

## **FROM STUDENT-GENERATED QUESTIONS TO ESSAY IN A DEMOCRATIC LANGUAGE CLASSROOM WITH REFERENCE TO RECONSTRUCTED TRANSACTIONAL THEORY**

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*This article describes an approach to teaching essay writing to students in an English for Education Development programme (EED) at the University of the Western Cape. It argues that students can use the questions they themselves have generated in response to a published text as the framework for an academic essay. It draws primarily on the work of John Rouse. The first part of the article describes how a new procedure was arrived at. Students generated their own questions in response to a published text and then organised and expanded their answers into an academic essay. Although the article focuses on the reading and writing process, the article describes the classroom interaction, so that some sense of the acculturation process can be given..*

*In hierdie artikel word 'n benadering beskrywe wat gebruik word om studente essays te leer skryf. Die betrokke studente neem deel aan die English for Education Development programme (EED) van die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland. Van die studente word verwag om vrae te genereer op grond van 'n publiseerde teks. Daar word betoel dat die studente hierdie vrae dan as raamwerk kan gebruik vir die skryf van 'n akademiese essay. Die uitgangspunt van hierdie benadering is die werk van John Rouse. In die eerste deel van die artikel word daar aangetoon hoe die benadering tot stand gekom het. Alhoewel die artikel op die lees- en skryfproses fokus, word die klaskamerinteraksie ook beskrywe om tot 'n sekere mate betekenis aan die akkulturasieproses te kan gee.)*

### **INTRODUCTION**

This essay describes one particular activity in a learner-centred approach to language and academic literacy development in the English for Educational Development (EED) programme at the University of the Western Cape. The main idea that underlies the activity is that students can generate their own questions about a published text and then organise and expand their answers into an academic essay. Student enquiry is strongly encouraged.

Although variations of this strategy may be used in the now developing discipline-specific EED support courses (in the Science, Law and Economics faculties), the strategy described here was used with groups of first-year students who were drawn from all the various faculties in a more general EED language course. There was a wide range of ability within the class. At the time that the course was started, some were able to use academic English successfully

with only a little assistance, others would be able to succeed in the various subject disciplines, but the vast majority would clearly find major difficulties in both reading and writing in their university courses. Their overall level of competence is weak, as is shown by the large number of Ds and Es in the English examination of the Senior Certificate.

In the EED course, our aims range from improving students basic literacy in English to increasing their fluency in the use of the academic discourses at university. Following Gee (1990) and Bernstein (1971) before him, we recognise that any improvement involves an acculturation process whereby students adapt and acquire the practices of a new community environment. "Discourse" (1990:143) in this sense then, is a broader term than "language code" and includes a wide range of behaviours associated with language use and appropriate to a particular community. For that reason, although my emphasis in this article is on the reading and writing of texts which are moving in the direction of the academic, I describe various moves and interactions in the lecture or tutorial as they happened at the time, so the reader will also be able to experience something of the process of broader acculturation to the discourse community of university. These excerpts, written in the present tense, are printed in italics.

## OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Asking questions is always a major concern of lecturers and teachers. And in the construction of an interactional classroom, the art of asking questions assumes particular significance. An interesting way of focusing this art came to me via correspondence (1990) with Dr John Rouse whose earlier book on interactive classrooms, *The Completed Gesture: Myth, Character and Education*, had presented possibilities for making the act of teaching an adventurous exploration. Rouse had sent me a set of questions which he had used to elicit responses to a poem and it did not take long to notice that these same questions provoked thoughtful responses to narrative and discursive texts as well as poetry. These questions became a kind of core activity upon which lecturers in EED (see Dyers & November: 1996) built other more specific strategies for reading and writing. Examples of open-ended questions which allow for more differentiated student answers are listed here:

1. Point to one interesting line or sentence. Explain why you find it interesting.
2. Point to one puzzling line or sentence.
3. What is your reaction to this poem?
4. Is this poem saying something? What's it all about?
5. As you read this text, what came to mind? What memories, thoughts or feelings came to mind?
6. Would you recommend this text to other students at this level? Why or why not?

