

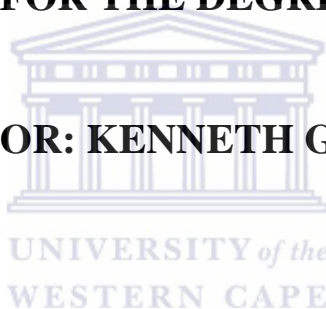
**DEVELOPING FIRST YEAR PART-TIME STUDENTS'  
ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES IN AN ACADEMIC LITERACY  
MODULE**

**BY**

**FIDELIS EWE CHU (2125452)**

**A MINI THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MA IN ENGLISH**

**SUPERVISOR: KENNETH GOODMAN**



**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
FACULTY OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE**

**JULY 2010**

# DECLARATION

I declare that **Developing first year part-time students academic competencies in an academic literacy module** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any university, and that all the sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged as complete references.

Fidelis Ewe Chu



## **ABSTRACT**

The transition from high school to university for many students all over the world has never been very easy and this is also true in the South African context. At the University of the Western Cape the majority of students, particularly part-time students, come from previously disadvantaged institutions of learning. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that most tertiary institutions in South Africa, including The University of the Western Cape, use English as the official language of instruction even though more than three quarters of students entering into institutions of higher learning in South Africa are second or even third language English speakers who do not have the language competence level required in the medium of instruction to successfully negotiate academic curricula.

To maximise throughput, institutions are investing in Academic Literacy programmes to provide students with basic academic and tertiary education survival skills. The Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) module, which I lecture on, is one of such modules introduced by the Economic and Management Sciences Faculty at the University of The Western Cape to help prepare students for tertiary studies. This study aims at reflecting to what extent the course content and its teaching and learning methods are effective in preparing part-time students not only for their university degrees but also for their careers, and making explicit the link between academic knowledge and basic skills development.

The qualitative data, viz. the questionnaires, focus group interviews, and participant observation were analysed through the use of Vygotsky's theory of the relationship between learning and development and new literacy theories; and data collected through students' reflections, were analyzed through descriptive narrative. Classroom observation also formed part of the methodology, as it added to my understanding of what was actually happening in the classes and whether the teaching materials and methodology were appropriate for the needs of part-time students. The triangulation in methods were used to increase reliability and validity to a larger extent.

The research findings are grouped according to the three themes identified which includes the relevance of the module, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning approaches and methods, and the integration of generic and discipline specific academic literacy.

The researcher hopes this study will help illuminate perceptions of part-time students' about the Academic Literacy for Commerce course and also how it can be improved to better serve the needs of part-time students.

**Key words:**

Academic literacy, part-time students, adult learners, competencies, skills transfer, tertiary education, academic support, curriculum design, skills development, South Africa.



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# Chapter One

## 1. Introduction and background

### 1.1 Introduction

Academic literacies have received considerable attention in tertiary education in most English-medium universities all over the world including South Africa. As a result of globalisation, and the increasing number of international students and the dominance of English as an academic language, academic literacy programmes have constantly been revised in both developed and developing countries. This is done to meet the ever changing needs of students entering institutions of higher learning. More than three quarters of students entering into institutions of higher learning in South Africa are second or even third language English speakers who often do not have the competency level required in the medium of instruction to successfully negotiate academic curricula (Mouton, 2001). Academic literacies are being taken very seriously in South Africa in terms of trying to meet the needs of students entering into institutions of higher learning. Hence, there has been the necessity for innovation and change in the way academic literacy programmes have been offered with a focus not only on academic reading and writing but on tertiary education survival skills in general. As argued by Warren (2006) academic literacy curricula should address issues of general and discipline-specific writing and skills; foundation and remediation; survival skills as well as the teaching approaches and methods to enable students to succeed in their tertiary studies.

Hence, it was necessary to find out students perception about the course content and if it is particularly useful to them as part-time students. Since different methods of teaching and assessments were used in the course, I was also interested in understanding how students felt about the way information taught in the course is presented and assessed. This is to help the researcher

build on the strong points and also to improve on the negative aspects or short comings of the module.

## **1.2 Background**

This research, on reflecting on the effectiveness of an Academic Literacy module in the Economic and Management Sciences, is part of the monitoring of the implementation of lifelong learning at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) that was endorsed by the Senate Life Long Learning Committee in 2005. Historically, this study is linked to a series of studies that commenced in 1997. The first study about UWC's part-time programme was published in 1998, followed by studies in 1999, 2003 and 2004 by the newly established Division for Lifelong Learning (DLL). The data in these studies was framed with reference to the context of an emerging South African democracy, where skills formation policy has become part of the strategic and operational imperatives for national South African structures such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

South Africa's emerging literature about its adult learners in higher education indicates that there is much to find out about the way in which work and study imperatives impact on the lives of part-time students, and in particular how the combination of study and work influences may affect academic performance and workplace success. This calls for a closer investigation into the kind of students currently studying at higher education institutions, as well as a related investigation into the kinds of institutional provision that may need to be put in place for an increasing, more divergent, and older student set with different needs from those of the more traditional cohorts of students.

Buchler, Castle, Osman, and Walters, (2006) present their insights into adult learners and their successes in higher education contexts in a study commissioned by the Council of Higher Education. Some of their considerations are highlighted below:

The growing research literature on adult learners in higher education points to micro teaching and learning outcomes of adult learners which includes issues of motivation, life circumstances, and learning strategies for success. Within the philosophy of lifelong learning there is a questioning of what 'success' means – is it only measured by the attainment of a qualification? ... Adults' life circumstances often do not permit uninterrupted study; sometimes they do not require a full qualification, so the criteria of throughput and completion rates are often inappropriate for adult learners (Buchler *et al*, 2006: 22).

This insight into adult learners and their successes in higher education is very important as higher education in South Africa has witnessed a number of complex changes since the new political dispensation in 1994. These changes have not only been political but have had to deal with complex issues like curriculum change. Worthy of note, is the introduction of outcome based education (OBE). Unlike in the past, where learning was teacher centred with learners facing difficulties in activating the knowledge acquired in the work place, OBE is more learner centred although it has its own problems especially when teachers are not well trained to implement desired outcomes. Research will still need to explore the extent to which OBE has changed the context of acquisition of knowledge in South Africa. **DECLARATION**

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Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have primarily focused on imparting knowledge and developing critical thinking skills with less attention being given to developing effective skills and aptitudes that students also require for their careers (Buchler *et.al*, 2006). However, with the changing trend of HEIs moving towards a more vocationally orientated ethos, it would now seem appropriate to explore the growing body of research suggesting that academic success alone does not predict success in the workplace, and to examine ways of helping students to develop a wider range of abilities, including increased self-confidence, adaptability, critical thinking, communication and teamwork. This is very important, especially with part-time students who are

working and considering further education and training not only as a means to achieve promotion, but also as a means to enhance their professional capabilities. It should also be noted that there has been a general decline in the general academic literacy levels of students who enrol for their first year (both full time and part time) at the University of the Western Cape and other South African universities. This worrying trend is not only limited to South Africa as developed countries such as the United States seem to be experiencing a similar decline in academic and mathematical literacy levels (Dillion, 2005).

The Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) module in the Economic and Management Science Faculty in the University of the Western Cape has been designed with this in mind: through the principle of promoting active learning, the principle of facing ‘both ways’ (world of work and the academic discipline concerned) and the principle of accommodating the diversity of students prevalent in Higher Education institutions. Therefore, the learning outcomes of the module should contain an appropriate mix of basic disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills. This is very important as it relates to the larger exit outcomes of these students.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives**

The aim of this study is to reflect on the extent that the Academic Literacy for Commerce Module provides good learning and teaching practice that will be of genuine benefit to the student, preparing them not only for their university degrees but also for their future careers, and making explicit the link between academic knowledge and skills development.

This study will attempt to investigate if and to what extent:

- Learning and teaching strategies developed for this module, contribute to improving part-time students' tertiary education survival skills and professional skills.
- There is a role for modules within an integrated undergraduate business curriculum that supports students in developing effective skills, required for both academic and career endeavours.

It is hoped that the Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) Faculty may benefit directly if the research emerges with any positive or negative information that can help strengthen student learning. This is because from the shortcomings of the module, recommendations can be implemented in the coming years. Hopefully, these recommendations would assist more part-time students to receive effective and relevant academic support to help them to complete their first year of study successfully. If this happens, the level of student failure in the faculty and high dropout rates of part-time students would decrease, and a higher throughput rate would be achieved. In addition, other faculties at UWC and possibly other higher education institutions that are similar to UWC could also benefit from findings that emerge from this study.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

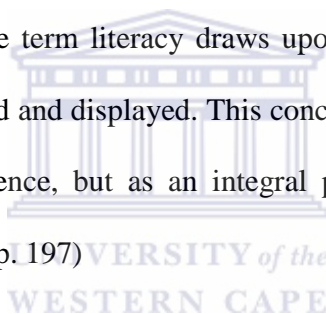
This research aims to investigate to what extent the design of the academic literacy module's course content and its teaching and delivery methods help to enhance the academic potentials of first year part-time students.

Among other things, the research will interrogate:

- What learning and teaching methods and approaches are used in developing part-time students' academic potential?

- How important are tertiary education survival skills to first year part-time students in relation to their studies and the world of work?
- To what extent the diversity in background of part-time students present an obstacle in developing the academic skills of part-time students?
- Whether the learning styles of part-time students present an obstacle in developing the academic skills of part-time students?

I have chosen to focus on literacies as an operational concept in this study. The term is more encompassing than competence, which often carries the notion of innate human capacity of acquiring, using, and understanding something such as language (Chomsky, 1965). Over and above the notion of competence, the term literacy draws upon the social context in which given competencies are acquired or evolved and displayed. This conceptualised literacy is ‘not in terms of decontextualised skills and competence, but as an integral part of social events and practices’ (Maybin, 2000 in Barton et al 2000, p. 197)



The fundamental reason for reflecting on the curriculum, teaching and delivery methods stems from a shift in the notion of academic literacies. An earlier view of academic literacy focusing only on students’ reading and writing skills has become insufficient. Also, the notion that academic literacies deals with different contexts, includes the transferability of a general set of skills and abilities from the academic literacy classroom to a disciplinary context (Hyland, 2002). Indeed, while it is acknowledged that certain skills are common across all disciplines (Johns, 1997; Sutton, 1997; Kaldor & Rechecouste, 2002), it is overly simplistic to argue that one can transfer the same linguistic structures operative in one disciplinary community to another as this poses considerable challenges. The current notion of academic literacies takes cognizance of diversity, complexity, and contextualisation (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988; Dillon, 1991; Samraj, 2002). The part-time students in

this research come from different backgrounds and have different contextual reasons for pursuing tertiary education. These different backgrounds often present an obstacle in fulfilling the literacy needs of part-time students.

All over the world the financial support of various governments for tertiary education continues to be of great concern as more funds are required than are made available by respective governments. In the advanced economies such as Australia (Dillon, 1991) this has led to a closer collaboration between industry and universities in the commercialization of research. This has often led to confrontations between university students, university lecturers, and non-academic workers on the one hand and governments on the other hand as to whose interests should receive greater consideration. If part-time students are financially contributing towards their own education, then the evaluation of the educational product and issues such as accountability and quality assurance need to be addressed. Such re-contextualization of education as a commodity implies the need for the service providers (university authorities) to regularly evaluate their curricula, to make them functional to the needs of potential employers. Moreover, many stakeholders in university education in South Africa have questioned the products that are being turned out by the country's universities, especially in terms of their communication skills in the workplace. This worrying trend calls for reflection and introspection in the teaching and learning of academic literacy.

I believe that an investigation into the design of the Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) module's course content and its teaching and delivery methods will help to throw more light on the strengths and weaknesses of the course which will help to improve the academic potentials of first year part-time students.

## **1.5 The Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) Course**

This ALC course aims at developing the student's reading and writing competencies by affording him/her an active role in examining and evaluating instructional reading and writing techniques. The course has been designed to make it easy for students to understand the relationship between the four language skills which are listening, reading, writing and speaking. As students progress in the course they will see how important these skills are and how interrelated they are to each other. In addition, the course aims at making students aware that critical thinking is central to whatever they do and that skills learnt in this course will hopefully be transferred to other courses when applicable. Also the importance of tertiary education skills is emphasised. Students are expected to understand and make use of diverse reading and writing strategies. This academic knowledge and skills will have to be applied to a variety of academic specific situations. To understand the rationale of the course it will be worthwhile to situate it within the context of higher education in South Africa.



### **1.5.1 Context of higher education in South Africa**

To understand today's context and challenges, we need to go back to the apartheid years. Thirteen years ago, there were 36 higher education institutions, 21 universities and 15 polytechnics, all state run. All of them were ethnically and racially separated, with most schools that black, coloured and Indians attended being under-resourced, and those that whites attended being well- resourced.

In 1994, there were about 500,000 students enrolled at these 36 institutions; by 2005, that number had increased to 734,000, and it is expected to reach 800,000 in 2010. This has been part of an effort to widen and deepen participation of citizens in higher education, the target being an 18 percent participation rate for the 18-to-24 age group. That number sat at 5 percent in 1994; now it is in the region of 13 percent. The number of black students at higher education institutions has

doubled in the process during this period. In 1994, about 55 percent of the student population was black; in 2005, it was 75 percent and has continued to grow.

