermasian category, *deconstruction* can be added, which is linked to the fourth orientation to research, namely the postmodern/ poststructural orientations (Lather 1991b:7). Although I will discuss each orientation separately, this does not reflect the "untidy reality" (Lather 1991b:11) of research, the fact that most researchers adopt combinations and that within one orientation there are many positions. Possibly a useful stance to adopt is that of a reflective conversation between different orientations.

1.1 Positivistic (empirical-analytical) orientation

The *technical* interest, associated with a positivistic orientation to research, is the interest of people in acquiring instrumental knowledge which will "facilitate their technical control over natural objects" (Carr and Kemmis 1986:135). The view in this orientation is that knowledge is absolute, universal, predictable and generalisable; the facts are "out there" for the researcher to gather (Guba

1990). In addition knowledge is seen to be value-free and neutral. The view of reality is that there is a single reality which is external to human beings. The researcher's job is thus to discover the "true" nature of reality, how it "truly" works and the ultimate aim of research is to predict and control reality. Methodologies associated with this orientation are empirical and scientific, employing methods designed to reduce researcher bias and allow for value-free research. Usher (1996:13) says that it is "...an approach that is *unreflexive* because it focuses exclusively on methods and outcomes and fails to ask any questions about the research process itself".

1.2 Interpretivist (hermeneutic, constructivist) orientation

The *practical* interest, associated with an interpretivist or hermeneutic orientation to research, "generates knowledge in the form of interpretive understanding which can inform and guide practical judgement" (Carr and Kemmis 1986:135). In this orientation, knowledge and reality are seen as socially constructed. Thus the knowledge and reality constructed through research is relative to the research context and there can be multiple constructions of any situation. Researchers in this orientation are not concerned with generalisation, prediction and control but with interpretation, meaning and illumination (Usher 1996). In this orientation, researchers do not believe that research can be value-free and researchers' own values and beliefs need to be made explicit. The methods used are aimed at documenting, describing and understanding a specific context "as it is" rather than to generalise or replicate. In addition, research in this orientation stresses the importance of discovering the meanings which research participants give to their activities.

1.3 Critical orientation

The *emancipatory* interest, associated with critical orientations to research, requires going beyond exploration of subjective meanings and understandings in order to empower and transform, in some way, the society and/or the people who have participated in the research. Critical research shares many

of the features of interpretive research except that critical research has a political emphasis (Guba 1990); the reason for doing the research is not merely to understand the status quo but to challenge and transform it (researchers are not satisfied with simply increasing knowledge); and there is far more emphasis on the broader social, cultural and historical context. In this orientation there is recognition that method is inherently political and tied to issues of power and legitimacy. The role of the researcher is thus one of constant critical reflection. Critics of this view of research (for example Lather 1991b) believe that critical researchers often facilitate the transfer of power from one group to another, replace one ideology with another. Usher (1996:25) puts it this way; "A major problem with critical theory is its self proclaimed commitment to an emancipatory project posited as a universal value".

1.4 Postmodern/Poststructural orientation

Researchers operating from a postmodern orientation believe that all knowledge is emergent, temporal, contested, local, unstable, partial, constantly in process and the product of relations of power. There are no more grand/meta-narratives to explain the world – we can only understand what is local, in its context (Lyotard 1984 in Lather 1991a; Usher 1996). There is no reality beyond language; reality is constituted in and through discourse. The interest is thus to *deconstruct*; to ask the Foucauldian question: how do the practices to discover the truth about ourselves (that is, our research methods) affect our lives? (Lather 1991a:111). Researchers believe that they must resist speaking for others by imposing interests on them in an attempt to emancipate them. Researchers need to interrogate their positions constantly, to analyse the power relations between themselves and the researched.

1.5 My research orientations

In keeping with the social constructivist theoretical framework (see sections 1.3 and 2.2 in chapter 2) which informs my understanding of education and literacy in general, writing and the drafting-responding process specifically, the overall orientation underpinning my research is interpretive. Fien and Hillcoat (1996:28) say “Research methods in the interpretivist paradigm place value on the thorough exploration of meaning in a specific context”. Kemmis (1988) believes that interpretive methods “attempt to define the problems of the field in ways which represent the understandings of the practitioners” (in Kember and Kelly 1994:3). And finally, Kuiper (1997:4) says, “The general aim of this interpretive or hermeneutical paradigm is to describe phenomena and to some extent to explain them”. These three definitions, in general terms, capture my orientation to the research. My overall interest in this research was to develop a more in-depth understanding of how the drafting-responding process as it is in the ELAP course helped students with the process of beginning to acquire the academic literacy they needed to cope with the academic demands placed on them in terms of the immediate context of situation of the ELAP course and in terms of the broader context of culture of the university. I was also interested in understanding how both the students and the respondent experienced the drafting-responding process.

Although the research did not set out to have any explicit critical-
emancipatory aims I do believe that it may start a process which at a later stage could have an impact on the social environment and the people within it (Kember and Gow 1992:307). The research findings may influence lecturers’ practices and attitudes within the ELAP course and more widely in the institution. In addition, I believe my own practices have been positively influenced by the research.

In the next two sections I examine the methodology and methods used in the research. I use the term “methodology” in a broad sense to mean the overall guiding strategies for doing the research; how researchers gain knowledge about the world (Guba 1990). In this case, the research took the form of a

qualitative case-study. I use the term methods to mean the tools and techniques for doing the research. Neither the methodology nor the methods are tied to any particular research orientation although the orientation(s) will influence the way the methods are used in the research (Guba and Lincoln 1989).

2. Methodology

2.1 Qualitative research

The research reported on in this thesis made use of qualitative case study as an overall research methodology. Neuman (1997) makes the observation that interpretive and critical orientations to research in the social sciences most often make use of qualitative methodologies. Denzin and Lincoln's description of qualitative research captures my understanding of the methodology employed in this research:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (1998:3).

Qualitative research therefore places emphasis on processes and meanings rather than measurement. Berg (1998:3) says that qualitative research "refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" whereas quantitative research "refers to counts and measures of things". Qualitative research stresses the socially constructed nature of reality and the value-laden nature of research (Denzin and Lincoln 1998).

2.2 Case study

Creswell (1994:12 in Leedy 1997:157) says case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher “explores a single entity or phenomenon (“the case”) bounded by time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group) and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time”. Case studies are used to research phenomena in naturalistic contexts.

In addition, as Adelman *et al.* (1980) say, “Case studies recognise the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths” (in Cohen and Manion 1994:123). It therefore seems to me that the case study methodology is particularly suited to research in education as it can be used to increase understanding of what occurs in particular educational, cultural and historical contexts and explore the understanding of the people in those contexts. For some people, the reliance on a single case poses problems of how far it is possible to generalise the results beyond the confines of the case (Bryman 1988; Berg 1998). This is linked to questions regarding the “objectivity” of the methodology (see section 5.2 in this chapter). My belief is that case studies which address important questions regarding educational practices, what works and what doesn’t, can add to a body of research and add to theoretical understandings of teaching and learning grounded in specific contexts (Walker 1992). As Johnson (1992) says, it is useful to compare the findings of case studies and search for useful general principles. She goes on to say that the case study approach has been widely used to examine writing processes at different levels and in a variety of contexts (80).

In my research, I was interested in understanding in more depth how the comments on draft essays helped the ELAP students to develop academic literacy. As part of exploring that, I needed to understand how the respondent and the students perceived the drafting-responding process. But as Adelman *et al.* say, case studies can also be a “step to action”. The insights gained may be directly interpreted and put to use in the context of situation of the ELAP course or in the context of culture of the university more broadly. It is

possible that the results of the research could find a more generalised application. The ways in which case studies are presented allow readers to make judgements regarding the implications and broader applicability of the findings for themselves. This contributes towards the “‘democratization’ of decision-making (and knowledge itself)” (Adelman *et al.* 1980 in Cohen and Manion 1994:123).

In this research the case consisted of the first academic essays (drafts and final versions) produced by seven students, as part of their course work in the ELAP course in the first semester of this year. Additional data was obtained by interviewing the students and the tutor who responded to their draft essays.

3. Methods

Methods are the data collection and analysis techniques used to operationalise a particular research methodology (Fien and Hillcoat 1996:35). Qualitative researchers use a wide range of interconnected methods in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. Exactly which methods are used depend on the research questions and they in turn depend on the context in which the research is conducted (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). In my research my main data consisted of firstly, the students’ drafts and final versions of ELAP essays (including the comments made by the respondent on the draft essays) and secondly, the interviews I conducted with the students and the respondent.

3.1 Essays

The students’ texts and respondent’s comments were raw data which I, as the researcher had to interpret, extrapolate meaning from through a type of discourse analysis, creating my own text which Denzin and Lincoln (1994 in Ely, Vinz, Downing and Anzul 1997) call “research text”. This was then used to recreate a “working interpretive document” (224). A draft of this document was given to the research participants (for member checking) and colleagues

for feedback. After that I used the systemic functional linguistics framework (see section 2.2.1 in chapter 2 and chapter 4) to analyse the data.

3.2 Interviews

Many theorists when talking about the value of data captured from interviews emphasise the fact that interviews give participants a voice in the research process. As Nielsen says “To explain and understand any human social behaviour ... we need to know the meaning attached to it by the participants themselves” (in Leki and Carson 1997:39). Seidman expresses a similar sentiment, that at the root of interviewing “is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (1991:3). From a post-modern perspective, Kvale emphasises the constructive nature of the knowledge constructed through the interaction by the participants in the interview. Therefore, as a method, the interview is neither objective nor subjective, “its essence is *intersubjective* interaction” (1996:159).

Some research theorists (for instance, Carspecken 1996; Kvale 1996 and Ely *et al.* 1997) believe that the ideal qualitative interview is semi-structured, allowing the participants lots of flexibility. Carspecken (1996) suggests that the interview guide should consist of lead-off questions to open up a topic domain and then some possible follow-up questions for each topic. The interviews I conducted with the research participants (both the students and the respondent) were semi-structured. See Appendices 4 and 5 for the questions which I used as guides in the interviews.

Experienced researchers usually suggest that interviews are tape recorded. Seidman (1991), for example, believes that to work most reliably with the words of participants, the researcher has to transform the spoken words into written text to study. The transcribed texts plus the tape recording are the material for the subsequent interpretation of meaning (Kvale 1996). Seidman (1991:87) goes on to say that inevitably the researcher’s consciousness will play an important role in the interpretation of the interview data but that “...

that consciousness must interact with the words of the participant recorded as fully and as accurately as possible". All the interviews I conducted were tape recorded and then fully transcribed. I checked the accuracy of the transcriptions by listening to the recordings while reading the transcriptions.

Different orientations to research highlight different aspects of knowledge relevant to the qualitative interview. From an interpretivist perspective, understanding, the interpretation of meaning is the central theme. There is an emphasis on the researcher's prior knowledge of the subject matter of the interview and this will undoubtedly affect the way the text, which is generated from the interview, will be interpreted (Kvale 1996). I felt all the time while I was trying to make sense of the data that my background experiences with student writing and responding was influencing what I "saw" and "heard" in the data.

It is important to look at the effects of the power differences in interviews because as Kvale (1996:126) says, it is not a "reciprocal interaction of two equal partners" – the interviewer is in charge, she defines the situation, introduces topics, leads the conversation, and so on. I was aware of this in the interviews I conducted and tried to reduce the effects of the power differences between myself and the students. For example, following Kvale's suggestion, before the interviews started I spent some time framing the interview, that is, defining the purpose of the interview, explaining how the data would be used, and the use of the tape recorder. I did this in each interview and also explained to the student participants that what they said would in no way affect their academic lives because I had no influence in that regard. I also told them that they would have an opportunity to read my interpretations of the data before anyone else and if there was anything that they felt compromised them in any way, I would take it out. In addition, if they wished I would not use their real names (see section 5.3 in this chapter).

In this research, the data obtained from the interviews with the students was vital in terms of my understanding of how they understood and experienced the drafting-responding process, especially in relation to my preconceived

ideas of their feelings. I also used the interviews with the students to check my analysis of their responses to the respondent's comments in their essays. The interview with the respondent was also important in terms of gaining insights into how she perceived her role as an ELAP tutor, as a respondent and her interpretations regarding how the students responded to her feedback on their essays.

4. Analysing, interpreting and presenting the data

4.1 Analysis

After the data has been collected the next step is to search for patterns in the data (Neuman 1997; Leedy 1997). On the basis of these initial patterns the researcher decides on conceptual categories which are then used to analyse the data. Carspecken (1996) believes that member checks and peer debriefings are required to validate the categories. (Peer debriefing involves a colleague familiar with qualitative research and the field checking the work for signs of bias and partiality).

In my research, after I had gathered the students' essays I studied and re-studied each student's draft and final version, taking particular notice of the comments made by the respondent on the draft and tried to determine if and how the student had reacted to the comments. After looking at all seven sets of essays, I tried to "compare findings for all the persons for commonalities or patterns, differences, and unique happenings" (Ely *et al.* 1997:207). I made a list of tentative categories.

I then read and reread the transcripts of the interviews with the students and the respondent and tried to match ideas that came up in the interviews with the initial categories that I had created after analysing the essays. I circulated this initial analysis among the research participants (students and respondent) for member checking and also to my supervisors for peer debriefing.

4.2 Interpretation

Analytical and interpretive processes work together in the construction of meaning: interpretation involves drawing meaning from the analysed data and attempting to see it in some larger context (Ely *et al.* 1997). An important insight for me has been the understanding that qualitative interpretations are constructed. In other words, there is no single interpretive “truth”; there is no natural, authentic or absolutely correct interpretation. This does not mean that I believe that interpretation is arbitrary and totally relativistic but rather that there are multiple questions that can be asked of the data which will lead to different meanings. In addition there are multiple interpretive communities and each will have their own criteria for evaluating an interpretation (Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Kvale 1996). From my reading it seems that it is now widely accepted (for example, Phillips 1990; Usher 1996) that interpretation of data is theory-laden, that is, it is not free from the influence of the theories, hypotheses, beliefs, values and so on held by the researcher. Therefore, Kvale (1996:211) points out, the researcher needs to be explicit about the evidence and arguments involved in the interpretation, as well as her own position, so that the interpretation can be evaluated by other readers.