Such questions might be said to implement, in a practical way, many of the insights gained from "transactional" theorists (Rosenblatt: 1976 & 1978, Clifford: 1992) who place the active reader transacting with the text at the centre of research around reading and writing development. The thread running through this approach is the recognition that the written text cannot be the source of meaning in reading. The imagination of the reader must act and

development. The thread running through this approach is the recognition that the written text cannot be the source of meaning in reading. The imagination of the reader must act and generate an experience from those textual signs. This immediately throws emphasis on what the reader brings to the text - past association, expectations, feelings, choices, etc. These same associations, expectations, feelings and *questions* are then incorporated as the student expresses herself/himself in the writing of the essay and other forms which occur in the class.

So when we EED lecturers found ourselves looking for ways to become more engaged in writing critically about texts that we were reading, I felt it was worth using Rouse's suggestion (personal correspondence: 1994): "Why not try allowing the students to make up their own questions? Let them answer those questions and then weave those answers into an essay."

Perhaps this would allow students a chance to bring to bear on the text more of their own concerns as, at the same time as it provided a chance to reformulate those concerns in a more academic way. This would further than creating opportunities for the students, but would provide more clarity and insight into their own concerns. It might also give us a chance to look at the process of creating questions. Questions, such as what made for a good question and what did not, could be examined. Perhaps it would also give us the opportunity to identify differences between student and teacher questions.

The task of organising the answers to questions generated by students into an essay seemed promising. It seemed possible that such questions could provide a structure for essay writing, yet a structure based on the students' own enquiry rather than some textbook form which can often completely derail a student's train of thought?

There was also an air of mystery and adventure about where this device might lead us and this seemed just the sort of spirit that Rouse was encouraging. Often I find that the problem with direct teaching approaches, which seem to characterise genre and critical language awareness methodologies, is that they almost set one up to find the precisely prescribed academic and politically correct answer in advance. The experience of exploration is undermined. In the approach we had decided to adopt, there was a distinct sense of not knowing where we were going. We would only find out what we thought when we got there. That seemed more like substantial academic enquiry in what Criticos (1993:15), University of Natal, describes as

an education which is generative not consumptive, concerned with perception  
not reception, searching not researching.

He continues that such open enquiry is particularly suitable for an "Emancipatory Education" in the present South Africa.

## **VOTING ON THE TEXTS WE WILL READ**

In EED we make use of a course-reader (1994-6). The texts in this represent selections that have evoked student interest (though also challenging those interests) in past years. The level of discourse ranges from the student magazine *Learn and Teach* to the *Mail and Guardian*. Articles such as "Why do Women Kill Men?", "Men and Condoms", "Do Women ask for Rape?", "Will there be Lobola in a Post-Apartheid Society", "Circumcision: The Cruellest Cut

of All?", and "Born Gay". Negotiation on the text to be read is the first step, for I find that students always seem more interested and committed to a text that *they* have chosen. In addition, I am interested in the proposition that democratic procedures not only produces more responsible citizens, but is an effective aid to learning.

One characteristic of democratic process is the power to vote on which text to read. So, the students in the class I am describing were asked to peruse our coursebook and nominate which text they wanted to read. Then we voted. (*Perhaps next time, I will be cagier and ask them one week in advance to come with nominations. Who knows how many of the articles they will read without even having to assign them?*)

The students voted to read "Why Women Kill Men?". Sometimes a title promises more than the text will deliver, but we were on our way into the reading. The next step was to find a competent student reader in the lecture group to read the article aloud. With stories, and especially stories with dialogue, there is space for three, four or more students to read the parts. A discursive article usually has fewer options in that regard. The narrator's voice is foregrounded.

Perhaps it is important to emphasise at this point how much our students benefit from hearing a good reading of an English text. Whether you refer to it as "comprehensible intake" or making the intake comprehensible (Krashen, 1981: 104), research has consistently indicated that children who were read to at an early age, turn out to catch the reading habit, and predictably succeed at university studies (Dombey, 1993; Meek, 1982). Many of our students have not had the luxury of being read to. Other research indicates that students from "non-school-oriented" backgrounds may need particular explicit guidance as to how such readers should position themselves for a reading (Gregory, 1992: 43-47). It seems clear that the experience of a good reading is essential. A lecture hall may be far from ideal for some group activities, but a clear reading - with our new wireless mike - is an activity that works well for even for our large lecture groups (150 students).