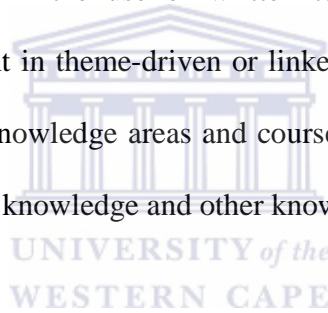
Since the new political dispensation in 1994 and the ongoing transformation in higher education, there has been a drive to increase access to tertiary education especially for the previously disadvantaged groups. This, however, is problematic because of the different levels of education that students still receive in primary and secondary school education in South Africa. This is not only a South African problem as the situation of inadequate academic literacy levels for tertiary education is further compounded by globalisation and the large movement of students from other parts of the African continent into South Africa. It is therefore essential that there is adequate preparation to deal with these different levels of diverse academic literacy background and preparedness for higher education.

A number of changes have taken place in the South African higher educational system. There has been the merger of many South African Universities and Technikons and also the on-going discussions of all curricula within higher education institutions to an outcomes based education (OBE) that is being implemented in primary and secondary level. Conversations around OBE insist that curricula should not only be responsible for the knowledge learners need to master in specific fields, but also for what learners can accomplish with the knowledge they have gained in order to solve problems in specific fields (Philips, 1997). Outcome based education emphasises an integration of specific knowledge and skills /abilities culminating in capabilities in specific fields.

### **1.5.2 Course Rationale**



The Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) course is a first year course aimed at assisting students to acquire tertiary education academic and life skills and is an important part of the core curriculum at the Economic and Management Sciences Faculty (EMS) in the University of the Western Cape. The course is shaped through ongoing discussions with the EMS faculty to ensure that the content of the course develops skills needed by students in the faculty. In the Academic Literacy for Commerce course students are expected to gain knowledge of the rhetorical principles that shape both perception and production of written texts. They learn the philosophical perspectives that govern scholarly analysis of writing, such as the pervasiveness of persuasive aims, definitions of the audience role, and the goals of argumentation. In this way, they learn to recognize the intellectual traditions that inform the use of written texts within their disciplines. Some instructors include additional content in theme-driven or linked courses so that students can apply this rhetorical knowledge to other knowledge areas and courses. Through this application learners can experience the ways that written knowledge and other knowledge areas influence each other.



### **1.5.3 Core Skills**

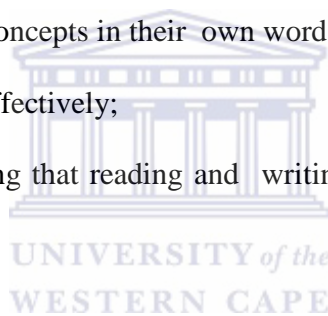
This course aims to develop several core skills such as listening, note taking, group dynamics, presentation skills, reading, writing and dealing with self esteem. Also in the analyses of written business texts it is envisaged that students understanding of business register and vocabulary can be improved. Students are expected to develop knowledge of and experience in the rhetoric of the written word through text analysis and their own production of academic essays, formal writing assignments, argumentation, and language study. In the process of discussing theories of argumentation, in analyzing the arguments of others, and in developing their own arguments, these students may develop the general art of reasoning and critical thinking. In exploring the words and

ideas of others to support research-based writing skills students develop the art of executing a research project.

### **Reading skills**

At the end of the reading component of the course students should be able to:

- Identify and demonstrate the ability to use pre-and post- reading techniques;
- Read their Economics, Industrial Psychology and/or Accounting, Management text books with greater insight and understanding;
- Apply academic reading skills and concepts to contemporary business literature such as the Financial mail;
- Explain discipline specific concepts in their own words;
- Summarise an article more effectively;
- Demonstrate an understanding that reading and writing is related to thinking and gaining knowledge;



### **Writing skills**

The writing component of the course aims to develop the following kinds of writing skills of students. The ability to:

- write coherent and meaningful paragraphs in academic essays where arguments are presented, motivated and substantiated;
- contextualise and integrate evidence provided to substantiate claims made in academic essays;
- construct logical and focused arguments (both orally and in writing) of different communication contexts;

- analyse, discuss, evaluate and summarise written texts, such as case studies; conversations and debates;
- write good and effective memos, e-mail messages, reports, proposals;
- edit and revise written work.

### **Life skills**

Besides reading and writing, students are also introduced to life skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking, time management, problem solving skills and self motivation and group dynamics.

Powell (1985) defines life skills as those skills needed to perform the task at a given age, and in the following areas of human development; psychological, physical, sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego and emotional. Hamburg (1990) saw life skills in terms of formal teaching of the requisite skills for surviving and succeeding in a complex society. According to a world health organisation (WHO) document (1993) life skills are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables one to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

Many skills can therefore be said to be life skills and the nature and definition of these skills are likely to differ across culture and circumstances. However, analysis of life skill fields suggests that there is a core set of skills for the promotion of the health and well-being of children, adolescents and adults (Van der Merwe, 1996). This includes:

- Decision making skills
- Problem solving skills
- Creative thinking skills
- Critical thinking skills

- Effective communication skills
- Interpersonal relationship skills
- Self awareness
- Ability to empathise
- Coping with emotions
- Coping with stressors

Schreiber and Davidowitz (2008) explains that the capacity for life skills, adjustment, coping, managing stress and personal development constitute affective, and thus ‘underlying factors’, which can significantly impact on efficiency rates at HE institutions. Hence, the need to empower students with these skills, to enable them to deal with the demands of HE institutions.

#### **1.5.4 Core qualities**

ALC aims at encouraging three core virtues: promoting creativity, critical thinking, and fostering a sense of positive self-esteem. Firstly, promoting creativity demands that students are guided not only to impress and express but also to persuade. As students work and rework essays to clarify their thesis, to better integrate their research, or to enhance the loveliness of a passage, they learn to edit and re-edit their work. Furthermore, in researching and in representing the words and ideas of others, students learn to write in a way that honours the virtue of honesty by avoiding plagiarism. Working through the challenges of writing, students practice the ability to be rather objective than subjective writers. Students must recognize that the challenges of writing will draw them into potentially uncomfortable situations like effectively substantiating their arguments, hence, hard work and dedication is needed to succeed.

### 1.5.5 Course Content

The course content involves the following skills:

- Listening and note-taking skills
- Group dynamics skills
- Critical thinking
- Reading
- Writing
- Referencing
- Digital information literacy skills

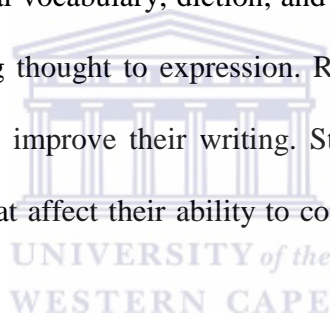
The ALC course aims at preparing students for academic challenges by helping them develop a keen eye for reading comprehensively and critically and in analysing written texts, while developing a voice for communicating effectively in their own writing. Students learn the basic principles that help shape their writing. They explore the relationship between author, audience, and text and methods of logical argumentation, organizational patterns, and paragraph development.

In writing essays, students learn to refine a thesis; develop supporting points, create introductions, and conclusions; and to choose an effective format. Students develop reliable composing processes, and the invention and revision strategies that will help them write efficiently and effectively. They learn editing skills that produce clarity and coherency. The ALC students learn the principles that govern argumentation in written texts, analyze the arguments in the written texts and produce their own written arguments.