After this initial data analysis I decided to use the Hallidayan framework (see section 1.3.1 and 2.2.1 in chapter 2) as a way of organising and discussing the data. Throughout the next step I was mindful of Seidman’s warning of the danger that I may try to force the data into categories or themes I already had in mind rather than letting them develop from the data (1991:101).

Too many researchers see the beginning theoretical frame as a structure into which they must shoehorn findings and somehow misplace those that do not make sense in that structure – a little like Cinderella’s stepsisters trying to squeeze their feet into the glass slipper that doesn’t fit
(Ely *et al.* 1997:235).

Halliday’s functional view of language in use in social situations fitted with my own ideas about language and writing as being socially constructed and

therefore seemed to me to be an ideal framework for the overall analysis and interpretation of my data. While doing background reading for my research I found many examples of researchers who have used this framework successfully and in many different ways (for example Evans 1996 described in Ely *et al.* 1997; Rothery, Martin, Veel and Coffin, Macken-Horarik in Hasan and Williams 1996; Luckett and Chick 1998; Martin and Rothery 1993; Macken and Slade 1993). When I began applying the framework to my data I found that it was flexible enough and broad enough to allow me to examine how the drafting-responding process works at both a micro level (that is, within the context of situation, to help students write an ELAP essay) and at macro level (that is, as a means of enculturating students into the culture of the university).

Following Halliday, I decided to look at how the respondent's comments helped students acquire the academic literacy "appropriate" to the context of situation (that is, the ELAP course) and how the drafting-responding process generally helped students in terms of the context of culture (that is, the university generally). I then examined the original categories I had devised and found that they fitted relatively easily into the two contexts. The comments made by the respondent were examined for the way in which they dealt with features of the context of situation, as defined by Halliday. I thus looked for comments that helped student writers in terms firstly, of the *field*, which relates to the topic of the writing and is expressed in *experiential* language; secondly, the *tenor* of the writing, expressed in the *interpersonal* language as it expresses the roles and relationships in the writing and thirdly, the *mode* of the writing which is concerned with the *textual* features of the text (see Table 1 in section 2.1 of chapter 4). At the same time I looked at data from the interviews to weigh up against my interpretations of how the students and the respondent perceived the comments (see section 5.1 later in this chapter).

The second part of the analysis and interpretation of the data involved looking at ways in which the drafting-responding process worked in terms of helping students to become enculturated into the context of culture, that is the

university generally. As no separate theoretical model of the context of culture exists (see section 2.2.1.1 in chapter 2) the categories I chose to discuss in this section arose from the data. I examined the ways in which the process contributed towards enculturating the student research participants into the context of culture of the university through giving them confidence. I also analysed the way in which positive feedback helped students in terms of their adaptation to the university. Finally I looked at problems with the drafting-responding process which were encountered during the course of the research.

4.3 The role of the researcher

In this section I will deal with my understanding of the role of the researcher generally and then my role in this research specifically. The following section deals with how these understandings have influenced the way in which the research has been presented in this thesis.

Commensurate with my overall orientations to research discussed earlier (see section 1.5 of this chapter), I do not believe that an interpretive researcher, using qualitative methodologies can be neutral and objective. I agree with Neuman (1997:334) that in qualitative research the researcher's presence is always an explicit issue and that often she takes advantage of personal insight, feelings and perspectives as a human being to understand her data better. Carspecken (1996:167) says that researchers need to be aware that the act of doing and writing up research will carry references to herself "her intentions, qualities, capacities and identity". At the same time though she tries to be aware of and make explicit her values and assumptions. A researcher's choice of research area, research questions, research methodology and the way she interprets and presents the data will all be influenced by her background experiences, her theoretical beliefs, her personality and her institutional background (Punch 1998). As Bordo (1989:140) puts it:

We always 'see' from points of view that are invested with our social, political and personal interests, inescapably 'centric' in one way or another, even in the desire to do justice to heterogeneity (in Lather 1991a:139).

Another researcher, with a different background, may well interpret the data differently but as Kvale (1996:210) says "hermeneutical and postmodern modes of understanding allow for a plurality of interpretation".

My choice of both research field and topic developed as a natural progression from my work as a language practitioner at the Academic Development Centre at Rhodes University. As part of my job, for four years, I have been co-coordinator of the Writing Respondents Programme. This has involved setting up projects with departments which entails the students handing in drafts of their essays which are responded to by trained respondents. The students are required to use this feedback in order to redraft their essays. In some cases I have been involved in consultations with lecturers concerning the topic and how it fits into the curriculum. I have played an important role in the training of the respondents, in responding to essays myself and in 1997 I was involved in a collaborative research project on responding to students' writing with a lecturer from the Psychology department (Van der Riet, Dison and Quinn 1998). I therefore embarked upon this research project with quite a number of preconceived ideas concerning the value of process writing and what kinds of responses help students develop their academic writing.

In the past few years I have also had the opportunity to teach on the ELAP course twice. The first time was in 1995 for a full semester and the second time was at the end of 1997 for two months. Both those experiences have given me insights into the theories and policies which inform the course, the practical realities of teaching the course, the students who register for the course and experience in responding to essays as part of the teaching the course. These insights I am sure have influenced in some way every aspect of this research project.

In addition, the theoretical understandings which inform the research process have been strongly influenced by my studies through both the Department of Education and the Department of English Language and Linguistics. Through this and my own reading I have developed an understanding that knowledge, reality and thus language are socially constructed and cannot be understood in isolation from the contexts in which they occur. This belief naturally led me away from positivist orientations to research and in the direction of interpretive and critical orientations. I find myself fascinated by postmodern orientations but I feel that I am only beginning to develop an understanding of these perspectives. My understanding of language as socially constructed has led me to explore in more depth the notions of discourse and academic literacy. Thus through my exposure to the theory and my practice as a writing teacher and writing respondent I have become more and more aware that writing is a social act and so therefore is responding to a person's writing. Le Fevre (1987:140) says it eloquently:

We will more fully comprehend the process of creating new ideas when we think of it as an act that is social even as it is individual, with the other always implicated in the inventions of the I
(in Ely *et al.* 1997:320).

It is this understanding that led me to use, as my theoretical framework, Halliday's socio-semiotic perspective, with its concern for the relationship between language and social context.

I have presented this brief sketch of the experiences that may have influenced me as a researcher because I believe, along with Geisler, that:

An account is, by definition, historical, local, particularised: To account for one's research, one has to explain the history and circumstances of one's identity as a researcher and how one's work arises out of those particularities
(1994:237).

4.4 Writing up the research

In no way do I see the findings or the way I have written up this research as “the truth”; this thesis is itself a social construction in which the choices I have made influence and provide a specific view of the data (for example, Atkinson 1990; Canagarajah 1996). As Richardson (1990:12) says:

Language is not simply ‘transparent’, reflecting a social reality that is objectively out there. Rather language is a *constitutive* force, creating a particular view of reality
(in Kvale 1996:269).

For that reason I have chosen to use “I”, to remind the reader that what is presented here has been constructed by a person. Kirscht *et al.* (1994) talk about the fact that the scientific community has eschewed the use of “I” in empirical reports as a reflection of the positivist’s belief in an objective reality whereas with social constructivists the “I” re-emerges as the originator of questions, the selector and interpreter of data and the judge of significance” (378).

Writing up this thesis, has to a large extent, provided me with an opportunity to make my stance and theoretical position explicit both to myself and to readers. Nonetheless, I have where possible provided quotations from the books I have read and extracts from both the research participants’ writing and their interviews in an effort “to be ‘multivoiced’, to weave varied speaking voices together as opposed to putting forth a singular ‘authoritative’ voice” (Lather 1991a:9).

5. Some key issues in research

In this section I make a few brief comments about validity, objectivity and research ethics.

5.1 Validity

Validity is the degree to which a method investigates what it is intended to investigate. From a positivist point of view knowledge is a reflection of reality whereas from a social constructivist point of view knowledge is believed to be socially constructed, thus according to Kvale (1996) in order to validate knowledge claims, interpretations need to be discussed and negotiated among the members of a community (Kvale 1996:239). Kamarovsky (1981) says:

... we must formulate self-corrective techniques that check the credibility of data and minimise the distorting effect of personal bias upon the logic of evidence
(in Lather 1986:270).

For Carspecken (1996:55-56) validity is about the soundness of argument rather than “truth” of statements. A research report such as this does not claim to have the final truth about how the drafting-responding process has helped students to acquire academic literacy. Rather it consists of a number of validity claims such as that the data produced are true to what occurred, that the analysis performed on the data was conducted as described, and so on. Kvale (1996:241) says something similar but in a different way. Validity depends on the “quality of craftsmanship” during the investigation, that is, continual questioning and checking and theoretically interpreting the findings. One way to validate is to check whether the researcher is critical throughout the research process of her own methods, analysis, findings and so on. One of the methods of doing this is through *triangulation*.

Triangulation refers to the process of using multiple data collection methods, data sources, analysts, or theories to check the validity of findings (Leedy 1997). According to Neuman (1997:336), triangulation is employed firstly, to increase the rigour of the data collection and analysis and secondly, to show the richness and diversity of the social setting in which the research takes place. Denzin and Lincoln (1998:4) maintain that triangulation “reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question”.

They believe that as objective reality can never really be captured, triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but rather an alternative to validation.

In my research I used more than one data collection method. I used the interviews to check and validate my interpretations of how the comments made by the respondent influenced the students' writing in their final versions. In addition, as mentioned earlier, I used both member checking and peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Carspecken 1996) to check the validity and reliability of my interpretations. I asked all the students who participated in the research as well as the respondent to read my interpretations and comment on them. The respondent gave me rich feedback which I use in some places in my discussion of the findings. As expected, given the power differences between us, the students did not give me much feedback beyond saying that they found the data interesting and that it made them think about their writing and the drafting-responding process more deeply. If time had allowed it would have been useful to do in depth interviews with them again after they had looked at the data analysis. Peer debriefings were conducted by the two people who supervised my research as well as a colleague who has herself conducted qualitative research and co-ordinates the Writing Respondents Programme with me. In this way I hope that I have acknowledged the existence of multiple realities and that my biases have been revealed.

5.2 Objectivity

The exact meaning of the term "objective" is elusive (Berg 1998; Kvale 1996; Eisner 1992) and different writers define it differently. Eisner (1992 based on Newell 1986), for example, draws a distinction between *ontological* and *procedural* objectivity. Ontological objectivity means that the researcher reports on what is really "out there"; she presents an "undistorted view of reality" (10). Procedural objectivity means that she uses a method that eliminates, or tries to eliminate, all traces of subjectivity. Thus the traditional aim of research (from a positivistic orientation) is to use procedurally objective

methods in order to gain ontologically objective understanding. My earlier discussion of my research orientation (see section 1.5 in this chapter); my understanding of my role as researcher (see section 4.3) as well as how I have written up the research findings (see section 4.4) should indicate that operating from an interpretivist/critical orientation with a social constructivist view of the world, these traditional conceptions of objectivity are not appropriate (Carr and Kemmis 1986).

This does not mean that I believe researchers can use any methods they like and be unaccountable to the research community for the research processes and findings. As Phillips (1990:23) says, “we do not have to abandon the *notion* of truth, and we do not have to abandon the view that some types of inquiries are better than others”.

So although it may be impossible to eliminate subjectivity and bias from research, it is possible for researchers to seek it out and analyse its influence through reflexivity (Hillocks 1995; Lather 1986). Phillips (1990) argues that there is a need to retain some aspects of the notion of objectivity. Discussing the notion of objectivity from a critical tradition he says:

A view that is objective is one that has been opened up to scrutiny, to vigorous examination, to challenge. It is a view that has been teased out, analysed, criticised, debated – in general, it is a view that has been forced to face the demands of reason and of evidence (1990:30).

It seems to me that in the doing and the writing up of the research the researcher needs to provide an “argument” (Lather 1986; and Ely 1991 both use this metaphor) which provides evidence that there has been self-reflexivity. Because objectivity is part of proving the validity of the knowledge constructed in the research (Seidman 1991), a way of providing evidence is through the methods of triangulation explored in the previous section.

5.3 Research ethics

In considering the ethics of my research I was influenced mostly by the ideas expressed by Anderson (1998) in an article he wrote entitled “Simple Gifts: Ethical Issues in the Conduct of Person-Based Composition Research”.

In order to protect the rights of the research participants I believed that it was important for me to receive their *informed* consent. I thus adopted the following procedure: Before the students had made any commitment to being involved with the research I explained the process verbally to them in detail. Then I gave each of them a consent form to sign (see Appendix 1). On the consent form I explained the purpose of the research; the extent of their participation (what they would be asked to do); what the results would be used for; that they would have an opportunity to see the results before they were published; that they could choose whether or not they wanted their real names used or not; and finally that they were free to withdraw from the project at any time. I felt that it was important that they did not feel in any way coerced or intimidated by the inevitable power differences between us (due to my “lecturer” status, being older, English speaking, and so on) so I asked them to deliberate for a week and then to return the forms to me if they were interested. All seven of the students whom I originally approached returned the signed consent forms.

When I conducted the interviews I once again tried to reduce the power differences between the participants and myself by being explicit about the purpose of the interview and how the data would be used and explaining that there weren’t any foreseeable risks involved for them (see section 3.2 in this chapter). Once I had completed the first stage of the data analysis I circulated the document to all the participants. None of them expressed any concern about it and only one student asked me not to use her real name. She did not say why she preferred a pseudonym.

At the time when I asked the students to participate in the project I did not mention any remuneration but once I had completed all the interviews I

decided to give each student a small amount of money as a token of appreciation for their time and effort.