*Zenzile reads the first third of the article in a deep bass voice, and Ntombikazi reads the second third. It is clear that students are getting just a bit fidgety at this point, so I request that we divide into small groups of three or four (which does not necessitate moving) and select one member of that smaller group to read aloud the remainder of the article. This seems to go down well as a strategy for keeping the reading lively and energetic.*

*The reading is completed and we're ready to move on. "Let's divide into groups of four or five, and each group will write three questions about this article," I say. "Any question at all. You can ask about words or sentences you want to understand better, or you can ask Who, Why, How, What happened, etcetera. Or, if you wish, you can also use any of the open-ended questions which we worked with on previous occasions."*

*We work on this for a while. I then ask for various groups to come up and write their questions on the large chalkboards. About ten representatives can be accommodated in this way. Soon we are all looking at the plethora of questions produced, and there is some pleasure in that moment:*

**Assorted Questions on "Women Who Kill Their Husbands"  
(by Adele Hamilton, *Fair Lady*, 10 Feb. 1993)**

1. Do women plan to kill their husbands?
2. Why don't abused women move away or divorce their husbands?
3. What does this article teach us?
4. Do you feel sympathy for these women? Why? Or why not?
5. What makes women kill their husbands?
6. What must be done to limit the killings of husbands by wives?
7. What makes women believe that killing their husband is the best solution to their problems?
8. What goes through your mind while reading this text?
9. Do you think S.A. law shows more sympathy for murderers than for victims? Explain.
10. State one feeling (e.g. anger, surprise, sadness, etc) you experience while you read this text.
11. a. What do you think the subheading "The Mouse That Roars" means?  
b. What is the writer here trying to tell us about society's norms and values?
12. Put yourself in the position of one of these abused women. What would it feel like?
13. What is the meaning of the word "microcosm"?
14. How would you deal with the situation if you were abused by your husband?
15. What do you feel about this article?
16. How many kinds of killers exist according to the definition by the psychiatrist in the article?
17. Why do judges sometimes give these women ridiculously light sentences instead of heavy sentences? Do you think this is justified?
18. Are the reasons these women give for murdering their husbands true? Or are they covering up for themselves in order to avoid harsher a long sentence?
19. Do you think these women think about future of their children? Explain.
20. Where does the love which led to marriage go to? Has it evaporated?
21. In what way can the legal system be changed to avert imminent attack in the home?
22. Are women who kill their husbands psychologically disturbed, or not? Motivate.

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But soon the time of the double-period lecture would be up.

*"Okay, let's continue this in the tutorials. Each tutorial will put about ten questions together in a tutorial worksheet."*

*After the students have left, I and my tutors copy all of the questions that are on the board, and I type them up so that the tutorials can all have copies. However, it seems useful to point out how intelligent these questions are. Indeed this text - a list of questions - is already a creation of significance. And the buzz in the lecture hall as we viewed this list spoke of this interest. The questions include many that reflected local concerns and discourse (see questions 2, 6, 9, 17, 18). But on the other hand many of the questions are already very "academic" (e.g. 11, 13, 16, 22) which is hardly surprising given the surrounding discourse culture of the academy. On the one hand, then, a large proportion of the students seem engaged and interested by matters of local concern, while at the same time some students have had the support to experiment with more academic sorts of questions.*

In the 80 minutes, we continued the work with tutorial groups consisting of about 25 students. We broke into groups of three or four, and each group was to select four questions that interested them from the lecture-created list. Another trip to the board produced a shorter list and we eliminated some of the duplications and looked more closely at some of the questions.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACADEMIC MEDIATION**

The first question was "Why do women kill their husbands?" During the lecture time, I had felt that some clarification was needed here. So I asked, "Let's see. Is this question asking the student's opinion about this, or do you want what the article tells us about this?"

Anton, who authored the question, considered this and said he wanted the students to explain what the article wanted. So he added words that changed the sentence to: "*In the article*, why do women kill their husbands?" I proposed "According to" rather than "In the". We carried on in this vein for the rest of the hour. Many questions were looked at closely and alternate wordings were created. This seemed to fulfil some of the hopes that I had when we began - that students would learn something important about making questions more precise, and in closer accord with academic norms. This activity also may support the notion that by following student interests as well as being open to negotiated possibilities, many opportunities arise to cover most of the items on the fixed syllabus.

Finally we had a list of ten questions which would be the worksheet for our tutorial. The secretary of the class copied the questions and I typed them and made copies for the next class meeting. The final worksheet looked like this:

### **Worksheet on "Women Who Kill Their Husbands" (by Adele Hamilton, *Fair Lady*, 10 Feb. 1993)**

1. According to the article, why do women kill their husbands. Explain.
2. Why do women find it difficult to break off from their husbands? Explain.
3. Do these women plan to kill their husbands? Explain.
4. How can we stop the high rate of women killing their husbands?