Students develop their research skills in the context of complex writing tasks: They learn to integrate quotations in their argument and learn to use words and ideas of others by using referencing.

Reading assignments are based on business texts and by analyzing the written words of others, students learn to value writing as an effective means of conveying information and as a powerfully persuasive tool. When reading in the ALC course, students consider the ways in which the writer has developed his argument in the respective paragraphs by interrogating the methods of paragraph development and also deconstructing rhetoric patterns to see how arguments are put together.

By exploring issues such as technical vocabulary, diction, and sentence structure, students come to understand the importance of fitting thought to expression. Recognizing that familiarity with the conventions of written English will improve their writing. Students review grammar and usage, paying special attention to issues that affect their ability to communicate clearly in formal written texts.



### **1.5.6 Course requirements**

During the course of the year, students write two essays, at least one of which includes a research component as well as informal writing assignments such as journals, free writes, in-class writing assignments, and writing exercises. Grammar exercises are incorporated into the reading and writing components. Students attend two lectures and a tutorial per week. Students are also expected to complete a group assignment on a specific topic which is expected to be presented to the rest of the tutorial group. Attendance is mandatory and a less than 60% attendance (as a regulation by faculty) means the student will not be allowed to write the exams.

### **1.5.7 ALC resources**

A variety of texts, are used to put together a course reader and also recommended readings are given to students from time to time in the form of handouts. Readings are carefully selected to encourage not only comprehension but also to encourage critical thinking and analysis. The course makes use of both stimulating and provocative text. This is to give the students the opportunity to grapple with issues that they may agree or disagree with while at the same time are able to respond to the text without being biased or prejudiced.

### **1.5.8 Learning outcomes**

Qualifications and standards registered on the NQF are described in terms of the learning outcomes that the learner is expected to have demonstrated after the completion of a module. Hence, there is an underlying commitment to a system of education and training that is organised around the notion of learning outcomes. These outcomes are clearly articulated and included in the course reader. Learning outcomes are also explicitly stated at the beginning of lectures and tutorials to provide direction and to ensure that both the lecturer and the learners have a common understanding of the desired outcome.

### **1.5.9 Main Outcomes**

ALC 101 aims at improving first-year students' academic literacy skills, and the use of productivity software. After the course students should be able to:

- Demonstrate the use of various listening and note taking strategies;
- Demonstrate an understanding of group dynamics;
- Demonstrate an understanding of analytical and critical thinking;

- Apply critical and analytical reading skills in various contexts, including text books and articles in journals, newspapers, magazines;
- Write well-constructed written assignments and academic essays,
- Use references and quotations in a coherent and appropriate manner;
- Summarise main and supporting ideas in written texts,
- Write well-constructed reports and proposals;
- Effectively utilize IT- based productivity tools to organize and manage information.

#### **1.5.10 Critical cross-fields outcomes (CCFOC's)**

The world is an ever-changing place, politically, geographically and technologically. To succeed or even survive in a globally competitive world, a country must ensure that it has a national education and training system that provides quality learning, is responsive to the ever-changing influences of the external environment and promotes the development of a nation that is committed to life-long learning. The NQF is a strategy in response to these demands. It provides a framework within which the South African qualifications system is constructed, representing a national effort at integrating education and training. (NQF, 2008).

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) requires that in addition to the main outcomes, certain generic and critical outcomes be achieved in the teaching and learning process for every course. In addition to the specific learning outcomes, by the end of a course students should also be able to:

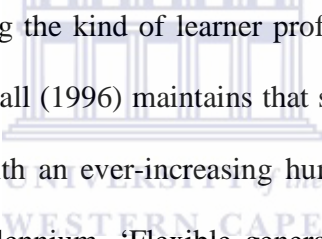
CCFO1: Identify and solve problems that display the ability to make responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking.

CCFO2: Work effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation or



community.

- CCFO3: Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
- CCFO4: Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
- CCFO5: Communicate effectively using visual, and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentation.
- CCFO6: Use science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others.
- CCFO7: Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.



Christopher Ball (1996) in describing the kind of learner profile that is suited to the 21st century speaks about 'flexible generalists'. Ball (1996) maintains that such people are needed to realise the goal of life-long learning which, with an ever-increasing human longevity, will characterise the successful citizenry of the next millennium. 'Flexible generalists' are people equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to adjust readily to multiple-career changes and make, through their own personal development, a significant contribution to the life of this country and the world. The shift in thinking is from education to employment which is developing the ability to do a specific job - to education for employability which is developing the ability to adapt acquired skills to new working environments. The new education and training system must be able to support the notion of an adaptable workforce by providing not only academic skills but important life or survival skills (NQF, 2008).

## 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter provides the background of the Academic literacy for Commerce (ALC) module and its content and importance for part-time students. It highlights the fact that academic literacy is very important to first year students entering institutions of higher learning in South Africa as a majority are second language (L2) English speakers who often do not have the competency level required in the medium of instruction to successfully negotiate academic curricula. Hence, it is important to interrogate the extent the academic literacy module provides good learning and teaching practice and environments that are of genuine benefit to the student, preparing them not only for their university degrees but also for their future careers, and making explicit the link between academic knowledge and skills development.

The rest of the thesis is divided as follows: Chapter Two deals with the literature review, Chapter Three deals with the Research Methodology, while Chapter Four focuses on the analysis of the findings. Finally, Chapter Five presents a summary of the main findings and some recommendations on how to improve the course content and teaching and learning in the course and its relationship to mainstream curricula.

## Chapter two

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a general overview of theories relating to the design, teaching and learning of academic literacies with particular interest on first year part-time students in the EMS Faculty at UWC. The view informing this chapter in particular, and the thesis as a whole, is that theory relies on practice; on the other hand, practice is equally in need of theory. Without recourse to a more systematic body of ideas, practice runs the risk of simply perpetuating the status quo, of not being challenged, of not having its assumptions exposed and thereby made amenable to change (Tesh, 1995).

This chapter therefore provides the theoretical framework for the study.

#### 2.2 Understanding academic literacies

The link between academic literacies and tertiary education (Lea & Street, 2000) is undeniable and has long engaged the attention of educationalists, applied linguists, and other scholars interested in the use of language by students. This has often been discussed by scholars in American, British, and Australian universities in contrast to postcolonial settings which increasingly, though, continue to use English not only in the academic domain but also in business and political spheres as a result of both globalisation (Block & Cameron, 2002) and the attendant use of English as an international language. The considerable attention that has been paid to academic literacies worldwide in the last three decades or so derives from the challenges posed by globalisation, internationalisation, “commodification” of tertiary education, and the increasing prominence given to English language education. (Afful, 2007).