6. The Research Process

6.1 The research participants

Towards the end of last year I approached Carol Hobson, one of the ELAP tutors and asked her if she would be interested in participating in the study which I was planning to do. Carol has been a lecturer in the Department of English Language and Linguistics for 3 years but she taught on the ELAP course for only the first semester of this year. The reason I was keen to work with her was that she has been a respondent for the Writing Respondents Programme (see section 4.3 in this chapter) for two years and as such has been part of two sets of training sessions for respondents. From working with her I felt that in many ways we have similar theoretical understandings of the issues involved in the research and I also felt that our relationship would allow for fruitful discussions.

I met with the students, explained the purpose of the research and the conditions of their involvement. I asked for volunteers and seven students volunteered. I gave each of them a consent form (see section 5.3 in this chapter). At a follow up meeting, all seven students returned their signed consent forms, thus indicating a willingness to participate. In that meeting I asked the students to fill in a short questionnaire (Appendix 2) providing me with background information, and also to do some freewriting (Elbow 1973) on their understanding of academic essays (see section 1 of chapter 4).

6.2 The first ELAP essay

The topic for the first ELAP essay was:

Discuss the arguments for and against the use of English as a medium of instruction at school in present-day South Africa.

The full assignment sheet is provided in Appendix 3.²

In ELAP the approach to teaching writing is to give students “authentic” tasks and then to provide them with plenty of scaffolding to assist them in getting it done. This is what Carol wrote for me in response to a question concerning the scaffolding prior to handing in the first draft:

Before the drafts we worked with the readings, going over difficult concepts, they answered questions about the texts and we had some discussion about colonial alienation and some of the issues raised in the readings. They also had a lecture on multilingualism by Gary which added some points they could use in the essay. The main focus of the term was on reading skills and note-making. They made notes from the Heugh article on the reasons for Heugh's proposal which they could use for the essay. Particular skills with regard to essay-writing were on analysing essay topics for instruction keywords, subject keywords and restriction keywords and we looked at their essay topic in particular and broke it down. They brainstormed and planned their essay in class, making for and against columns and we worked on grouping ideas for a while (although they really struggled with the latter). Did some paragraph writing work and looked at cohesion and coherence, especially cohesive markers. Coherence was mainly about putting jumbled paragraphs into order. I also emphasized one idea per paragraph a lot and we did some stuff on topic sentences. Then they handed in the draft (note, no work on referencing except some general encouragement to say where ideas came from - but none of the technicalities taught formally).

It has been a policy in ELAP to teach students to adopt a process approach to academic writing (Dison 1997a) (see sections 1.2 and 2.1 in chapter 2). This is done in a variety of ways during the course of the year. One of the ways is to require students to write draft essays on which tutors give written feedback. Students are then expected to use this feedback to revise their essays which are then marked by the tutors. The policy of the ELAP co-ordinator (confirmed by Carol in the interview with her) is that tutors should use the

² Point 3 on the assignment sheet tells students to interview people in order to find out what they think about the topic. I understand this to be a way of showing students the different kinds of evidence that are acceptable in academic writing. This part of the assignment isn't relevant for this research because the students were only required to include it in the final versions of their essays.

opportunity when responding to students' essays to comment on as many aspects of the students' writing as possible.

Once Carol had finished responding to the drafts she sent them to me for photocopying before returning them to the students. I was invited to attend the lecture period during which the draft essays were returned to the students. Before Carol returned the drafts she explained to the students that the object of the feedback was to help them improve their essays and she warned them not to be distressed by the amount of feedback or the relatively few positive comments – neither of these was an indication that their essays were “bad”. For the first 10 –15 minutes the students were asked to read through their drafts and to call on Carol if they had any questions they wished to ask her. Thereafter, using pre-prepared overhead transparencies she dealt with some general academic literacy and language issues that had cropped up in the essays. She dealt with various aspects of the following: use of abbreviations, referencing, causal connectors and other cohesive devices, introductions and conclusions, generalisations, sentence length, addressing the demands of the topic, formal language, topic sentences, use of pronouns, paragraph structure, and concord. Wherever possible she used actual examples from the essays to illustrate the point she was teaching. In the following lecture period (which I was unable to attend) the students were given the opportunity to start the process of revision with the opportunity of consulting Carol concerning any difficulties they had with the feedback or the revision.

The relevance of describing all the scaffolding given to the students before and during the essay writing process is that I believe that it all contributed to any improvements or changes which I noticed in the final versions of the essays. In other words, it is not only the respondent's comments which could have influenced them but a combination of all the interventions which I have mentioned

The following chapter begins with providing some background on the research participants. After that the research findings are described and discussed,

firstly in terms of the immediate context of situation of the ELAP course and then in terms of the context of culture of the university.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE DATA

At the end of the previous chapter I outlined the research process. This chapter will begin with information about the backgrounds of the student research participants. The rest of the chapter is devoted to an explanation, combined with a discussion, of what I found when I analysed the students' essays and the interview data. The main question in my mind as I did this was: *How did the drafting-responding process contribute towards the students' acquisition of academic literacy?* This part of the chapter is divided into two main sections. Firstly the data is discussed in terms of the *context of situation*: how the respondent helped students with the different kinds of meanings (that is, experiential, interpersonal and textual meanings) they were required to make in their ELAP essays. Secondly, the data is discussed in terms of the *context of culture*: how the drafting-responding process contributed towards helping students adapt to the new culture of the university as a whole.

1. Background to research participants

The seven students who were involved in the research project are referred to by their first names throughout this report (one is a pseudonym): Anathi, Zamo, Ashley, Phumlani, Loyiso, Tsakani and Kgaogelo. All seven of the students speak English as a second language (ESL). They all passed English Second Language Higher Grade in matric with one obtaining a B symbol, 3 obtaining C's and 3 obtaining D's. Four of the students matriculated in the Eastern Cape, one in Kwazulu Natal, one in the North-West province and one in the Northern Province. In terms of home language three speak Xhosa, one speaks Zulu, one speaks Afrikaans, one speaks Tswana and one speaks Tsonga. Five of the students are males and two are female and only one of the males has had some experience as a volunteer journalist since

matriculating, the rest are all straight from school. They were all advised to do ELAP by the Dean of Humanities.

Their initial impressions of academic writing obtained from the freewriting (see section 6.1 in chapter 3) I asked them to do early in March, were quite varied and included the following opinions and impressions: academic writing is done in order to get marks; it is done in the form of essays and the purpose is to explain concepts in various subjects; it does not need to be creative but it does need to be specific; academic writing has to be “senseful so that the reader is able to read what you’ve written” (Phumlani); it is about writing at a higher level and it has to be formal, for example “children” not “kids” must be used.

To me it's writing in a formal way. Using difficult words for easy words. Sentences must be short and it must be clearly understandable by the reader. And your thoughts must be clearly stated to.
(Ashley)

Academic writing refers to the process by which a person is taught to write effectively and fluently and is able to reach the high standards and challenges of writing.
(Loyiso)

.... it is also how at university you are taught how to write
(Kgaogelo)

These comments express the students’ emerging understandings of the different literacies which they are required to acquire and learn at university in order to succeed. There has been research conducted both in South African universities and abroad that shows that students’ experiences of reading and writing at school are very different from the kinds of reading and writing which they are expected to do at university (for example Moll and Slonimsky 1989; Geisler 1994; Hillocks 1995; Dison and Rule 1996; Johns 1997). In the interviews conducted with the research participants, they confirmed that this was the case for them too. A number of them also mentioned that they believe that the fact that they are ESL learners exacerbated their difficulties. Kgaogelo, for example, said in an interview

... the books are quite difficult ... and the language and especially the fact that I had English as a second language because I had to read over and over and over and still when I finishing the essay, I still wasn't sure that it's the right thing.

At many universities there are very few opportunities for direct initiation into the academic culture (for example, Ballard and Clanchy 1988; Johns 1990; Angelil-Carter 1995; Johns 1997) and, especially for students whose home and school literacies are very different from those used at the university, it is often difficult to acquire the cultural “rules and conventions” indirectly. The objective of the ELAP course is to make explicit the often tacit cultural understandings of the university (see section 2 in chapter 1). One of the ways of doing this is through the comments made on students' essays at the draft stage of the essay writing process (see section 4 in chapter 1). It is this aspect of the enculturation process which was the focus of this study.

Having provided some brief background information on the research participants in the previous section, I deal with data analysis and discussion in the remainder of the chapter.

The data was analysed and will be discussed using the Hallidayan framework from systemic functional linguistics which was outlined in section 2.2.1 in chapter 2. To recap briefly, it is based on the belief that texts cannot be context-free. Halliday describes all texts as being situated within two contexts: the *context of situation* and the *context of culture* (see Figure 1 in section 2.2.1 in chapter 2). The context of situation which determines the register (“the meanings typically associated with particular contexts of situation” Macken and Slade 1993:211) of the text and its three contributing elements of *field* (the “what” of a text), *tenor* (the “who” of a text) and *mode* (the “how” of a text). In this case the context of situation is the ELAP course. The broader context of culture, in this case, the university as a whole can be defined as “the institutional and ideological background that give value to the text and constrain its interpretation” (Halliday and Hasan 1985:49).

This was a useful framework for analysing and discussing the data because it allowed me firstly, to examine the students' texts (at a micro level) with the respondent's comments in relation to the immediate context of the ELAP course. Secondly, it enabled me to look at how the drafting and responding process, at a more macro level, influenced students in terms of their adaptation to the broader culture of the university as a whole.

2. Analysis and discussion of data

2.1 Context of situation

The register dimensions of field, tenor and mode help to tie the three kinds of meanings (experiential, interpersonal and textual) within a text into the situation in which it occurs (for example, Macken and Slade 1993: 212) (see section 2.1.1.1 | chapter 2). The immediate context of situation in this research was the ELAP course. One of the major aims of the course is to initiate students into some of the general text features which they need to acquire across disciplines in order to begin the process of becoming academically literate (see sections 1 and 2 in chapter 1). Many researchers (for example Voss 1995 and Dudley-Evans in Johnson 1996; Kuriloff 1996; and Johns 1997 drawing on the work of Elbow 1991, Geertz 1988 and Purves 1990) have attempted to specify what Johns calls "the nature, values, and practices in general expository academic prose" (1997:58-64). It is these general "rules" for academic literacy which the ELAP course as a whole, and the respondent's comments on essays particularly, introduce students to. Johns (1997) suggests that exposing students to these is a good starting point to prepare students for an examination of how texts are socially constructed.

For the purposes of this discussion, the various aspects of academic writing are categorised as contributing towards making the different types of meaning. In reality, the three types of meaning occur simultaneously and the various aspects are all interlinked. In the next section the data is discussed in terms of the three kinds of meaning. Table 1 below shows how the features of

the context are linked to components of the text. It also shows, in brackets, which aspects of the text emerged from my data and which are dealt with in the following section.

SITUATION: Features of the context	(realised by)	TEXT: Types of meanings
Field of discourse (what is going on)	→	Experiential meanings (conceptual development, developing argument, referencing)
Tenor of discourse (who is taking part)	→	Interpersonal meanings (writer's awareness of reader, modality)
Mode of discourse (role assigned to language)	→	Textual meanings (integration, context, cohesion)

Table 1: Relation of the text to the context of situation
(adapted from Halliday and Hasan 1985:26)

2.1.1 Experiential meanings (field)

Experiential meanings are “real world” meanings which are related to the situational variable of field; the “what” of text. In this section I will explore to what extent drafting and responding helped the students with “writing-to-learn” (see section 2.1 in chapter 2); with understanding the field or content domain of the topic. Although, for the purposes of this analysis, field is discussed separately, content and form can never be separated. As Grabe and Kaplan (1996:136) say: “...in the process of exploring content students learn how to present the content through effective language use and genre form”. I have chosen to discuss experiential meaning in terms of the related areas of conceptual development, development of argument and referencing.

Conceptual development

Much of the research on feedback to student writing has emphasised the importance of feedback being primarily in terms of the meaning, the concepts which the student wishes to convey in her writing (for example Ballard and Clanchy 1988; Paxton 1994; Sořcinelli and Elbow 1997). This idea is summed up by Macken and Slade (1993:211):

Although we acknowledge that the formal aspects of punctuation, paragraphing and spelling do have a place in presentation of a text, tidying up the surface features of a text does not help a writer to restructure his or her writing so that it makes meanings appropriate to the overall purpose and context.

Research done by Van der Riet *et al.* (1998) with second year Psychology students, found that feedback at the draft stage of the essay writing process which focuses on meaning, can help to facilitate students' conceptual development. In a number of the drafts examined in this research there were comments (in-text and summative) which aimed at helping students to understand the demands of the topic better. For example, part of the summative comment on Zamo's draft essay read:

*You need to make sure that you argue clearly why Eng. should be a MOI rather than just a subject. Some of your arguments show that South Africans need to know Eng. but does this mean that they need it as MOI? Why do you think people insist that it should be a MOI? Is there some special benefit students would get?*³

It is clear from his final version that there is a shift in his thinking and that he manages to focus his essay far more closely on the topic. As in the research done by Mallonee and Breihan (1985), it seems that explicit comments such as these which clearly explain the problem are more useful to students than comments like "Stick to the topic". In addition, the respondent asked the writer a number of questions in order to prompt him to think more deeply about the topic. A close examination of the final version showed that there was conceptual development in terms of his understanding of the

³ The respondent's comments are represented in the text in small font italics.

requirements of the essay topic which it seems this summative comment and some of the in-text comments helped him with. In the interview Zamo remarked that these comments “changed my whole view of the essay”.

A similar change of focus was seen in Phumlani’s introduction as a result of the comment: “Make sure that you make it clear to the reader that you are talking about a MOI at school, Otherwise a nice introduction”. And part of the summative comment (and some in-text comments)⁴ on Phumlani’s essay also helped him to focus more narrowly on the topic:

You need to make sure that the arguments you discuss are always relevant to the topic of Eng. as MOI rather than just of Eng. as a necessary language to know. You need to show why Eng. should have this special status as MOI rather than having it just as a subject for example.