5. It is common knowledge that in a home where domestic violence prevails, it is usually a white woman who will fight back and a black woman would be more likely to endure it. Explain.
6. Do you think that constant battering and humiliation justifies cold blooded murder, as in the article, although the act was not intentional?
7. What is the role of government in these murders?
8. Do you share the opinion of the writer of this article on women who kill their husbands? What is your opinion?
9. "Susan was subjected to a continual round of public taunting and physical abuse by her husband who blamed her for her apparent fertility." Why do men beat their wives because of apparent infertility?
10. "Families, church groups and society at large conspire against women caught in such situations, the overall message being that any husband is better than none, and that it is *her* responsibility to keep the marriage together no matter what". Do you agree that this is the way things are? Explain.

The students were favourably impressed by seeing their own questions used this way. We met for the next class and I proposed that students should answer their own questions.

*"Hey, there are too many questions!" Butshabethu objects. We negotiate and settle for answering about six questions. We also decide to answer some questions which rely on the text for answers (such as 1 & 3), and some questions which are asking for our own opinions, somewhat independent of the text.*

In our class, a choice existed here as to whether to meet in groups and discuss possible answers to the questions, or whether each student should answer his or her questions before we met to discuss the answers. We opted for this latter option. A fairly typical response from a stronger student, Mercia Klaas, is given:

1. According to the article, women kill their husbands for self-defence. Women also do this because of the husband who failed to love her. Men also get killed because they abuse their wives and therefore women feel that violence is the only currency in order to protect herself. One woman shot her husband because he accused her of infidelity. Sometimes women kill their husbands because of financial constraints.
3. No, these women do not plan to kill their husbands, because in most cases they do it for self-defence in order to protect themselves. They sometimes do it out of anger and when they can't cope with things anymore.
6. In my opinion, if the husband abuses his wife, she has a right to kill him. It is just a method of self-defence.
7. They should become more aware of cases like this. Although they send these women to jail, I think the government should be handle these women with care. Women kill their husbands in order to protect themselves and therefore the government should not be too hard on them.

10. I disagreed with this statement because in my opinion it is the husband's responsibility to keep the marriage together. Normally the man is the head of the household and he is responsible to protect his family and he is responsible to protect his family and to take care of everything, no matter what.

It might be noted that Question 5 created some heated discussion in the tutorial, but few students chose to write their answers to it later. One can understand why this might be so, but it also raises some questions as to whether the classroom procedures generated in this particular situation could be improved upon in order to ensure that these thought-provoking issues do form part of the students' writing.

I might also question my own strategy of asking all the students to write their essays on the agreed upon questions. Since the entire class was reading the same article, this led to repetition and undermined the freshness and individual responsibility which are important. A more effective strategy would be to allow small groups of students to choose a different text to read; write up their own questions; answer them; and then use those answers in order to create a more extended piece of writing. However, in this class we all wrote on the above agreed upon questions. This does have some advantages in that students that lack confidence can gain through experiencing closely what other students are doing with the same question.

In the next part I explore some of the essays written in response to texts chosen by smaller groups of peers.

### **ESSAY ON "CIRCUMCISION: THE CRUELLEST CUT OF ALL"**

This text which appeared in the Mail and Guardian had a controversial history. When it was nominated for reading in the lecture hall, many of the men in the class objected to the text being discussed before women and uncircumcised men. Some of the women countered that they would refuse to discuss abortion and such topics where the woman's body was the focus. We were not able to carry on with this reading at that time, and this seemed to raise some serious questions about what would or could be discussed. As one student remarked:

"You know, Mr Katz, these discussions are one-sided if you know what I mean. I mean that the Xhosa culture is always being put in danger by this, but the Western culture is not being asked to change. It is always we who are forced to change."

Surely this was a serious concern and I am far from having an answer to this comment, except to indicate that my own understandings and sensitivities may be usefully expanded. Describing his research into providing access to academic literacy in the EED programme at UWC, Volbrecht (1996:479) also comments:

I was constantly aware of how individual subjectivities (including personal qualities and values) generated particular approaches to meaningful access and diversity, and that when these subjectivities were in constructive dialogic relationships (Witherell and Noddings, 1991), the chances for productive

educational endeavour were increased.