Afful (2007) explains that the term ‘academic literacy’ conjures all the multifaceted sets of complex skills that are required for a person to function effectively in various disciplinary communities in a university. Apart from the fact that these skills are required for students to interact effectively with a text (that is, print, visual, digital, or computer-mediated), they are perceived to be critical for high school students entering the university as pre-university institutions are seen to have a culture, practices, and values different from those of universities or tertiary institutions (Alfred *et al*, 2000). In recent times academic literacy has been redefined to encompass a complex set of skills and accomplishments required at ‘entry’ into tertiary institutions as well as skills required for an advanced learner to make an effective ‘departure’ from universities as an independent researcher (Johns & Swales, 2002).

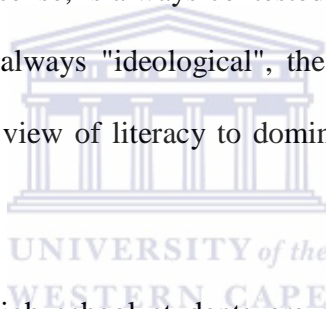
Mouton (2001) explains that the transition from secondary to tertiary level needs effective academic skills like reading, writing and critical thinking. Also life skills such as time management, self esteem, and group dynamics are especially important to enable learners (particularly part-time students) to reduce the ever increasing gap between secondary education and tertiary education. These skills (thinking, reading, and writing) do not come naturally to most people - they are acquired skills. The problems associated with acquiring academic skills’ such as writing is exacerbated due to the fact that English is not the mother tongue of most students in South African Universities and this becomes an additional barrier to overcome. Academic literacies involve skills, language use, and relationships students rarely experience in their out-of-school discourse communities. Literacy is always situated within specific social practices and within specific discourses (Gee, 1996, 2000). Some of these literacies are better developed than others, and competence is relative to specific contexts, communities, and practices (Kern & Schultz, 2005).

What has come to be termed the "New Literacy Studies" (NLS) (Gee, 1991; Street, 1996) represents a new tradition in considering the nature of literacy, focusing not so much on acquisition of skills, as in dominant approaches, but rather on what it means to think of literacy as a social practice (Street, 1985). This entails the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power. NLS, takes nothing for granted with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it becomes associated, problematising what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking "whose literacies" are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant.

Literacy researchers have constructed a conceptual apparatus that both coins some new terms and gives new meanings to some old ones. Street (1985) begins with the notion of multiple literacies, which makes a distinction between "autonomous" and "ideological" models of literacy (Street, 1985) and develops a distinction between literacy events and literacy practices (Street, 1988). According to Street (1984), the standard view in many fields, from schooling to development programs, works from the assumption that literacy in itself--autonomously--will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. Introducing literacy to poor, "illiterate" people, villages, urban youth etc. will have the effect of enhancing their cognitive skills, improving their economic prospects, making them better citizens, regardless of the social and economic conditions that accounted for their "illiteracy" in the first place. This is considered as an "autonomous" model of literacy. Street (1984) suggests cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these gentle effects. Research in NLS challenges this view and suggests that in practice literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and so, therefore, do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions. The autonomous approach is simply imposing western

conceptions of literacy on to other cultures or within a country those of one class or cultural group onto others.

The alternative, ideological model of literacy, offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacy practices as they vary from one context to another. This model starts from different premises than the autonomous model--it posits instead that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles. It is also always embedded in social practices, such as those of a particular job market or a particular educational context and the effects of learning that particular literacy will be dependent on those particular contexts. Literacy, in this sense, is always contested, both its meanings and its practices, hence particular versions of it are always "ideological", they are always rooted in a particular world-view and in a desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others (Gee, 1991; Besnier & Street, 1994).



There is evidence, however, that high school students are not very accomplished in academic literacy, let alone part-time students, some of whom have not been in a classroom situation for years. These part-time students lack the kind of literacy needed for achievement on traditional school tasks and standardized assessments (Lewis, 1996).

When part-time students come face-to-face with more traditional forms of learning (such as school learning), they need to use specialized academic literacy skills to comprehend and communicate about texts that are often decontextualized and disconnected from many students' experiences. Marzano (2004) considers academic knowledge as having a more narrow scope than an individual's general knowledge. Depending on students' prior experiences, including subjects taken in school and the quality of teaching experienced in those subjects, students may or may not have the topic

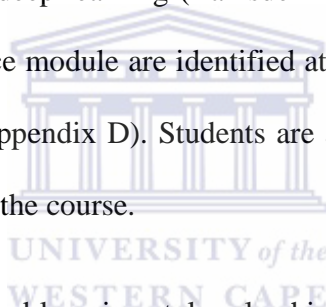
and domain knowledge needed for success in a particular academic environment (Alexander & Jetton, 2000). This, therefore, accounts for the need for a relevant and stimulating academic literacy curriculum to assist students to acquire this knowledge and related skills.

### **2.3 Developing a curriculum**

A curriculum is more than just a sequence of lectures and timetables. According to Kern, *et al.* (1998), a curriculum is “a planned educational experience”. Hence, the main intention of curriculum design at the tertiary level is to foster the academic development of students. Once a specific group of students is identified for whom the curriculum is to be designed, the purpose for the curriculum design can then be made clear.

If a curriculum is to be “a planned educational experience”, then curriculum design and implementation should follow a sequence of steps that operates like an upward and downward spiral with a robust feedback system for the adjustment of each step. These steps should include establishing the goals and objectives of the course, a needs analysis of the students, design and implementation, and feedback to measure success. (Kern, et al.1998). O’ Grady (2001) agrees with Kern *et al.* (1998) that a successful course, one in which students learn what educators intend them to in a meaningful manner, is the result of many factors, from preparation to delivery and motivation. She stresses that the ‘successful’ or ‘outstanding teacher’ is frequently the one who carefully conceptualises their courses and then organises these ideas into working plans and detailed course documents. These plans provide a foundation and a guide for instructional practice that is likely to lead to greater comprehensiveness, cogency, coherency and consonance (O’ Grady, 2001).

Planning for any course must include a credible understanding of the learner and how they are likely to perceive and respond to different instruction as the educational environment or context of learning is created through our students' experience of our curricula, teaching and assessment procedures (Ramsden, 1992). Identifying the desired change in students implies an understanding of where the students 'are at'. Hence, part of planning a course must be about finding out information about the students (that is before the first class, looking at entry scores, characteristics of previous cohorts, amongst others, or during the first contact, getting to know the students, prior learning/understanding, learning styles, motivation and preconceptions/assumptions about the course)(O' Grady, 2001). This will also help one pitch the course at the right level and avoid surface learning while encouraging deep learning (Ramsden 1992). Learning styles of students in the Academic Literacy for Commerce module are identified at the beginning of the course through learning styles questionnaires (*c.f.* appendix D). Students are also expected to briefly comment in writing about what they expect from the course.



The research literature on teaching and learning styles also highlights the importance of a focus on cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Greeno et al, 1997). Learning strategies can be divided into two basic types. Cognitive strategies help us to remember and organise content information. For example, in ALC when we read we might apply a cognitive strategy to skim the title, pictures, and headings of a text to get the gist of what we will read. We might take notes to help us remember the main points. An expert reader will also know when it is possible to skip over sections of a text and when it is important to read every word carefully. When teaching a large number of facts, a good strategic learner will "study smarter" by working to understand the "big picture" and then dividing the facts into categories through a classification scheme, diagram or outline, for example mind maps (Gillespie and Nash, 2002).