When the respondent examined his final draft she felt that overall his conceptual understanding of the topic had improved and “He does give better reasons for his argument throughout the essay...he’d kind of written down the facts in the first version but [in the final draft] he was trying to give some reasons for those facts”.

A further example of development in understanding the topic was revealed when I questioned Tsakani about why she had omitted a particular paragraph from her final essay which had been in the draft (with no indication of a problem from the respondent). She explained, “I took it out because I was giving solutions [to the problem of which MOI should be used in SA schools]. I was not supposed to and in my introduction I left it out.” I quote the final sentence of her introduction (with the respondent’s comment)

I will also look at possible solutions to this problem which will be multilingualism instead of monolingualism.
This section is not entirely relevant because the question does not ask you to consider the solutions.

⁴ Some researchers (for example, Sorcinelli and Elbow 1997) believe that comments that focus on a particular point in the text as well as summative comments are useful but that there needs to be a clear relationship between the two types of comments. Summative comments can provide an overview of the text and give cohesion to in-text comments.

This shows conceptual development in terms of her understanding of the requirements of the topic (that is, that solutions to the problem are not required) as well as her understanding of how academic essays are structured (that is, if something is mentioned in the introduction, it needs to be developed in the body of the essay). The fact that she transferred feedback from one part of the essay to the issue in general, seems to show that she was not simply responding mechanistically to the respondent's comments.

Another example of conceptual development is seen in Kgaogelo's draft essay:

[Ngugi] argues that by teaching children english as a medium makes the child's mother-tongue inferior.

Note here that it does not make the mother tongue inferior but it makes children think that their MT is inferior.

In the final version she changed it in the way in which the respondent suggested. She also added extra evidence "This argument is also supported by Heugh (1992) who says that if children are taught English as MOI ... ". The comment prompted the writer to think more deeply about the concept and also to go back to the reading to clarify her understanding. In addition, her strengthening of the argument by referring to the reference is evidence of her growing development of academic literacy, prompted by the respondent's comment.

Sometimes when reading a student's writing (especially when the student is an ESL speaker) it is difficult to tell whether a particular problem is conceptual or whether the student is merely having difficulty in expressing herself. For example Anathi, in his draft ELAP essay wrote:

When other language are not used at South African schools and we only use English the language of instruction, the other languages are alienated.

Is it the languages which are alienated or the students who are alienated from their languages?

Anathi changed it in the final version as the respondent suggested and claimed in the interview that it was an idea that had not been totally clear and the comment had helped to clarify the idea for him (“like it clarified the whole thing for me”). The fact that the respondent phrased her comment as a question allowed the writer to consider his options and decide for himself whether he agreed with her interpretation or not. The respondent later commented that in her responding she is guided by the idea that comments in the form of direct questions in the body of the text are a good way of responding (Boughey 1997) (see section 2.2.2.2 in this chapter for further discussion on the use of questions in feedback). An advantage for the ELAP tutor in responding is that she knew the students and could tailor her responses to suit them.

... Anathi is a very bright student which influenced me to use questions rather than more definite comments ... because I actually know the students and I know their different abilities ... [with a] stronger student I can work more on the kind of cognitive levels...

Generally the respondent seemed very aware of the needs of her individual students. Sometimes she used the questioning format as in the example above whereas in other cases she provided writers with clear and specific suggestions for revising the text. She said:

I think I have opted for a much more explicit type of comment partly because of the L2 status of ELAP students and their lack of knowledge of academic discourse. But I also think I keep this focus on explicitness ...because of my heightened awareness of genre, discourse and academic literacy which comes from my Linguistics background.

Some of the research on responding, particular to ESL students' writing, points to the importance of providing clear comments, in full sentences and shows that where possible it is helpful to provide student writers with clear and specific suggestions for revising their writing (Herrington 1997; Ferris 1997).

Developing argument

Development of argument is very closely linked to concept development (2.1.1) and referencing (in this section) and cohesion (2.1.3) but because it is a crucial aspect of field in academic writing, I have decided to include it in this section. Presenting a clear, logical argument is central to most academic essays. Writers like Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Nightingale (1988b) and Moll and Slonimsky (1989) have found that very often students do not know what is meant by “argument” when it is used to refer to academic writing, understanding it instead in terms of the metaphor of “argument as war”. Clanchy and Ballard say:

The term argument is used in a special sense in relation to academic essays. It does not mean that you must necessarily ‘take sides’ or present only one point of view. Rather it means that you explore the topic through clear and consistent development of ideas, using adequate evidence.
(in Nightingale 1988b: 65)

There was evidence in the essays I examined of the respondent, through her comments, helping students come to an understanding of what argument is and how it is used in academic essays. For example, in the summative comment on Kgaogelo’s draft essay the respondent said:

You need to be careful that your for and against arguments don’t totally contradict each other as the reader is more likely to believe the research and evidence from a published author than what you have provided in the form of an opinion. If the arguments are on different aspects of a topic, that is fine, but if they directly contradict each other you end up with a very weak for section. So, I suggest that you either explain why they contradict or make sure that you give references in your for section which support your arguments OR that you find some different for arguments.

In this comment the respondent provided the writer with a very explicit explanation of *how* argument can be used in academic essays, plus she gave her some very clear strategies for how she could go about improving her argument.

The point is reinforced by a comment in the body of the essay. In her interview Kgaogelo said that she could, as a result of the comments, see that she had contradicted herself. When the respondent compared the two versions of the essay she felt that this aspect had improved in that the student had used the arguments less forcefully and “used them in slightly different focus so that they didn’t contradict each other quite as much”.

In the following extracts from Anathi’s draft essays the respondent made a number of comments which he managed to respond to and the result was a paragraph in his final version about which the respondent said: “*Good argument through the paragraph*”.

Draft:

Make it clear that you mean when English is used as an MOI
English is also a problem in South African schools because when the children who use English as a second language start school they do not have any experience in English and need to be firstly taught in their home

What do they need to understand – teachers/subjects/concepts? *Is this a contrasting point or does it add to your argument?*
language in order for them to understand. On the other hand, the first language speakers get an unfair advantage, because they are used to English from their homes, so they learn easily in their mother tongue.

This may have long term consequence...
One other example of my point here can be that in many tertiary institutions, the second language speakers of English need to first go to a certain bridging

not only the style of teaching but also language skills, which is more relevant to your essay.
course to help them cope with the style of teaching in tertiary institutions; so many second language users of English need to spend an extra year at

university
varsity or college. This can be very costly because many black parents do not have enough money to pay for their children at varsity. *Is this sentence relevant to the essay? Perhaps you could rather have a final sentence which points out that Eng. students are unfairly advantaged.*

Final version:

English is problematic when used as a MOI in South African schools because when the children who use English as a second language start school they do not have any experience of English and need first to be taught in their home language in order for them to understand the new concepts. The first language speakers of English have an unfair advantage when English is used as a MOI because they are used to English, so they learn more easily in their mother tongue. This may have long term consequences e.g. when students reach university they will need to attend a bridging course because they used English as a second language and therefore they have to spend an extra year at university or college in order to learn the language skills which are required from them in tertiary institutions.

It seems that the respondent's comments encouraged Anathi to rethink his argument in this paragraph. His argument in the final version was more coherent and did not contain ideas that were irrelevant to the topic. He seemed to have done more than mechanically copy suggestions made by the respondent. Once again, possibly the questioning format and posing of alternatives prompted him to think about the issues raised by the respondent (see discussion on questioning format in *Conceptual development* earlier in this section).

Referencing

In the interviews I conducted with the students they all said that the major difference for them from the kind of writing they did at school and university essays is that in the latter they are required to seek ideas from sources (that is, not just write from "common knowledge") and then reference the ideas. Johns in her discussion on general features of academic writing (beginning of section 2.1 in this chapter) says:

Academic texts should acknowledge the complex and important nature of intertextuality, the exploitation of other texts without resorting to plagiarism.
(1997:62)

Citing work by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1989) she goes on to say that students need to be able to use texts for "knowledge transforming" and not

just “knowledge telling” (see section 1.2.1 in chapter 2). Using sources and referencing in academic writing thus has a strong epistemological basis: knowledge is constructed through using the ideas of others as evidence for the writer’s own ideas. Knowing how and when to reference is vital for student writers to learn, in terms of the “rules” of building knowledge in the field. But as pointed out by Dison and Rule, the “rules” are often confusing and seemingly contradictory:

At university students are encouraged to question received viewpoints and to develop their own intellectual positions rather than to mimic authoritative voices. However, if they do not defer to these authorities, if they merely draw on their own experiences in their own registers, they will also fail.
(1996:87)

There was some evidence in the essays I examined of the respondent’s comments on referencing encouraging students to go back to the readings which they had done, resulting in improved conceptual understanding and/or improved arguments.

Part of the summative comment on Zamo’s draft read:

You must reference all ideas which are not originally your own with the surname of the author and year of publication of the article. You would need to be able to prove each statement if you did not say that it was someone else’s idea.

This was accompanied by many in-text comments reminding him of the need to reference (for example, “You need to reference these ideas.”, “Where do they come from? You could add a few examples of countries where the policy failed”. Here he responded by referencing the writer Heugh and providing Zambia as an example). In the draft there were no references to other writers whereas in the final version he referenced approximately six times. In his interview Zamo said that he believed that his understanding about referencing in academic essays generally had increased a lot.

Tsakani’s draft also did not contain a single in-text reference to another writer. The respondent pointed to this both in the text and in her summative

comment. In the text she said things like: *"These are very general ideas which seem to be based on your own opinion. You should see if there is a reference to support you here", "Do you have a reference for this point? Where did you find this information?", "I think this is Rangaka's point so you need to reference it",* (plus another six comments related to referencing). In her summative comment she said, *"Make sure you reference all ideas/arguments that are not originally your own".* In the final version Tsakani added 22 references, that is, name of author and date of publication. She seemed to have understood why this was necessary and complied with the requests in the draft. A further development for this student will be when she is better able to integrate the information from sources and to use quotations, and so on. At one point where she was requested to reference it appears that she actually went back to the reading and that she clarified her understanding further so that she was able to expand and develop her ideas. She confirmed that this was the case in her interview.

Ashley's final version also showed a marked improvement in his use of references. Once again, the respondent made a number of in-text comments explaining to him why he needed to reference at various points. In addition, her summative comment spelled it out very clearly:

You have not used any references in this essay. When you write an academic essay, you must reference every idea which is not originally your own, even if you don't quote directly from the book/article. So, if you read about the argument in a book/article, you must say that you are using someone else's idea. It will also help to stop you making very broad generalisations which are based on your opinions rather than on research. If you make a broad generalisation, it becomes your responsibility to prove that what you say is true, but if you can say that you found the generalisation in a book/article then the responsibility rests with the original author.

Part of her comment at the end of the final version: "Much better use of references and much fewer generalisations based on your opinion – well done!"

Some students, in the interviews I conducted, made comments about referencing which showed their slowly emerging understanding of how referencing works in academic writing. Some of this understanding, I believe, is as a result of the comments they received on their essays. Kgaogelo, Anathi and Phumlani both expressed the understanding that they (as first year students) lacked authority (and credibility) and that by referencing, their

arguments are “made stronger” and more “believable”. Tsakani’s ideas were similar. She understands that even if an idea is one’s own, a writer needs to find “authorities” to back her up. Loyiso talked about the difference between school and university essays:

...[at school] I was just writing what I think mostly and now I know that whenever I write, I mean, it is better to come with an idea of something and then you reference it. Then, I mean, it is much more believable and understandable. You know, when someone says ‘this and this and this’ I mean support his [inaudible], something like that, that I state my opinion basically on his opinion.

2.1.2 Interpersonal meanings (tenor)

Interpersonal meanings involve writers’ role relationships with their readers and their attitudes towards the subject matter (Martin 1993; Eggins 1994) (see section 2.2.1.1 *Interpersonal meanings* in chapter 2). They are expressed through the situational variable of tenor. Tenor “looks at language as interaction – who is talking and to whom and how they feel about it” (Martin and Rothery 1993). Johns, in her discussion of general text features (beginning of section 2.1 in this chapter), says:

Academic texts should display a set of social and authority relations; they should show the writer’s understanding of the roles they play within the text or context.
(1997:62)

Novice students don’t often share the knowledge of the roles they are supposed to play (broadly in the university and specifically in their writing) with their lecturers. The problem for them is that, because essays have different purposes, it is not always easy to know how to position themselves *vis-à-vis* the readers of their writing. On the one hand they are clearly novices in academia but they are trying to become experts and need to display their emerging understanding. Yet they are writing for lecturers whom they perceive to be experts. The question of roles is further complicated by issues of power and authority between the student-writer and the lecturer-reader. Allowing students to write a draft on which they are given constructive and

formative feedback rather than a mark, lessens the risk for the writer and lowers the power differences between writer and reader.

None of the students who participated in this research had experienced academic writing before; hence part of the respondent's purpose was to make them aware of the role relationships expressed in their writing. This section will deal with the way in which the respondent helped the writers firstly to be more conscious of the audience for their writing and secondly, to use modality, which is one of the ways in which writers can express their relationship with their readers and the field of the essay.

Making the writer aware of the reader

Macken and Slade (1993) talk about the fact that in a written text, tenor involves the idea of a writer creating for the reader a "reading position" and that well written texts show an awareness of this and an ability to use it effectively. Kuriloff (1996:496) believes that "the critical importance of the writer's awareness of the reader is common to all discourses and operates in some form in all discourse communities". Part of the respondent's role is to help writers develop this awareness. In an interview with the respondent she expressed her understanding of this aspect of responding. She believes that there are two purposes for responding to students' writing. The one is to help the writers to become initiated into the discourse of the university and the specific discipline ("things like referencing and not being too definite"). And the other is to make them aware of the reader: "You are responding in terms of 'Do I understand this?' and if I don't then making that person aware that I don't actually understand it".