It was of some interest when the circumcision text came up again in the next year. This time the activity was initiated in the smaller tutorial. Clearly this forum was more private and probably safer. And only small groups within each tutorial would read and respond to each article. Our group consisted of Loyiso, Ogaufi and myself. This time the small groups went directly to the task of writing questions and followed that with an essay. After reading the article aloud together, we came up with the following questions, of which I contributed question 5:

1. What did we discover or learn in this article?
2. What is the article about? What point is the writer making?
3. According to the article "The penis was tied with leaves for healing." Can leaves heal? Explain why you think so.
4. Why is circumcision taking place in the bush and not in hospital?
5. When you read this article, does it remind you of anything in your own experience?
6. Is circumcision right for our new South Africa?

Because of the sensitivity surrounding this issue, I told Loyiso and Ogaufi what had happened the previous year and asked them if they wanted to continue with this project and whether they would be prepared to write papers that would be shared with the rest of the group. We could switch to another topic. But they both insisted that this was the topic they wished to read about.

Entering into a discussion on this topic is a curious experience. On the one hand there is something sensational in the issue itself. Indeed, I had to consider whether I was making a habitual colonialist move by joining in this discussion as the disengaged scientist, ready and able to reduce my two correspondents to the status of the "other". Given the power relations between lecturers and students, there is probably no escaping the fact that such a positioning can never entirely be overcome. However, circumcision is a topic that resonates as a problem in other communities as well. The question of whether to circumcise a recently born baby had, in fact, arisen for a couple of my own acquaintance, and they involved me in some serious discussion around this question.

So, in joining this group, there did seem to be something at stake for me as well as my two partners. I introduced my history to Ogaufi and Loyiso when we met together. I find that such a situation is desirable as it temporarily positions me as a student and allows me to understand the cultures in the classroom as well as model more directly my own learning strategies. Rouse, through his character Mrs M (1993: 73) remarks on the value of such interactions: "And how else am I going to keep up with youth culture? I don't want them to think I'm illiterate," she frets. Then she points out:

And there ought to be a place...where we can enjoy our differences now and then, don't you think? In a math class or science class they're irrelevant, they would just get in the way, but in my class we can find some advantage in our differences, we might get something good out of them. Or so I hope.

My meeting with Loyiso and Ogaufi continued. Ogaufi was from Namibia and had grown up in an urban area where he had escaped the necessity of circumcision. However, he related a story about how tribal people would sometimes even hunt down people in the towns and kidnap them to be circumcised.

We then looked at the second question about the leaves used in the process. Loyiso seemed to be very knowledgeable about the procedure. Ogaufi was fascinated and asked several questions. The most startling of which was "What do the witchdoctors do with the part that is cut off?"

"That is secretly buried," explained Loyiso, "so that no one can find it. Because we believe that an inyanga can gain power over another person if they came to possess this thing."

We continued speaking for some time, and I was explaining my own questions about circumcision performed on Jewish infants. "In a way this custom seemed to make less sense since the child had no choice in the matter," I explained. Then we all went on to write up our answers to the questions, and then to create an essay out of those answers. Loyiso wrote this essay in response to the assignment. It seems to be rather representative of most of the student essays:

**Circumcision the Cruellest Cut of All**  
**"Let us all provide the remedies for this serious threat"**

Circumcision is the process of transforming boys into manhood it is practised by black tribes with the exception of Zulus. It is dangerous but it means a lot value to those who are respected their traditional culture. In my essay I'm going to portray the view of different organisations concerning this matter of ritual traditional circumcision. After that I will give my personal opinions concerning the traditional circumcision.

The Congress of Traditional leaders of South Africa (Contralsa) argued that "the ritual circumcision had to be examined". The actual circumcision should be performed at a hospital because many youths that attended initiation schools have suffered septic wounds from the cutting of their foreskins. Many teenagers died from severe wounds.

African National Congress [ANC] representative Eric Pelser says "circumcision should not be abolished, but it has to be practised in a healthy manner." He further stated that a doctor should oversee the proceedings. His statement is sounding nice but the problem is, we do not have so much doctors to go out and oversee the proceedings.

Pan African Congress representative (P.A.C.) Nana Moabi agrees that circumcision should be performed in hospitals. I think that thing can cause biggest problem among traditional healers. Circumcision is the sacred thing so it must be treated purely and have great value and respect among people.