Metacognitive strategies consist of knowledge about one's own thinking processes. They are the "executive managers" of knowledge and involve planning, monitoring, evaluating and revising one's own thinking processes. Good metacognitive strategy users engage in an ongoing process of identifying what their prior knowledge of a topic is, what they don't know, and what they need to learn. Metacognitive strategies enable learners to plan and self-regulate their work and to judge under what conditions to apply which cognitive strategies.

Tutors help learners to learn these skills by enabling them, firstly, to examine their prior knowledge and to construct new knowledge in the light of their past experiences through reflecting on the knowledge, skills and learning strategies that they use to complete a particular task. Secondly, tutors may ask learners to think about how this specific learning might transfer to other parts of their lives and to use this information and their thinking processes to monitor, develop and alter their understanding. Finally, tutors can help learners to identify what barriers they feel interfere with their learning and revise their assumptions about these in the light of their own growing independence.

While planning is in part anticipating and articulating what the students may be like (and what we wish them to become), it is also about developing strategies (such as pre-course questionnaires, early assessment, class discussions and interviews) to check whether these assumptions and expectations are valid and accurate. The information gathered allows a teacher to be better prepared and flexible in making informed adjustments to instruction such that it meets the students' specific needs and in this way desired course outcomes can indeed be achieved (O'Grady, 2001).

## **2.4 Part-time students as adult learners**

Janis (1987) highlights the fact that part of being an effective instructor involves understanding how part-time (adults) students learn best. Compared to full-time students, adults have special needs and requirements as learners. Although adult learning is relatively new as a field of study, it is just as substantial as traditional education and carries the potential for greater success. Of course, the heightened success requires a greater responsibility on the part of the teacher. Additionally, the learners come to the course with precisely defined expectations.

Adults are more goal-oriented. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain. They, therefore, appreciate an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements. Instructors must show participants how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.

Jarvis (1987) explains that the best motivators for adult learners are interest and selfish benefits. If they can be shown that the course benefits them pragmatically, they will perform better, and the benefits will be longer lasting. The best way to motivate adult learners is simply to enhance their reasons for enrolling and decrease the barriers. Instructors must learn why their students are enrolled (the motivators); they have to discover what is keeping them from learning. Then the instructors must plan their motivating strategies. A successful strategy includes showing adult learners the relationship between training and an expected or possible promotion.

The importance of developing the academic competence of part-time students has been considered in relation to national and international literature pertaining to work and study in Higher Education. In his investigation into adult learners wishing to participate in part-time study in Scotland, St Clair

(2006) makes the following interesting observations about who participates, and who does not participate in Further and Higher Education:

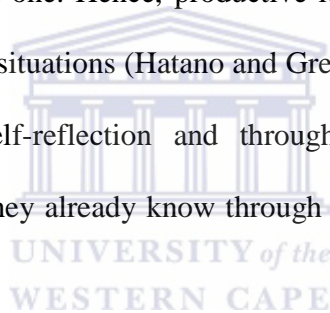
Across all institutions, 37% of students are part-time, and 47% are mature learners (over 21 at time of entry to study). It would be interesting to break down the figures further, in order to examine the types of courses mature learners are doing, and how strongly maturity correlates with part-time status or the deprivation index. Some of these correlations have been calculated in the UK as a whole, and show that between 1994/1995 and 2003/2004 the proportion of mature learners increased from 59% to 60%, and over 90% of part-time students in the UK are mature students (Department for Education and Skills, 2005), (2006:28).`

In South Africa, the government's Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) has identified skilled artisans and vocational skills as critical for sustained economic growth. An ASGISA (2007) report suggests that, in the current workplace in South Africa, high levels of written and spoken communication skills, work ethics and personal management are highly valued. These are some of the skills that part-time students can expect to acquire from the academic literacy module and such life skills are treated with great intensity. The academic literacy module applies a holistic approach to help part-time students acquire both academic and life skills to enable them to compete successfully with other graduates.

The general problem of transfer of skills to the work environment is very important as knowledge at work and knowledge at the university are recognised as being broadly differently structured, differently acquired and used for a different purpose (Eraut, 2004, Bernstein, 2000). Eraut (2004), Bernstein (2000), and Layton et al (1993) have pointed out the fundamental differences between academic and work knowledge in terms of the context of learning and structure of knowledge

respectively and hence the difficulty of transferring skills from the academic context to the world of work.

Bernstein (2000) theorises that knowledge in work and society is by and large differently structured from academic discourse. This is because the more vertical knowledge structure of academic knowledge, with its abstract language and guiding principles suggest that it will not easily integrate with the more context bound nature of work knowledge (horizontal structured discourse) (Bernstein,2000). If this is true then learners from the academy will need more than just academic knowledge to be productive. That is, it will be difficult for individuals to transfer what they have learnt in one situation to a different one. Hence, productive learning will require the individual's ability to generalise across different situations (Hatano and Greeno, 1999). Productive learning here will refer to learning through self-reflection and through reflective interactions. Students' knowledge is extended from what they already know through these reflections within an extended social learning milieu.



The notion of transfer of skills though very important, is very difficult to measure or assess whether transfer has actually taken place. This research does not aim to focus on transfer of skills, a hint on the nature and level of transfer will be gained through students' own perceptions and reflections on what they have learned and how they would integrate this learning into their other courses and into their work environment. While this does not demonstrate transfer, it does point to a potential that might be realized and could form part of a follow-up study to establish how students have integrated their learning in a future longitudinal study.

## 2.5 Learning styles and learning theories

Gudykunst (2002) defines intercultural communication as communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Jandt (2004:39) sees it as a “face to face communication between two people from different cultural backgrounds.” Knapp and Hall (1992:227) look at intercultural communication as the interpersonal interaction between members of different groups who differ from each other in respect of knowledge shared by their members and respect for their linguistic forms of symbolic behaviours. Intercultural communication therefore gives an insight into the areas we need to address or understand in the era of globalization.

In addition, South Africa provides a complex and intriguing picture of multilingualism due to its broad spectrum of both indigenous and non-indigenous languages and its politically burdened history of Apartheid, (1948-1994) (Encarta premium suite.com, 2007). During this period, only English and Afrikaans were recognized as official languages. All the other languages were only spoken by the politically powerless people. These languages include: isiZulu, isiXhosa, siSwati, isiNdebele, seSotho, Setswana, Tsonga, Tshivenda, Sepedi as well as the Indian languages. This poses a huge problem in presenting the ALC course as these languages have significant differences to English which is the medium of teaching at UWC and many other universities in South Africa. Hence, second language English speakers will need more time to understand not only the English register but important concepts that are taught in discipline specific modules.