In the essays I examined there were a number of examples of the respondent explicitly reminding writers that they need to be aware of their readers. For example, part of Anathi's introduction to his draft essay read:

In my argument in this essay I am going to discuss both the advantages of using English as a medium of instruction and also the disadvantages but I am in favour of this 'against arguments'. *'not having English as the MOI' – this is clearer than making the reader re-read what the argument is about.*

Through this comment the respondent clearly reminded the writer of the need to be as clear as possible in order to help the reader and she also gave him a clear suggestion for how he could rephrase that section of the sentence.

Linked to the above point is the issue of writers positioning readers. In Zamo's draft essay he said:

As we all know nowadays S.A. is an internationally recognised country. *You actually have to prove this – you cannot assume something like this in an academic essay. If you just started with 'nowadays' then you turn it into a statement that your reader can disagree with and you are not forcing him or her to accept what you have assumed, i.e. the statement can be debated.*

Through this comment the respondent was highlighting an important convention in academic writing. In the interview with Zamo he seemed to understand that the way he had phrased it, he was assuming that everyone believed the same as he did but that in academic writing that is not usually acceptable.

In Tsakani's essay the respondent said, *"This is a nice clear paragraph where you have taken the reader clearly through your argument"* (my underlining). Comments like these occurred quite often in the essays I examined and, I believe, they have the potential to build vital metacognitive knowledge for writers (see section 2.2.1 *Positive feedback* in this chapter). They can also help writers to become critical readers of their own writing.

Modality

Another of the criteria for general academic writing which Johns (1997:60) mentions (beginning of section 2.1 in this chapter) is that writers should take a "guarded stance" in academic writing. The most common way of "hedging" is

through the use of modals. She quotes research done by Fahenstock (1986) which found that articles written by experts in a field contain many more hedges than articles written by non-experts who tended to provide “facts” much like those found in most textbooks (see section 2.2.1.1 *Interpersonal Meanings* in chapter 2).

In academic writing overt expressions of attitudes and feelings are deemed inappropriate and writers have to find more “objective” ways of expressing their opinions. This can be done through the use of modals. Modals are used to express something that is somewhere between “is” and “is not” (Egins 1994:179) and are used so that a writer can intrude her attitudes, judgements, and so on. Modality is particularly important in academic writing as it “allows us to temper the exchange by expressing degrees of either probability/usuality or obligations/inclination. Modals are the grammar’s way of expressing the writer’s judgement without necessarily making the “I” explicit, for example, “It seems that...” (Halliday 1996). The use of modals then helps the writer to establish the expected relationship between herself as writer and the lecturer as reader: it is not “appropriate” for students to express strong opinions in their writing.

There were some examples from the essays with comments which showed students how “tentativeness” is used in academic writing.

Firstly, because business in South Africa has always been in the hands of the english, and there is no way a person can get a job if they do not know how to speak and write english competently ... (Kgaogelo)
Are you sure this is true? Aren't there many people in SA who have jobs but don't speak/write English? Be careful of being too definite.

By using the questioning format in the comment, the respondent was trying to use a “facilitative” rather than a “directive” method of responding (Sommers 1982 and Brannon and Knoblauch 1982). She wanted the writer to think about the assumptions which she had made without telling her how she should change her essay. When the respondent examined this part of the data she said, “I particularly like to use the question format here so that

students become aware of the fact that the world does not only operate according to their beliefs or views". In the last sentence though she warns Kgaogelo quite explicitly against being too definite. In the final version Kgaogelo changed "there is no way" to "the chances are slim that". In the interview she indicated that she understood the need to be more tentative but she still felt that her statement was correct for the majority of cases.

In Tsakani's draft essay, in a paragraph that she actually chose to omit in the final version, the respondent made a comment in which she explained the concept of tentativeness:

I have added may here to show that it does not always happen – everything is not always definite, so you should show that there are other possibilities.

What is interesting is that in the next paragraph, in the draft, she said, "Lastly it leads to elitism which means that..." whereas in the final version she changed it to "Lastly, it may lead to elitism..." (my underlining). It would seem that she understood the concept of tentativeness explained in the previous paragraph even though she chose to leave out that paragraph. In her interview she made it quite clear that she understood the issue: "...these are not always the consequences. I must not generalise".

Anathi in his draft essay wrote:

This is a bit vague – is it all people/ some people/ educationalists/ theorists/ has research shown this point?

People think that English should not be used as a medium of instruction at SA schools because English is said to ignore the knowledge which the children bring with them into the classroom (Heugh 1992).

In the final version he changed that part to "A few people...". And in the interview he said that he understood the point the respondent was making, "...I did understand this, like I shouldn't make a generalisation, just assume that what I think everyone thinks". Nonetheless his response in the final version was still quite vague and his point would have been made more effectively if he had been more specific than "a few people".

2.1.3 Textual meanings (mode)

Eggs describes textual meanings as “the way the text is organised as a piece of writing (or speech)” (1994:12). The situational variable associated with it is mode (see section 2.2.1.1 *Textual meanings* in chapter 2). Whereas field is the *what* of text, tenor is the *who* of text, mode is the *how* of text; mode is the role played by language. For many novice writers a major stumbling block is realising that oral and written discourses do very different things and that academic writing requires a special kind of literacy which they need to acquire in order to become “experts” in their various disciplines.

In the case of orality, the speaker and the listener have the benefits of face-to-face communication, including the resources of intonation, gesture, immediate feedback and so on. In the case of literacy, however, it is the knowledge of genre which provides a key clue to communicate intentions and audience expectations.
(Cope and Kalantzis 1993:65)

In chapter 2 (see section 2.2.1.1 *Textual meaning*), using Chafe and Tannen’s theories (1982 and 1985), I discussed some of the differences between writing and speech. Based on that, the data in this section is divided into three parts. Firstly, I examine some of the ways in which the respondent helped students with the written mode in terms of their ability to *integrate* their ideas better in their essays. Using Tannen’s concept of *relative focus on interpersonal involvement* I then look at how the respondent reminded writers to assist their readers by providing explicit contexts for the ideas they presented and finally how the respondent encouraged writers to use cohesive devices to help readers negotiate meaning.

Integration

If one thinks of face-to-face conversation as being on one end of a continuum and traditional academic essays (or expository writing) as being on the other end, then according to Chafe, academic writing should have a highly developed integrated quality as opposed to speech, which is more fragmented. Adapting Chafe’s idea of integration in this section, I discuss

firstly how the respondent helped students to integrate their ideas at a more macro, overall structural level. Thereafter I looked briefly at integration in terms of formal academic style and lexis.

Traditionally, academic essays are expected to have a linear structure with a clear beginning and a clear ending, and propositions should follow each other logically. Respondents' comments are therefore often directed at helping students to improve the macrostructure of their essays, such as introductions, conclusions, providing argument and developing argument.

In Loyiso's draft essay, both in the text and in the summative comment, the respondent made very explicit comments regarding how he had (or hadn't) structured his essay. Part of the summative comment read:

You need to work more carefully on planning your essay. Make sure that similar points are put together and that you order the paragraphs so that they follow each other logically. Don't use sub-headings because they stop you writing topic sentences which are a clearer guide for the reader about what you discuss in the paragraph. You need to go back to each paragraph and see what the main topic is. If you find that two paragraphs have the same topic, you need to put them together into one paragraph....

These general ideas were reinforced within the essay by numerous comments such as:

This paragraph is about a common language – you mention it 3 paragraphs earlier. All similar information should be in one paragraph.

Don't use subheading like this. You should have a topic sentence which indicates that the paragraph will discuss this point.

In the final version Loyiso removed the subheadings but there seemed to be very little effort to group ideas together. On the whole, the final version was very different from the draft, so it is difficult to tell whether or how he tried to respond to specific comments. When asked about these comments his response seemed to indicate that he believed that his metacognitive understanding had increased:

Yeah, but that tricked me a lot because I was just struggling to do that but now I just, I must confess that I see a little improvement because I can try and do it much better than I used to do it. I was just writing what I think. But now I know that before I would write any paragraph I have to plan my topic sentence must be like this and I have a plan, you know, supporting sentences.

Zamo's conclusion in his draft was vague:

This country has come to far to where it's at. If we allow English to be the MOI in our schools what will be the outcome? SA must also realise that this would also come with negative effects. If we allow English to be dominant in schools, we may enjoy its benefits, but we must also prepare ourselves for the negative effects.

Your conclusion needs to summarise the main points of your argument, and I suggest that you add this paragraph to the end of the summary for a full conclusion.

Using some of the respondent's advice he wrote what seems to be a more effective conclusion for his essay because he integrated ideas from the rest of his essay and brought together the pros and cons of the argument he had presented:

In conclusion, we have seen that if English is the MOI in our schools, children would be able to learn the language that is used in the business world and they would not have problems in finding employment. English is also a versatile language and it can create a common identity within our schools. On the other hand though, English promotes school drop outs as we have seen happening in Zambia. It also stigmatises other local languages and these languages are discriminated against by those who speak English. Using English as the MOI has its positive and negative points but it's up to the parents and the education department to choose if English should be used as the MOI.

For academic writing to have an integrated quality it helps if the writer has chosen appropriate formal and precise language in which to express her ideas. If the language used is too informal and vague, the writing will have the fragmented quality of spoken discourse. Part of learning to write academic essays means learning to write in the discourse of the discipline. It is most likely that in ELAP, and particularly so early in the year, this simply means helping students to see the difference between the spoken and written mode

and encouraging them to write in a more integrated, formal and academic way.

In Zamo's draft the respondent made a general comment, *"Be careful of being too informal and writing as you speak. You need to be as formal as possible"*. Although she didn't provide any particular in-text examples for him, the general tone of his final version was more formal, less "chatty". This was evident, for example, in the greater use of cohesive devices, more referencing and the omission of phrases like "I say this because...", "You find that a small group...", "As I have mentioned...", and so on.

In Anathi's draft the issue of informal language also cropped up:

English is also seen by other South African people as the colonial language (the language the colonists used to colonise Africa and to dominate the black people to make them think their languages were useless and that English was the best language or was the way to go (Ngugi 1986). *'needed for success'? this is too informal*

Here the respondent suggested another way in which he could express himself and explained what the problem was with the words he originally chose.

A lot of the assistance given by the respondent at the mode level took the form of alternate suggestions for words used by the writer. This was done in order to help students to understand the importance of expressing ideas clearly and precisely in academic writing. For example:

Do you mean a 'current' problem?
It is also a living problem which will continue to generate new debates for quite some time ... It has become something like natural that English should be a MOI in South Africa today. *a common view?*
(Phumlani)

To most countries which are multilingual, like South Africa the thought of which language to use as the LOLT is frightening. *Why is it frightening? Do you mean difficult?*

Although most students responded to these suggestions and corrections in their final versions, it was hard to tell whether this had any long-term benefit for the student writer. Possibly the question format (see section 2.2.2. *Resistance* of this chapter) made them think about the choice of word rather than simply change it. Sometimes the suggestions for change were accompanied by a brief explanation which could help a student understand how academic writing works, for example,

Moreover, it still gives the colonisers a hold in the countries they have colonised.... (Tsakani) *'power' would be more formal here*

In Anathi's essay the respondent suggested a better word in a tentative way. At the same time she provided an explanation for the meaning of the word. This achieved two things: firstly, she was checking that she had interpreted correctly what the writer wished to say and secondly she was using the opportunity to expose him to what might have been a new word for him:

Do you mean 'controversial'? (many different opinions?)
This is a very critical topic; because many people have different ideas about which language should actually be used as a medium of instruction....

Context

In academic writing the focus is much more on the content that is being conveyed than on the interpersonal involvement of the writer and reader. In speech the interactants use the immediate context to help them construct meaning. In writing it is up to the writer to provide an explicit context for the reader within the text (Macken and Slade 1993). Clark and Ivanič (1997) point out that this is especially difficult for students in academic writing because at one level they are writing for "experts" in the disciplines but at another level they are expected to display their knowledge and understanding in their writing.

Boughey (1995:204-205), using the ideas of Cummins (1984) believes that comments made by a respondent can help students make the transition from

using language in a context dependent way “towards an understanding of language as a mode of communication which can be used to communicate meanings independent of the context in which they were originally constructed and without the support of para-linguistic features for the communication of those meanings”.

There were some examples in the essays of the respondent helping writers to become more aware of the reader’s need in terms of context. For example, the first sentence of Zamo’s draft essay read:

Not everything in our education system is stable.
Be more specific here, e.g. present day South African.

Although he effected the change in his final draft, one can’t be sure that he understood the issue of context here. Possibly the respondent could have provided a brief explanation to help the writer to understand why it is necessary to be more explicit in academic writing.

Similarly, the first line of Anathi’s draft essay read:

This is a very critical topic; because many people have different ideas about language... *You shouldn’t assume that your reader knows what the topic is.*

In this example the respondent reminded him to be aware of the needs of the reader but she didn’t tell him how to revise. In the final version he stated the topic clearly:

My topic about English being used as a medium of instruction at school in present day South Africa is...

Another example appeared in Tsakani’s draft essay:

Thirdly, it gives first language speakers an unfair advantage as they feel superior than others because they see themselves as guardians of pure English. *Could you be more specific about who the ‘others’ are? 2nd language speakers or other languages?*

In the final version she changed “others” to “second language speakers” and in the interview she claimed to understand the need to be clearer and more explicit in writing.