Professor from health organization says "the initiation is the tough matter." The ritual performed in winter. It took place in thicket. The group slept in a hut made of plastic bags and trees. Initiates used to have matted grass for a mattress. The doctors argued that these hut provide fertile ground for germs. The remedy for this matter is that, the razors and rusty knives should be sterilized, and any other useful instruments must be kept clean. This new venture must be encouraged by the government by recruiting male nurses who have full knowledge of circumcision. These nurses must be distributed to check up the initiates proceedings.

Circumcision is still right for New South Africa but now it must be operated in highly hygienic method. The teachers must teach their societies about the new health ways that should be practised to prevent septic wounds. The government must make special project for playing a big role in influencing the black tribes of country to practice valuable and respected cultural belief.

I don't agree with those people who are saying circumcision must take place at hospital. Because I know that can bear serious problems. The people who went to the bush be criticizing those who did not go there. They might take them as they are less than men. Another thing let us not make tradition circumcision unrespectable culture. Circumcision is the sacred thing so it must be treated like any honourable thing. To me when circumcision take place in hospital, it will be as unnecessary operation or unrespected practise. One thing that should be done is that the professional people must teach the traditional healers to use hygienic methods when they are doing their jobs. To me the above mentioned statements sees as the only remedy for circumcision.

Tshokolo Molokeng: *English 105 Reader*, 1996 University of Western Cape. "Circumcision the cruellest cut of all", page 42.

What strikes me here are the various interjections that the student writer makes, such as in the third paragraph where Loyiso adds, "we do not have so much doctors to go and oversee the proceedings." The fifth paragraph's suggestion about male nurses also comes from the student's own experience and illustrates more active dialogue with the published text. It seems to me useful when a student's own experience can be used as a base for critical commentary, rather than being entirely overwhelmed by the text. Reading researcher Margaret Meek (1982: 209) remarks:

As soon as the reader asks a question of his own about the text, he has begun to behave like a reader; if he disagrees with the author he is nearly a critic.

I am satisfied that Loyiso's essay is accurate, critical and showing a developing awareness of academic discourse. Yet also maintaining some sense of a personal voice and style. Certainly there are problems. The paper does not include much of the discussion in the small groups and focuses almost entirely on an exegesis of the text reading. There is still a lack of cohesive devices connecting the paragraphs and other problems with standard written discourse. Though notes on accurate referencing were provided in the course reader, this student's

bibliography is not yet sufficiently conventional. But this is a small detail which the writer will soon master. This approach to referencing is gradual, and an essay that responds to only one reading text makes the task of referencing non-onerous and accessible.

Learning to use written quotes in an essay was facilitated by the availability of the quotations used to answer the questions. More commonly, these difficulties can be ascribed to the student's problems with comprehending the text in the first place. The nature of the subject matter - local circumcision practices - and the time available for discussion no doubt provided support. The questioning process assisted in reaching that comprehension.

## REVISITING A RECONSTRUCTED TRANSACTIONAL THEORY

The continuing appropriate references to the text and the admixture of critique, as when Loyiso disagrees with the proposals of the PAC representative seems also to indicate that an event is occurring here which fits the description of a desirable reading process according to transactional theory. The response is not purely subjective, which can sometimes be a problem for pure reader-response educators. On the other hand we have some sense that Loyiso has imagined the text and brought it to life as a felt event. Though Rosenblatt used many of these arguments to discuss the reading of literary texts, she also makes the point (1976:88) that:

Even in efferent reading, then, the reader's role is beginning to be recognised. The words on the page leave much open for him to fill in and structure.

Rosenblatt uses the term "efferent" to refer to reading "in which the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading" (1976:24), which might be more of the concern in the subject disciplines where experiencing the poetic charm of the text is not valued or necessary. In that sense I might be arguing for a more poetic classroom of sorts, even if the text is not a poem. The feelings of the reader are important, especially when the aim is motivated learning of the language and not any simple mastery of the objective subject matter. Loyiso constructs his interpretation using the feelings he experiences while reading, questioning, and discussing the text.