Besides the issue of language, there is also the issue of learning styles. Every student has a preferred learning style. Knowing and understanding the learning style of the student helps the lecturer to create an environment for students to learn more effectively. By identifying the learning style of the student, the instructor would be able to capitalize on their strengths and also improve

their self-advocacy skills, a notion shared by advocates of the social learning theory like Vygotsky. Social learning theory has sometimes been called a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation. The theory is related to Vygotsky's Social Development Theory and Lave's Situated Learning, which also emphasizes the importance of social learning.

Vygotsky's theory is one of the foundations of constructivism (Driscoll, 1994). Vygotsky (1978) asserts that the zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the distance between a student's ability to perform a task under adult guidance and/or with peer collaboration and the student's ability in solving the problem independently. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs in this zone. Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the socio-cultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences. According to Vygotsky (1978), humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions and ways to communicate needs. Vygotsky believed that social learning precedes development and also that the internalization of these tools lead to higher thinking skills (Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD would be useful in the ALC module as there is an attempt to expose students to different social contexts and also use scaffolding, and the multiple drafting process to guide them to improve in their academic reading and writing. This is an academic space in which the different learning styles of adult learners can be taken into account.

Kalantzis, Cope and Harvey (2003) suggest that in the explicit teaching of academic literacy practices there are certain skills and characteristics required of successful learners, workers and citizens in the knowledge economy. The authors trace the shifting commercial, technological and cultural conditions characteristic of any economy, and highlight that there are key qualities required

for individual success. Effective learners will increasingly need to be autonomous and self-directed, flexible, collaborative, display open sensibility, broadly knowledgeable, and able to work productively with linguistic and cultural diversity. They contend that to achieve these qualities standardized testing and a 'back to basics' approach to curriculum which have often been practiced, are unable to promote and measure effectively these skills and sensibilities. Instead, a broader and more creative approach to curriculum and assessment is recommended. A 'new basics' is argued for at the level of curriculum, with correlative assessment techniques such as analysis of portfolios, performance, projects and group work.

Another key concept is that of "scaffolding" (Vygotsky, 1986). The role of the tutor is, through guided participation, to build bridges from the learner's present understanding and skills to reach a new level of knowledge. This collaborative process moves the learner along the developmental continuum from novice towards expert. Scaffolding helps to do this by providing tasks that are slightly above the learner's level of independent functioning yet can be accomplished with sensitive guidance. In the process of jointly performing a task, a tutor or more skilled peer can point out links between the task and the ones the learner already knows, helping the learner to stretch his or her understanding to the next development level. Within the ALC curriculum, the lecturer's role is to first structure the task and the learning environment so that the demands on the learner are at an appropriately challenging level. Then the role is to continually adjust the amount of intervention and the range of tasks to the learner's level of independence and fluency.

Lave (1988) argues that learning as it normally occurs is a function of the activity, context and culture in which it occurs (or is situated). This contrasts with some classroom learning activities which involve knowledge which is abstract and out of context. Social interaction is a critical

component of situated learning, which involves a process of engagement in a "community of practice" which embodies certain beliefs and behaviours to be acquired. As the beginner or newcomer moves from the periphery of this community to its centre, they become more active and engaged within the culture and hence assume the role of expert or old-timer. (Lave, 1988). Other researchers like Brown, Collins & Duguid (1989), have further developed the theory of situated learning with emphasis on the idea of cognitive apprenticeship: "Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in authentic domain activity. Learning, both outside and inside school, advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge" (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989).

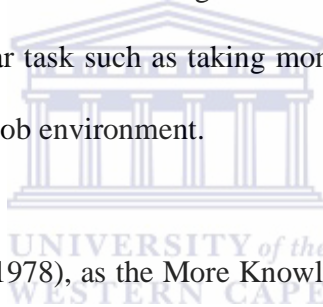
Vygotsky's (1978) Social Development Theory and Lave's Situated Learning are important as many schools have traditionally used a "transmissionist" or "instructionist" model in which a teacher or lecturer 'transmits' information to students. In contrast, Vygotsky's and Lave's theories promote learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. Roles of the teacher and student are therefore shifted, as a teacher should collaborate with his or her students in order to help facilitate meaning construction in students. Learning, not instruction, is a dominant force in a student's literacy development (Crawford, 1996). Learning therefore becomes a reciprocal experience for the students and teacher and the Academic Literacy for Commerce module tries to practice both learning and instruction.

Reflecting on the literature on enhancing the academic literacies of part-time students it is important to think about the theories of knowledge that underpin our understanding of how part-time students (adult learners) learn so that we can teach appropriately. Learning, especially for adult learner, should be seen as an active process of gaining understanding in which learners use their prior knowledge and experience to shape meaning and acquire new knowledge (Glaser, 1992). It is



based on research related to the development of expertise in thinking. This emphasises the fact that adult learners are active problem solvers who learn in order to make sense of the world around them. They like to explore, solve problems and strive to remember. Learning activities should be undertaken not just as ends in themselves but as a means of achieving larger objectives and goals that have meaning in the wider communities that the student is part of. This means that knowledge emerges out of the problem solving activities that the learner engages in. So the learner has a central role in interpreting what is being taught in ways that are meaningful in his/her own context rather than depending on the lecturer as the sole source of knowledge.

For example, part-time learners have tacit knowledge of how they learn to do new things gained from experience of doing a particular task such as taking money out of a cash machine or finding their way around a new area or new job environment.



Teachers, considered by Vygotsky (1978), as the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), need to help learners think about what strategies they use in this kind of learning and how they can transfer these strategies to other kind of literacy tasks. Active learning also emphasises the importance of transferring the learning that takes place in the learning programme to the learner's everyday life. If this doesn't happen, acquiring literacies becomes divorced from these broader purposes and does not have real meaning for learners (Daniels, 2001).

As such it is important to build on the prior knowledge of learners by helping them to identify what they already know about a particular topic (Gillespie, 2002a). More so, is an understanding of the range of prior knowledge and experience that some part-time learners might bring, including those from minority backgrounds who have faced prejudice and discrimination based on gender, race, age

or disability or their capacity to learn. This existing knowledge can then be built on in courses like Academic literacy for Commerce (ALC) in order to help learners to achieve a more expert understanding.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter surveyed the literature on academic literacy and the nature of part-time students that is of relevance to this particular study. By understanding what academic literacy is and the nature of part-time students, it will enhance the ability to develop the academic competencies of first year part-time students.



## Chapter three

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

This thesis reports on a study of the role of the Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) module in developing the academic competencies of first year part-time students in the EMS Faculty. The study was carried out over a period of two years in order to determine the extent to which the course content and design of the Academic Literacy for Commerce module, its teaching and delivery methods, helps to enhance the academic potential of first year part-time students.

This chapter will focus on the research methodology used in this study. It describes and discusses the qualitative research methods used in this thesis. It outlines the various stages involved in the design and implementation of the methodological plan devised for this study.