Cohesion

Coherence refers to the way the text “hangs together” so that a specific reader in a specific context can understand it. It consists of two levels: firstly, coherence as a property of interpretation and secondly, as a property of text, that is, internal coherence using cohesive devices (Halliday and Hasan 1976). This section deals with the use of internal cohesive devices. According to Tannen (1985), providing cohesive ties is an important aspect of expository text because of the relative lack of focus on interpersonal involvement in that discourse. Cohesion has to be lexicalised in written text rather than conveyed through paralinguistic and prosodic cues as in spoken discourse. Another of the general features of academic text outlined by Johns (see the beginning of section 2.1 in this chapter) is thus:

Writers should provide ‘maps’ or ‘signposts’ for the readers throughout the texts, telling the readers where they have been in the text and where they are going.
(1997:59)

She goes on to say that through these a writer can help a reader to predict and summarise a text as well as understand the relationships among ideas and arguments. Cohesion is one aspect of academic writing with which a respondent can very easily assist students. There were many examples amongst the essays I examined. I will now discuss a few of them.

In her interview Kgaogelo claimed that the respondent’s focus, both in her summative comment and in comments within the essay, on providing signposts in order to help the reader to negotiate the text, helped her to understand this aspect of academic writing.

It is truly vital to start teaching children at school english as a medium of instruction, its not wrong to teach them their mother tongue, but they truly need to be taught english to prepare them politically, economically and socially independent. And they can be taught their mother-tongue as a second language, so as to let them know their culture. (Kgaogelo)
This introduction tells the reader what your viewpoint is, but you might like to add that you will be discussing the arguments for and against using English as a MOI in your essay.

This in-text comment pointed out what was good about the paragraph, reminded the writer about the needs of the reader and then, in a tentative way suggested how she could make the structure of her essay clearer for the reader. In the final version Kgaogelo did this and got the response “Good clear intro.”.

And then at the start of the following paragraph the respondent said:

You need to alert the reader that you are going to start off discussing the arguments for using English as a MOI.

To which she clearly responded “Firstly the arguments presented will be for the usage of English as MOI”.

Later in the essay the respondent said:

You need to show how the following paragraph links to the previous one or you need to show clearly that you introduce a new point here

Kgaogelo’s response to the comment was to introduce a cohesive device:

Secondly, the arguments that will follow are against the use of English as MOI....

A part of the summative comment on Zamo’s draft was:

Your paragraphs are usually well developed, i.e. the topic progresses logically and you keep to a single topic. The final, summarising sentences are also good. However, you could guide the reader more clearly through your essay by using cohesive devices at the beginning of each paragraph.

The first two sentences of the comment served two purposes: firstly they provided positive feedback to the writer and secondly they made explicit to him what he might be doing intuitively, thus providing him with useful metacognitive understanding of his own strategies (see section 2.2.1 *Positive feedback* in this chapter). The respondent was pointing out to him that there was coherence in his writing but that it could be improved by providing more cohesive devices. In terms of the use of cohesive devices there was a marked development from the first to the final draft. In the first draft there were no cohesive devices whereas the development of the writer's argument was clearly signposted in the final version.

In ELAP the students are encouraged to use very explicit signposting to help their readers negotiate their writing. In Loyiso's draft essay this seemed to have resulted in an overuse of signposting. At many points in the essay when introducing a new point he wrote things like:

Now I am going to writing about English as a medium of instruction at school in present day South Africa under this point 'employment'.

The respondent commented in detail at this point:

Although it is good to tell the reader what you want to discuss, you actually do this too much. This kind of very explicit sentence about what you want to discuss should be at the beginning of a set of arguments. At the beginning of a section you need to make sure that the points connect logically to each other or show that they are different. It doesn't really help to just add in a sentence before each point which tells the reader what you will discuss if it doesn't link to the previous point, i.e. the logical connection is still broken.

This aspect was better in the final version and in the interview he expressed his understanding like this:

...I think one of my tutors was trying to tell me is that you know a problem I was making that in each and every paragraph I was always saying that now I am going to do this. That is where I failed. But now I have learned something that, no, that thing I ought to do is in my introduction. So that is where I tell the reader that you must expect this and this and this...

Loyiso's difficulty is aptly described by Al-Ali and Holme in their discussion on the dangers of teaching genre forms too explicitly:

The key, mediative rather than communicative issue of finding how to use language to develop thought will take second place to the issue of how to make text 'signpost' its own message. Student essays then resemble a cityscape that consists of wide straight roads between rickety and incomplete buildings. The reader can go everywhere with ease, but finds no destination worthwhile.
(1999:6)

The respondent agreed that this can easily happen. She said "A lot of the improvements [in this section] strike me as quite superficial ...the ELAP students particularly tend to resort to "firstly", "secondly", etc. which doesn't always mean that they get to deeper levels of cohesion and linking but I suppose that these are very high-level skills".

Having examined the data at a deeper level in terms of the linguistic model of the context of situation, I will now look at it from the broader perspective of the context of culture. As I mentioned earlier (see section 2.2.1.2 in chapter 2), there is no separate linguistic model for the context of culture (Halliday and Hasan 1985) but it is important when looking at students' texts to be aware of how the beliefs, values, assumptions and so on of the context of culture, that is, the university generally, influence what is deemed "appropriate"/ acceptable in the context of situation.

2.2 Context of culture

The broader context of culture shapes the various contexts of situation associated with it; the context of culture shapes the range of possibilities within a particular context of situation (Clark and Ivanič 1997) (see section

2.2.1.2 in chapter 2). Clark and Ivanič describe the context of culture as consisting of a configuration of values, beliefs, constructions of realities, roles and relationships – all of which are associated with various discourses and genres. In this research the context of culture is taken to be the general culture of the university.

Research done at South African universities has shown that many students, but particularly those from ex-DET backgrounds, struggle with the culture of the university. For example, research done at the University of Cape Town reported on by Hutchings (1998) found that there are wide differences between the culture of the university and the cultures that ex-DET students come from in terms of learning, knowledge and writing; students reported feeling “academic intimidation” and alienation. The role of the ELAP course generally and the feedback to essays specifically is to help students with the “unsteady transition between cultures” (Ballard and Clanchy 1988:13) in terms of their academic writing. The feedback can be seen as providing *scaffolding* which encourages development within the students’ *zones of proximal development* (see section 2.2.1.2 in chapter 2).

This section looks at ways in which being given the opportunity to hand in a draft and receive feedback on it contributed towards enculturating the research participants into the context of culture of the university through giving them confidence. It also examines the way which the positive feedback helped students in terms of their adaptation to the university. In the next part of this section I will look at difficulties with the drafting-responding process: ways in which the process did not work to enculturate students. The difficulties will be discussed in terms of problems with establishing students’ ZPD’s and in terms of students’ resistance to being “told what to do”. Finally, the section ends with some comments on the process from the perspective of the respondent.

2.2.1 Gaining confidence from the drafting-responding process

Ivanič (1997:88) says:

One thing that characterises most of the writers I worked with was a sense of *inferiority*, a lack of confidence in themselves, a sense of powerlessness, a view of themselves as people without knowledge, and hence without authority.

A vital aspect of the drafting-responding process is to reduce these feeling and to help novice writers to develop confidence in themselves and their writing.

Many students arrive at university unprepared for the writing demands that are placed on them. Research conducted nationally (for examples see Moll and Slonimsky 1989; Dison and Rule 1996; Boughey 1999) and internationally (for example Geisler 1994; Johns 1997), shows that school-based literacies are usually inadequate preparation for the literacies required at university. This difficulty is further exacerbated for students for whom the medium of instruction at university is not their home language. Many students thus arrive at university with no confidence in their own writing abilities. Dison and Rule (1996:89) as a result of their work with students at the University of the Witwatersrand, believe that:

we should consider not only how to develop disciplinary competence but also disciplinary confidence ... students who feel that they have something of value to contribute, that they can build on their own knowledge and skills and learn from their mistakes, are more likely to succeed than students who feel that they are ignorant.

The ELAP students who participated in this research claimed never to have written “academic” essays at school. They were seldom required to read anything in preparation for an essay (other than the prescribed textbook in content subjects) or to reference and if they were it was only in the form of a bibliography at the end of the essay (see section 2.1.1 *Referencing* in this chapter). Zamo says: “We didn’t have to do much research on it. It’s like you

had to write it from your head". Kgaogelo talks of the history teacher giving them notes which they used to write essays and she says "the ideas were the ones which we were being taught" which seems to me to indicate an attitude to knowledge as something fixed, "out there" which simply has to be recorded in an essay. They were required to use "knowledge telling" strategies as opposed to the "knowledge transforming" strategies which more skilled writers use (Bereiter and Scardamalia 1987) (see section 1.2.1 in chapter 2). Anathi confirmed this in his interview:

It was like less formal, ja. Like you didn't have to state someone's argument, reference and that kind of thing. Just had to take something out of the book and just write it there.

Some of the students spoke about finding it difficult to write in such a "formal" way at university in comparison to what was expected of them at school.

In their interviews some of the students said that the most valuable aspect of having had the opportunity to take part in the drafting-responding process was that they felt more confident that they were on the right track. Having to do a draft gave them the confidence to experiment because they knew that they would have a "second chance".

I asked the students to describe their initial reactions when they first got their drafts back. I quote a few extracts:

I felt like, whoo, I failed because like it had so many comments on it ... But then she made us go through them and like she explained some of the mistakes that many of us made. Then I realised that they are positive, some of these comments ... She explains this is the mistake you made there and here, so I think in a way this comments are very helpful and they encourage you.
(Kgaogelo)

... I felt very bad because I had many comments and I thought, no, there is nothing I did right. I just wasted my time because it was so full of comments but when I went through the comments, I said, no. the whole thing was changed to right because I saw that the comments are very helpful ... telling me my mistakes and they were trying to show me how to link and all this stuff...
(Phumlani)

Well, you know the first time I saw this draft I thought, wow, like it was too bad because I saw it was full of comments then I thought that well, I am totally, I am too bad in writing. But when I found out that ... every comment is helping me, I mean, to build up.
(Loyiso)

All three of these quotations seem to indicate the students' initial lack of understanding of writing as process; of the purpose of writing a draft. The students seemed to understand writing (and hence knowledge) as being "right" or "wrong". This is demonstrated through their use of words like "failed", "mistakes", "too bad" and "there is nothing I did right". As a result of their experiences of having their writing marked at school they also seemed, at first, to expect all the comments on their essays to be negative. It seems to me that an important part of what the respondent did, through her comments, was to help students to counteract these feelings; to help them to understand better the genres of university essays and finally to gain confidence in their own abilities. In other words, she assisted with enculturating them into the context of culture of the university

In the interview with the respondent she said she saw the ELAP course as being valuable for students as a bridge between secondary school and university. She believed that some of the resentment that some students expressed about having to do ELAP was because the kind of literacy they require in order to cope with academia had not been developed at school level and many of them were unaware of the enormous differences between the two. She went on to talk about the lack of support for students in mainstream courses:

...mainstream courses don't offer enough support to be able to put a student in immediately and most mainstream courses are interested in the top level of student.

She saw ELAP as being a safer environment in which students could learn what is expected of them at tertiary level, both academically and socially.

This section made some comments regarding how the drafting-responding process as a whole seemed to help students to adapt to the context of culture. In the next section I look at how positive comments helped students begin the process of understanding the culture of the university.

Positive feedback

The respondent tried, wherever possible, to give the students positive feedback, especially in places where a student had responded to a particular aspect of writing which had been dealt with as part of the ELAP curriculum. She provided positive feedback, by giving what Elbow calls, “descriptive or observational responses” (1997:10). This could help students to develop a metacognitive understanding of the writing and thinking processes they had used (also Ely *et al.* 1997). Paxton believes that the role of feedback on writing fits somewhere between encouraging acquisition of discourse (that is, through interacting with those who have already mastered the discourse) and learning (that is, “metalevel” knowledge) but for the feedback to be successful it “needs to be constructive and not reinforce negative perceptions students might have about their writing” (1998:150). Tsakani, for example, made particularly good use of cohesive devices which the respondent pointed out throughout the essay (✓ good) and at the end, “Excellent use of cohesive devices”. At the end of a paragraph the respondent wrote,

Generally a well structured paragraph where ideas are linked and you keep to one topic.

It is possible that this might help make explicit to a student what has been taught about paragraph structure in the ELAP course. This is an extract from the interview I did with her:

Lynn: Did it help you where your argument isn't clear? You know, if you look at a paragraph where your argument is clear?

Tsakani: Yes, it does because it helps me go through my paragraph again and try to go through the points and the ideas that I wrote to correct those paragraphs that she says she doesn't understand.

In the second paragraph of Anathi's draft he received the following positive reinforcement:

Good – you have kept closely to the topic of MOI – it is very easy for this just to become a general discussion of why English should be used generally rather than why it should be an MOI

To many South African schools English is used as a medium of instruction because many people believe it is the way South Africa should take on its way to 'unity'. The reason ... is because English has been regarded as politically neutral (Heugh 1992:767).

In the interview with Anathi he said that he found this comment useful because it reminded him throughout the writing of the final version to keep the focus on MOI in schools not just English as a subject.

Tsakani sums up her feelings about positive comments:

Because if someone tells you, you are dumb, dumb every time you tend to think that. When she tells you that at least you did something right, you tend to want to improve and do more right than wrong...

This section has dealt with some of the positive ways in which the drafting-responding process can help students to begin the process of understanding the culture of the university. In the next section I examine some of the problems with the process which were encountered during the research.

2.2.2 Problems with the drafting-responding process encountered by students

The drafting-responding process doesn't always achieve what the respondent hopes it will for a number of reasons. For all the students who participated in the research it was the first time they had ever been required to submit a draft, received feedback on it and then been expected to use the feedback to rethink their ideas and revise their writing. Predictably they weren't always sure how to deal with the comments and they encountered some problems. Many of the problems encountered by the students could be explained in terms of difficulties with establishing the zone of proximal development (ZPD)

described in chapter 2 (section 2.2.1.2) or in terms of students' resistance to what Freire (1971) calls the "the banking concept of education", that is, the idea of teaching as "depositing" knowledge into students. In the next section I present some examples showing difficulties encountered by students with feedback. After that I look at some of the difficulties encountered by the respondent.