Rouse (1993:65), himself a student of Rosenblatt, indicates how these arguments are still useful within the context of more recent understandings of the constructed nature of subjectivities and discourse. Interestingly, Rouse uses the word *style* instead of the word "discourse", which is suggestive of a more personal sense of agency. So, introducing a chapter wherein Mrs M's students engage with discursive and academic writing is this description:

Having a style means having developed the flaws in your character to the point where they bring you a satisfying return. To the point, that is, where you are regarded well by others or even admired for the very characteristics they would condemn in you if only they recognised them for what they really are. But thanks to an artful self-presentation they do not. A presentation that can never be spontaneous, of course, but is like all art the result of conscious effort and

unremitting practice.

In this construction, academic discourse is another *style* to be mastered or not depending upon the need for self-presentation. This need goes beyond simply a decision to attend and participate in a language development programme. The desire for a satisfying return suggests that the way one impresses ones peers is just as important as the way one impresses one's lecturer. So styles of discourse present themselves in the language classroom and the way they are handled by the lecturer may determine important decisions amongst the students.

Showing off a new academic style has to occur in an environment which supports it, and this is extremely problematic when students come from backgrounds and styles which may be far from and even in opposition to the discourse of the academy. In one sense these home styles, literacies or discourses are the "flaws" that need to be changed, or maybe concealed, by the newer academic discourses. But in another sense, these styles also provide a ground for communicative interaction that energises the use of language. The classroom becomes a place where students choose to construct their styles more openly. Forcing students to give up their home-based literacies can easily create a moribund situation where learning in general comes to a terrifying halt no matter how ingenious the explanation of the new academic literacy.

But Rouse (1993:70) chooses to narrate and demonstrate these things rather than only explain them, and therefore in his story Mrs Martinez's student Shakena Wells presents her research like this:

"Well," Shakena began, "this bout hangin out. You member when my partner there comes in his arm all banged up? Some guy hit "im with a bat?" Nestor, leather-jacketed, rose slightly from his seat and nodded to right and left, acknowledging the calls and murmurs of sympathetic approval. "That give me the idea, so I say fine out bout hangin out. And he tol me to do this. He say "You do the outside an I do the inside," so if this ain't no good it be his fault." She glanced down at her paper. "So I ax you all bout it, I got all this information-an I fine out you all hang out. Some a you doin nothin *but* hangin out! I fine out you all hangin roun Toys "R" Us bout every night it warm, in the parkin lot."

This more culturally acceptable oral Black English performance does not indicate that Shakena is any the less hard at work at standard written English. And Mrs M is careful to present for our edification the beginning of Shakena's written text:

Once upon a time there was a toy store called Toys "R" Us and all the little boys and girls used to go there with their mommies and daddies to buy toys. Then one night it so happened that some not so good boys and girls showed up at Toys "R" Us but not to buy toys. They were hangin" out. They came to drink, party and cause trouble.

Rouse's point is that allowing and even provoking students to make use of their own dialects and personal knowledge, urges them on to an intellectual engagement which paradoxically does two things. It supports the student's construction of her own personal and cultural identity while also allowing the student to adapt to the culture and discourse of the academy.

In another scene, Rouse makes this point more explicit describing how Shakena prepares to present her report (p68):

She went over to the teacher's desk, under the tiger print, and pulled out the chair. "Jes like Riley," Malcolm said loudly, referring to a social studies teacher who conducted all his classes from behind the desk.

This is an interesting enactment of the movement from what Gee refers to as "primary Discourses" to the "secondary Discourses" at school. Gee (1990: xv/xvi) offers some description of this movement as a process involving membership in a new community group:

You learn the Discourse by becoming a member of the group: you start as a "beginner", watch what's done with the group as if you know what you're doing when you don't, and eventually you can do it on you own.

What seems important for me here is the sense of membership that is exemplified by Rouse's students. It was part of my intention to create a similar sense of community with a device like student-generated questions and other student choices. The rough comparison here presented between my own work and Rouse's results might indicate that the community existing in the South African tutorial seems to be less expressive of particular styles. But whether this is due to my own failures, the fact of students working with a second language, the effects of apartheid, or some other reason is difficult to ascertain. Still, my sense is that I have been able to move my students in the right direction. The danger of alienation is partially overcome, though of course this continues to be uncertain territory and one can never relieve the student of choice in the matter.

The question is what sorts of relationships are operating in the class? To what extent do academic discourses remain a lecturer or institutionally-owned practice whose acquisition of which must be concealed? Or is there some other sense of shared ownership? And is this ownership a two-way street, with the lecturer learning about the students discourse as well as vice versa?

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