The zone of proximal development (ZPD)

It is possible that one of the reasons some students had difficulties in dealing with the respondent's feedback is that, because students are at different levels of development, it had been difficult to predict accurately how to create the appropriate ZPD and how to provide sufficient or the right kind of scaffolding for each individual student. In this section I examine some examples where this could have caused difficulties for students.

As in the research conducted by Ferris (1997:330), my examination of the essays found two conflicting but co-existing truths:

Students pay a great deal of attention to teacher feedback which helps them to make substantial, effective revisions, and that students sometimes ignore or avoid the suggestions given by teacher commentary.

In examining the essays it was obvious that quite often the respondent's comments were not taken up by the writers of the essays. On exploring this with the students it was found that one of the major problems for students was that they didn't always understand the comments. Phumlani for example said: "...there are some other comments that I didn't actually understand. Then what I did is I just decided to leave them out." Kgaogelo talked about sometimes struggling to understand the comments, finding them confusing and then just ignoring them or leaving out all together the bits that the comments referred to. She suggested that it would help if the students had time to talk to the respondent. Although the respondent does make time for students to ask questions, there isn't always enough time to deal with each

individual student's queries or the students don't always have the confidence to ask for help or admit that they had difficulty in understanding the respondent's comments.

When I asked Zamo why he hadn't responded to this apparently very clear and explicit comment in his draft essay

As I have mentioned in my first paragraph SA is now an internationally recognised country.

If this paragraph logically follows that first paragraph then it should be put after it. By referring back to it here, you show that it is linked, so you need to move it.

he said, "I think I just couldn't do that, just didn't know how to do that. I think I was lazy at the time".

Some students, despite not understanding the respondent's comments, followed her advice in a mechanistic way. For example, Anathi said: "I think I understood some of the comments and then some, okay, but then some I think 'just let me go the way she is saying' but actually I don't understand".

Anathi did well in his final essay (75%). He used some of the comments made by the respondent to good effect but many of them he ignored, particularly those related to structure and use of cohesive devices. For example he did not seem to take into account these parts of the summative comment:

... Towards the end of the section you seem to have added a few unrelated paragraphs which could be integrated into the 2 sub-sections as they are on the same 2 topics.

You could also work on using more cohesive devices at the beginning of the paragraphs to show the relationships between them (you use 'also' a lot, but this is not always adequate).

A number of times in the text the respondent also made comments related to these issues, e.g. "This seems to belong to the section at the end of page 4 – 5. You could include it there" and "This seems to belong earlier where you discuss those first 4 points about English dominating". In the interview he found it difficult to articulate exactly why he hadn't responded to many of these comments, saying things

like, “I think like I just felt confused. How does it link and does it have to link?”. He felt that if he just did as he was told without understanding why, he would do a bad job and end up losing marks. At one stage when he was revising his essay, he said he tried to put in cohesive devices as they had been taught to do in ELAP: “I think like at one stage, okay, I’m going to link them. I’m going to say like firstly, secondly, thirdly and so on and I think in my final version I got those for like the first three arguments and then it sort of all fell apart...” and later he simply said “I don’t know how to link”.

From looking at this student’s essay and from comments he made in the interview I got the impression that Anathi was prepared to make use of only those comments that he could cope with easily but anything that he had to struggle to understand or which took too much reworking of the draft (or going back to readings, and so on), he ignored. When I was discussing this with the respondent she expressed the opinion that the kinds of comments regarding cohesion which Anathi ignored are very difficult to respond to and that his non-response “reveals a lack of deep-level linking skills which come with conceptual development”. In other words, it is possible that these comments were beyond the level of his ZPD and therefore he could not respond to them.

An obvious difficulty with written comments is that they can easily be misunderstood and create difficulties for writers. For example, part of the summative comment on Phumlani’s draft read:

I think it would help you a lot to write a topic sentence for each paragraph so that you can show how related ideas in a paragraph are linked. Although your paragraphs are generally on one broad topic, you have not clearly shown the reader what that topic is.
...

It would also help the reader if you numbered your arguments, e.g. firstly, secondly, thirdly. This will help to see when you regard something as aspects of one topic or several different topics. (my underlining)

Phumlani, it seems, focused exclusively on the last part of the comment and then interpreted it incorrectly. In his final version he used headings which he numbered, for example:

1. Introduction
2. Argument for the use of Eng at schools in South Africa
 - 2.1 Communication
 - 2.2 Unity
 - 2.3 English as international language, etc.

As a result he did not write proper paragraphs with topic sentences or create links from one part of the essay to the next. This also meant that a lot of the other comments about development of argument and linking ideas were not taken up. As a result he did not get a good mark for his final version.

Students sometimes don't know *how* to use the process to their best advantage and need to "learn" how to use comments made at the draft stage of the essay writing process. For many students this is the first time that they are exposed to this kind of formative feedback, aimed at helping them to revise their writing. To illustrate, an extract from the interview with Anathi:

Lynn: ...she says [in the draft] that you should have discussed that earlier. You seem to have ignored that comment?

Anathi: Yeah, I think I did. I thought, oh man, like when I was writing my final version, I was looking at the first draft. I started from the beginning and when I arrived here [the point in the essay where the respondent says he should have discussed that aspect earlier] I thought, 'oh, oh, too late!'

If he had understood better how responding works and exactly what revising (as opposed to editing) an essay means, he might have read through all the comments first, tried to work with the major macro issues first and only at a later stage paid attention to the editing. Possibly students, particularly in a course like ELAP, need more space for coaching in how to cope with comments on their essays. As a result of her research at the University of Cape Town, Paxton says:

It seems that the success of the feedback stage depends fairly heavily on the preparation that has gone on beforehand to ensure that tutor and students speak the same language and that the ground rules are made explicit
(1994:22)

This section looked at problems students encountered with the comments in terms of the ZPD. The following section looks at “resistance” as a possible reason for students’ ignoring the respondent’s feedback.

Resistance

Another reason students may have ignored comments is that they were resisting being treated like containers into which information is “deposited” (Freire 1971). They see themselves as needing to be active participants in their own education, as needing to question and think critically about all knowledge that is presented to them.

In the interviews some students said that they ignored some of the comments because they did not always agree with respondent. At one point in Kgaogelo’s draft essay, the respondent wrote:

There are five different ideas in this part of the paragraph. You should only have one idea per paragraph. You don't have to present every argument – it is how you present the argument rather than how many arguments you present which is important.

In her interview Kgaogelo discussed this comment with me:

Kgaogelo: I couldn’t like make that paragraph have the same idea. What I thought is like those ideas to me it seems to link. So I thought I was like discussing the same thing but from different points of view.

Lynn: So you struggled with that comment? You didn’t quite agree with it or understand it?

Kgaogelo: I couldn’t, well, but I couldn’t like agree with it but I noticed what she meant. I did understand what she meant but to me ... I felt they were not different ideas. I thought like I was trying to explain something.

As Ferris says (1997:333-334) in the discussion of her research findings: “a student’s lack of responsiveness to a teacher’s comments is not necessarily a sign of laziness or recalcitrance but may rather indicate that the student is

thinking creatively and functioning independently – surely the ultimate goal of all writing teachers”.

One or two of the students expressed resistance against the way in which the scaffolding was provided; they felt that the respondent gave them too much guidance or corrected too many of their errors and that they should have only had them pointed out and then been forced to correct them for themselves. Possibly, without realising it, like Freire (1971), they were expressing a desire for learning based on problem-posing and problem-solving rather than simply being told what to do. The respondent expressed an awareness that the students struggled to cope “on an emotional level” with the amount of feedback. She said, “They were horrified when they got their drafts back”.

One student (Tsakani) spoke of finding some of the responding too directive and preferring the less directive type of responding which she had encountered elsewhere,⁵ “...she [the writing respondent who responded to her Politics essay] didn’t tell me what to do; just suggested that I do something to improve it.... You don’t feel that you are obligated. Like she gives you a choice to take it or leave it if you want to.” The issue of how directive a respondent should or shouldn’t be depends a lot on the needs of individual students. In ELAP the respondent feels she needs to be directive because the “skills” she is trying to develop are essential; and the ELAP course co-ordinator (personal communication) suggested that ELAP students may find suggestions/questions confusing and not realise that in fact they are expected to respond to them. Ferris (1997), in her large-scale study on teacher’s comments on ESL students’ essays, found that the experienced ESL teacher in her study avoided the indirectness of questions or using hedges in her comments so as “not to confuse her students about her intentions” (329). She says that ESL students need assistance with processing questions successfully and understanding that often they are posed in order to prompt a

⁵ Most of these students did at a later stage have the opportunity to submit drafts of a Politics 1 essay which were responded to by respondents from the Writing Respondents Programme (see section 4.3 in chapter 3).

writer to think more deeply about an issue rather than requiring a direct “answer” in their essays.

Even in a small sample such as in this research there was quite a range in the way in which the students responded to the respondent’s comments. Some students seemed to apply themselves to the comments and their final versions were much more “appropriate” in terms of the conventional academic genre. For other students the drafting-responding process meant only responding to minor issues (grammar, spelling and possibly adding a reference here and there) and ignoring any comments that required major revision. The respondent mentioned that in her experience the stronger students are able to respond to the macro issues raised by respondents but “the weaker students tend to be able to deal only with the superficial. You know, put a reference in here, that kind of thing”.

The previous sections looked at difficulties with the process from the students’ perspectives. The following section contains some comments from the point of view of the respondent.

2.2.3 Comments on the process from the respondent’s perspective

An impression easily gained from looking at the draft and final versions is that for some students the process only has meaning at a very superficial level. They expect a respondent to “correct” their writing and do not understand the process. The respondent, when she looked at the initial data analysis said that an overall feeling for her after looking at the data was that “responding does not always aid development of higher-level skills like integration for many students”. At a later stage though she seemed to gain a more positive long-term perspective:

I think it is hard for them [ELAP students] to see it as cognitive development and metacognitive development as they are not always aware of the requirements of the discipline. The surface spelling and grammar things are tangible... If they go back to these essays at the end of the year I think they will be able to see the deeper development.

This impression was borne out by the ELAP co-ordinator who commented later in the year that she felt that the students in the class from which the research participants came had developed a great deal in their understanding of the academic essay genre (personal communication 1999).

Some of the difficulties with responding to essays can be as a result of the task design or students' difficulties with interpreting the task. The respondent talked about the fact that often it was only when she was responding to draft essays that she realised the difficulties (or weaknesses) inherent in the task. For example, in this task of the essay used in this research, many students went off the topic and wrote about language policy generally instead of focusing on medium of instruction in schools. For this reason it is sometimes useful to have a draft because it gives the lecturer an opportunity to clarify major misinterpretations of the topic. As the respondent said, "You don't always realise what people are going to do with the topic until they've done it [a draft], which is why a draft is nice". There were many comments on the essays which I examined which were aimed at helping students to focus on the topic.

The respondent, when she examined the draft essays and final versions more closely felt that in most of them there had been some kind of development but she felt that it was difficult to tell whether this could be ascribed to the comments she had made or "because of the intensive teaching [which they have had in ELAP] which they are not going to get in other subjects, which is maybe where they do fall flat in later years because they don't have that extra support". It is likely that the combination of the intensive teaching and the ideas being reinforced in writing in the margins and end-comments of essays can lead to better understanding.

3. Conclusion

In this chapter I presented an analysis and discussion of my data: of what I “saw” when I examined the students drafts, with the respondent’s comments and how the drafting-responding process may have influenced the way in which they revised the final versions of their essays and hopefully contributed towards their acquisition of the academic literacies they require in order to be successful at university. In addition, I included *their* ideas, and those of the respondent concerning how the process worked for them. In order to provide a structure and theoretical depth to my discussion, I used Halliday’s SFL framework.

My research showed that the drafting-responding process can help students in terms of both *what* knowledge is required at university, that is, with the *domain content* and with *how* that knowledge is constructed, that is with *rhetorical processes* (see section 2.1 in chapter 2). Through being required to submit a draft, students are encouraged to revise their work and hence understand writing as a process. At the same time, the comments made by the respondent can help them to understand better the content or *field* of the essay topic as well as the conventions and *modes* of expressing those ideas. In addition, the respondent, through her comments, can help the writer to be aware of the reader and to establish the appropriate relationship between herself and her reader. At a more macro level, it seems as though the drafting-responding process can contribute towards helping novice students adapt to the broader context of the university by giving them confidence and developing their meta-cognitive strategies.

The chapter concluded with some brief comments on the difficulties with the process, both from the students’ and from the respondent’s point of view. This research project only looked at one aspect of what happens in the ELAP course. It is important to keep in mind that it is only a part of many experiences encountered by the students in the ELAP course, their other courses and the university as a whole. It is all these which will finally

contribute to their adaptation to the context of the university and their acquisition of the academic literacies they will need to succeed at university.

The following chapter concludes this thesis. In that chapter I look at what I consider to be some of the shortcomings of the research and of the drafting-responding process as it is implemented in the ELAP course.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Like Johns (based on the ideas of Brufee 1984), I have argued in this thesis that at many universities

opportunities for direct initiation into academic culture are few and demands of the already-competent within the culture are many. There is little chance for the necessary conversation among participants that provides a bridge into the culture, a conversation that can lead to authentic interaction within the community and to the development of the private thinking and appropriate writing necessary for academic success (1990:212).

At the end of the previous chapter I presented the findings of my research which examined how the drafting-responding process functioned to initiate a “conversation” to provide a “bridge” into the academic culture for novice students. Using the Hallidayan framework, my research showed that the process can help students, firstly at the micro level, to develop the necessary academic literacy to cope with the demands of essay writing within the specific context of situation of the ELAP course and secondly, that it can work to help students to adapt to the context of culture of the university as a whole.

In the cases that were researched, the drafting-responding process encouraged the students to view their writing as a process which gave them time to think through the ideas, concepts and arguments and secondly, the comments provided by the respondent helped to make explicit to them the usually implicit cultural “rules and conventions” of the academy. Despite these findings, the drafting-responding process, as it is used in the ELAP course, does have some shortcomings. Some of these are linked to the ELAP course generally.

Although ELAP does try to straddle a few discourse communities, people like the social theorist, Gee (1990) for example, don’t believe that a course like

ELAP can apprentice students to a number of discourses at the same time.

He says:

Imagine a course called 'banging' (say "Freshman Banging 101...), that gave students the general purpose skill of banging on things. After taking this course, students could later enter more specific training (or courses) in playing drums, hammering nails, pounding meat ... (all types of banging). I would argue that our 'Banging 101' class is going to be a waste of time, kill the student's interest in banging, or, worse yet, produce students who are veritable menaces when they enter specific areas that use banging for their own purposes. The best way to learn to drive nails properly (or even appreciate the task) is to become (at least for awhile) an apprentice carpenter ... The world has little need for (or places of worth for) people who can just bang....
(Gee 1990:172)

He suggests that possibly the principles of process writing and responding work more effectively if used by "experts" within specific disciplines. Boughey argues similarly that because knowledge is socially constructed, the teaching of writing should be an integral part of the curriculum for each discipline. She believes there is a "need to develop academic literacy not just as an adjunct 'skill' but by and through engagement with *learning* in the mainstream disciplines themselves" (1994:26). Brown *et al.* (1989), whose work is based on Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of learning, use the phrase "situated cognition" to describe their belief that learning is context-dependant; that it takes place in communities of practitioners. They go on to say:

To learn to use tools as practitioners use them, a student, like an apprentice, must enter that community and its culture. Thus, in a significant way, learning is, we believe, a process of enculturation.
(Brown *et al.* 1989:33)

What troubles me is that the existence of EAP courses may encourage what Johns (1997:72-73) calls "naïve literacy theories", that is lecturers who believe there is just one, unified literacy in the university. The implication is that students can be sent on an EAP course and the mainstream lecturers don't have to worry about their role in developing students' academic literacies in their disciplines. Whereas, like Johns (1997), I believe the university should embrace a view of academic literacy as "evolving, complex, contextualised, and

collaborative, a process for which students and faculty must all take responsibility” (76).

Dison and Rosenberg (1995) in their discussion of the ELAP course at Rhodes argued that, although it provided valuable support for the students enrolled, it rested on two misconceptions, namely that skills learnt in a course such as ELAP are transferable to other courses and that academic language is unvariable.

Despite these valid arguments against the efficacy of general EAP courses, there are some researchers (for example, Voss 1995 and Dudley-Evans 1995 in Johnson 1996) who believe that in some circumstances some general skills and attitudes (heuristics and metacognitive strategies) can be transferred, for example, in English-speaking academia: scepticism about information; the need for evidence to support argument (include and acknowledge external sources); the need to make linkages between bits of information; writing is linear and logical; and so on. They believe that these are common to many fields, even if they take place in different ways. Johns believes that discussing with students general rules for academic literacy can prepare them for an examination of how texts are socially constructed and “to explore how cultural and social forces may influence texts in various contexts” (1997:64). Possibly then it can be argued that initiating students into these strategies is useful right at the beginning of their university careers but that higher up in academic study domain-specific knowledge becomes increasingly important.

MacDonald (1994:187) in Kuriloff (1996:498) argues that students progress through a series of stages on a continuum, for example, firstly, non-academic writing; secondly, generalised academic writing; thirdly, “novice approximations of particular disciplinary ways of making knowledge”; and finally, “expert, insider prose”. The writing-responding process as it is used in ELAP can help students develop their generalised academic writing.

One of the critical cross-field outcomes which were adopted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is: “Communicate effectively using

visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation” (Department of Education and Training, Curriculum 2005 Users’ Guide:1997). This implies that developing writing and hence academic literacy should be part of each discipline and should not only occur in courses like ELAP. Possibly lecturers could be assisted in their task through there being stronger links between courses like ELAP and faculty (for example, the EAP course described in Moore *et al.* 1998) and between ELAP and ADC projects such as the Writing Respondents Project (see section 4.3 in chapter 3). Wilmot (1997:88) points out that in many countries the move towards outcomes-based education (OBE) is a reaction to a general paradigm shift in education away from the positivistic paradigm towards a paradigm underpinned by social constructivism. If the move towards OBE at the University is taken seriously and if curricula are underpinned by a view of knowledge as contested, negotiated and changing and of learning as socially constructed then developing academic literacy should be a major outcome for all courses at university. In addition, lecturers will conceive of writing not only as a tool for communication and for assessing students, but as a tool for learning and constructing knowledge.

Another concern that occurred to me during the course of the research is that the drafting-responding process is “facilitating students’ socialisation into ‘proper’ academic practices, without taking a critical view of these practices” (Ivanič 1997:75). Students may not be encouraged to understand that academic literacy is not a fixed set of practices to which students have to be initiated but that it is socially constructed and open to contestation and change. They may not be made aware of how traditional discourse practices are shaped and shape social relationships and power relations (Gee 1990; Eggins 1994; Clark and Ivanič 1997). As Clark (1992:135) says:

There is a tension between the need to provide access to the kinds of linguistic practices which are required in order to succeed in education and the need on the other hand to develop a critical awareness of dominant conventions and alternatives to them.

She does go on to say though, that possibly students first need to be taught “the dominant expectations about ‘good’ academic writing in a University” (20) before they can feel empowered to flout them. Similarly, Johns says that before students can “break the rules”, “they first need to understand some of the basic conventions, concepts and values of a communities genres” (1997:68). Possibly the role that of ELAP and the drafting-responding process is to introduce students to these.

Gee believes that in reality many general writing courses are an apprenticeship into “middle-class values, thinking and interactional styles...” (1990:173). This raises another issue that is seldom made explicit to students, that the academic writing which we encourage, is derived from western ideology and processes of socialisation. In teaching students to be literate in academic contexts, we are ignoring other literacies. Gough, talking about students at the University of the Western Cape, says:

We have also been concerned about how to respond constructively to the (marginalised) discourses and literacy practices the students bring with them, to acknowledge that as academics we are engaged in, not simply imparting new ‘literacy’ skills, but different identities and personas (1999:19).

Possibly then drafting-responding process would be enriched if it were informed by a slightly more critical perspective in terms of the theories it is based on and the methodologies which it employs. In addition to these thoughts, I also feel, in retrospect that although it wasn’t my original intention, my own research could have had a stronger critical focus. In my research there was what Schwandt (1998:247) calls a “lack of critical purchase”, that is, there was not enough attempt to change the status quo through my research. He says:

Critics hold that it is precisely because of this distancing of oneself as inquirer that interpretivists cannot engage in an explicitly critical evaluation of the social reality they seek to portray. (1998:248)

Nonetheless, I do feel that my own views, beliefs and hence practices have been positively influenced by the insights I have gained from engaging in the

research. In addition, the research findings may, when read in conjunction with other similar studies, influence practices in the context of situation of the ELAP course or in the context of culture of the university more broadly (see section 2.2 in chapter 3 on how the findings of case studies may be applied).

Finally, what has emerged most strongly for me in the course of this research and my work with students' writing is how much we expect of students. Referring back to the quotation with which I began this thesis – we expect students “to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (Bartolomae 1985:134). This research has shown that the drafting-responding process, as it is used in the ELAP course at Rhodes University, can help students to begin the process of learning “to speak our language”, but for students to become full members of any discourse community, lecturers in all disciplines have to take on the task of helping students to acquire the literacies they need to cope with their academic tasks.

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Appendix 1

Consent to participate in research study and to publication of results

1. I understand that Lynn Quinn of Rhodes University will be conducting a research study into the comments that writing respondents make on students' draft essays. She will be trying to find out which kinds of comments are helpful for students when they rewrite their essays.
2. I have been asked to participate in this research study. I understand that my participation will consist of the following:
 - Allowing Lynn access to all the essays (draft and final versions) which I write in ELAP and Politics (and possibly Anthropology) in the first semester of 1999.
 - Being interviewed twice by Lynn.
 - Providing Lynn with background information about myself and my previous educational experiences.
3. I accept that the results of this research study will be used towards the completion of Lynn's master's degree. In addition, the results may (at a later stage) be used for writing papers for presentation at conferences or publication in academic journals.
4. I understand that before any results from the research are published, I will be given an opportunity to see them and discuss any changes that I feel are necessary.
5. I understand that if I wish, my real name does not need to be used in any report describing the research study. But if I want to, I can be acknowledged in any reports on the research.
6. I agree to participate in the research study but I understand that if at any point I change my mind, I am entitled to withdraw my agreement to participate.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date signed: _____

Appendix 2

Questionnaire for student participants

1. Name: _____
2. Address in Grahamstown: _____
3. Phone number in Grahamstown: _____
4. Date of birth: _____
5. Name of school where you matriculated:

6. Place where school situated: _____
7. In which language where you taught most of your subjects at school? _____
8. What English course did you pass in matric, for example, first language/ second language/ higher grade/ standard grade, etc?

9. What symbol did you get for matric English? _____
10. What other subjects did you take in matric?

11. Do you have any other experience of studying after school? If so, what? _____
12. What is your home language? _____
13. What other languages do you speak fairly fluently? _____
14. What subjects are you registered for at Rhodes this year? _____
15. Could you please write about half a page in which you answer the question: "*What is academic writing?*"

Appendix 3

ELAP

Assignment 1

The title of this assignment is:

Discuss the arguments for and against the use of English as a medium of instruction at school in present-day South Africa.

1. Read the following articles which we will work with in class:

1.1 Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1986). The Language of African Literature. Decolonising the Mind. London. James Curry/Heinemann.

1.2 Rangaka, KM (1988). English - The Adopted Son of Imperialism but the Father of Emanicipation? *Matlhasedi* Vol 7. No 1/2,25. Reprinted in Murray and Johanson. Write to Learn. Pages 182 - 183. Johannesburg. Hodder and Stoughton.

1.3 Heugh, K. (1992). Enshrining Elitism - The English Connection. *Language Projects Review*, 7 (3), 2-4.

2. Choose ONE more article or chapter from the library and refer to it in your essay.
3. Interview TWO people in your home town in order to find out what they think of English as a medium of instruction at school and why. ONE of the people you interview should be at high school presently. The OTHER person you interview should have been out of school for at least ten years and should have worked for some of these years.
4. The DRAFT of this assignment is due on TUESDAY 23 MARCH at 8AM. Please note that this is not an Elap day so you will need to place the draft in the Elap Essay Box. The draft DOES NOT have to include your interviews because many of you will not be able to complete them before the holidays. The FINAL VERSION of this assignment is due in the first week of term 2; WEDNESDAY 14 APRIL. This final version WILL include your interviews.
5. The length of the assignment should be between 600 and 1000 words (3 - 5 pages).

The Process

Some of the process of this assignment will be done in class before you go on holiday, but use this information as a checklist.

1. Read each article carefully. Look up difficult words in the dictionary or try to guess them from context.
2. Summarise the main points/arguments in each article **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**.
3. Summarise your own point of view.
4. Interview two people and summarise their points of view.
5. Plan your essay:
 - * make two columns, one for arguments in favour and one for arguments against. Put all the information and opinions in the appropriate columns.
 - * decide which opinions and information go together well and decide what you are going to write about in each paragraph.
6. Start writing your draft. A draft is a rough copy of the assignment which you usually do not hand in to your lecturer. However, in order to teach you how to correct your work and improve it, we will take in the draft and indicate how you should work on it before you hand in your final version on the 14 April.
7. In your draft you will concentrate on writing your ideas down logically and weaving the information that you have collected from your articles and your interviews together. Do not worry about handwriting or grammar to begin with. When we read through your draft we will check the following things:
 - * that your paragraphs follow logically
 - * that you have clear topic sentences in each paragraph
 - * that your supporting sentences match your topic sentence
 - * that the structure of the essay is satisfactory;
 - that you have an introduction and a conclusion
 - that your paragraphs follow each other logically
 - that there are linking markers between paragraphs

Appendix 4

Guiding questions for semi-structured interview with Carol (ELAP tutor)

1. Can you explain your understanding of how responding works?
What kinds of comments do you think students find helpful?
2. What is your experience of having your own writing commented on
at a draft stage?
3. Do you see a difference in your roles in terms of responding to
your ELAP students' essays and the other writing responding work
that you do? (Elaborate)
4. Can you tell me your understanding of the philosophy or rationale
behind the ELAP course? (Why does RU offer it? What does it
hope to do for students?)
5. Is there a specific policy for ELAP tutors regarding how they
should / do respond to students' writing? (How does this differ
from how you see your role in other responding?). In your
experience, does the policy work?
6. In ELAP you mark students final essays (which in other responding
we don't): Has doing this given you insight into how students do or
don't use the comments we make? Has it given you any ideas
regarding which kinds of comments students find most useful?
7. Do you have any general comments regarding this batch of essays
on MOI in schools and the drafting process?
8. Do you think your students have improved in terms of their ability
to respond to your comments in their subsequent essay?
9. Skim through the essays and allow Carol to highlight anything she
thinks may be of interest.
(How do you feel when ELAP students ignore your comments? Any
idea why they ignore some comments?)

Appendix 5

Guiding questions for semi-structured interviews with students

1. Did you ever write “academic” essays at school? What kind of essays did you write at school? What are the main differences between the essays you wrote at school and the ones you have written so far this year at university? What kinds of comments did the teachers give you on your essays at school? Were you ever given the opportunity to re-write essays, using feedback from teachers?
2. How many essays have you done this year that have had comments at the draft stage? Which subjects?
3. What do you think of the drafting-responding process? Can you explain generally why (how) you found the comments and the process of redrafting helpful or unhelpful?
4. Do you think that the drafting-responding process had will/ has helped you with future essays in the same or another subject?
5. Let's glance through the draft of your first ELAP essay. Can you pick out any comments that you found particularly helpful? Can you pick out any comments that you found unhelpful/ confusing / upsetting? (Explain/ Elaborate)
6. Questions on specific comments and responses to comments in each student's essays.