##### 3.1.1 Ethics statement

In line with the social science code of ethics and the ethical requirements of the University of the Western Cape and Arts Faculty ethics committee, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. They were advised not to use their names during the completion of the survey. The rights of those involved and affected by this research were taken into consideration and where it was reasonable to do so, informed consent was obtained from those directly involved in the research. Since students were expected to reflect truthfully on their personal opinion about the course, measures were taken to maintain the confidentiality of information and minimize intrusion into participants' lives. Participants were given an informed consent form which was carefully explained to them before they signed (*c.f.* appendix E). Participation in this research was voluntary and participants were allowed to withdraw at any stage of the research process. Application for

permission to undertake the study was obtained from the Head of Department of the Academic Development Department and also from the Dean of Research of UWC.

### **3.2 Research design and methodology**

The research tools are very important for the accomplishment of any project. If the right tools are not chosen by the researcher, they may become barriers to the findings. A combination of qualitative methods (student reflections, questionnaires, focus group interview including tutors and students) will be used to elicit data pertaining to what extent the design of the ALC module course material, its teaching and delivery methods will help to enhance the academic potentials of first year part-time students. It will also attempt to throw light on the extent to which the divergence in background and learning styles of part-time students presents an obstacle in developing their academic skills. This research will subscribe to qualitative research methods which are “concerned with human beings: interpersonal relationships, personal values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts and feelings. The qualitative researcher attempts to attain rich, real, deep, and valid data and from a rational standpoint, the approach is inductive” (Leedy, 1993, p.56). This research deals with collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing what part-time first year students do and say. Hence, qualitative methods will be more suited to help gain more knowledge about these set of students.

### **3.3 Research Instruments**

#### **3.3.1 Sampling**

The sample size for this study consisted of 30 male and female first year part-time students, between 25 and 55 years of age working in diverse service areas. Webster (1985) defines a sample as a “finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the

whole.” When dealing with people, it can be defined as a set of respondents (people) selected from a larger population for the purpose of a survey. A sample of 30 part-time students would be a representative part of the 68 students registered for the module, for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population. The sampling will take all factors into consideration to avoid or limit errors, bias or chance in sampling. One way of doing this has been to use a large sample size (30 out of 68 students). Also, efforts at minimising sampling error would be controlled by exercising care in determining the method for choosing the sample.

Hence, for this study, purposeful sampling was considered an important type of sampling. Purposeful sampling selects information rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 1990). Size and specific cases depend on the study purpose. Maximum variation sampling, a type of purposeful sampling was used with the aim of capturing and describing the central themes or principal outcomes that cut across a great deal of participants (age, gender, learning styles, race). This involves purposefully picking a wide range of variation on dimensions of interest. This documents unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions (Patton, 1990). Maximum variation sampling also identifies important common patterns that cut across variations. In relation to the study, an example of part-time students from different learning styles, age groups, gender, race, home language, nationalities, professional backgrounds, cultures, work experience and the like would be selected. Patton (1990) explains that the researcher using maximum variation sampling strategy, would not be attempting to generalise findings to all people or all groups but would be looking for information that elucidates programmatic variation and significant common patterns within that variation.

### 3.3.2 Learning styles

The study will analyse students' reflections, and 30 anonymous student questionnaires. An analysis of the questionnaires will help establish baseline information about the student profile, and the use of open-ended questions using qualitative methods will allow for rich information about respondents' work and study contexts.

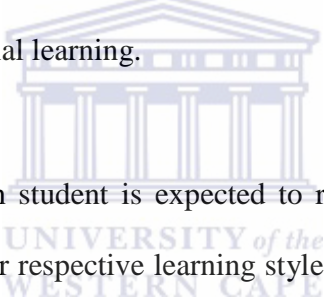
As mentioned in the literature review, every student has a preferred learning style. Knowing and understanding the learning style of the student helps the lecturer to teach more effectively (Crawford, 1996).

A learning style refers to a person's preferred approach to learning. Students learn in different ways; and the approach they prefer may be an important determinant in their academic performance (Allinson & Hayes 1988). Students' learning context is a broad term which encompasses a variety of student-related variables, such as learning styles on the one hand, and variables which educators can control on the other. Educators need to adopt approaches to teaching and assessment that enable students with different learning styles to learn effectively. In the ALC module there was a need to create a suitable mix of different learning opportunities to ensure that the largest possible number of students could learn effectively. Identifying individual students' learning characteristics may help educators to improve their course design and choose helpful and appropriate learning outcomes (Butler 1988), modes of delivery and assessment (Sangster 1996). Once again the ZPG is a space in which the different learning styles can be accommodated in tutor – student or peer collaboration.

Linked to learning styles are teaching styles. A teaching style is a combination of teaching methods and techniques that a lecturer/teacher prefers in his/her teaching. Van Hamburg (2006) mentions principles of good teaching, including encouraging student-lecturer contact and cooperative and active learning, and the need to respect diverse learning styles. The approach used in the ALC

course, and one that is broadly aligned with educational policy in South Africa, is the outcome-based approach. Acharya (2003) identifies the basic principles of outcome-based education as a clear focus on the required outcomes and designing backwards to the student experience to manage learning activities to achieve the required outcomes. In the Accounting Sciences, this approach is highly recommended because of the requirements of professional bodies.

A further approach that is of interest to this study is the problem-based approach, which is also outcome-driven. The approach can be implemented in various disciplines including enhancing academic literacies. The process uses 'facilitators' of learning as opposed to teachers/lecturers. Learning is then driven by posing challenging, open-ended problems, and students work in small collaborative groups to improve their critical thinking skills. This approach provides students with integrative and meaningful experiential learning.



At the beginning of the course each student is expected to respond honestly to a learning style questionnaire to help understand their respective learning styles. The analysis of the questionnaires is used to determine students' learning preferences and to assist in the design of the course. Over 94% of respondents were visual learners. An analysis of how the course is designed to accommodate such students would help to reflect if the course content and teaching methods and approaches are relevant and stimulating.

In addition to learning styles, a needs analysis was conducted. Learning needs analyses are undertaken in industry and business to determine the gap between the existing skills, knowledge and abilities of staff and those that are needed for the organisation to function at the desired level. Once this gap is determined, decisions can be taken as to the type of training required (if this is the preferred action) and the form of delivery (Crawford, 1996).

Likewise, in an educational setting, a learning needs analysis helps students identify where they are in terms of their knowledge, skills and competencies, versus where they wish to be - what are their learning goals?

Adults learn better when they can see a reason or relevance as to why they are following a programme of study. By conducting a learning needs analysis with prospective students, the learning provider can identify what programmes are needed. Including learners from the outset will help ensure that course content, schedules, etc., are in line with the needs of the student. By assisting the learner to identify the gaps in his/her own learning, one will be better able to support the student.

In terms of the research approach, a colleague from another department conducted interviews with two professional tutors who assisted in facilitating the course. Tutors attend lectures and deal with small groups of students (about 15-20) as well as having one on one consultations with them. It is hoped that the two tutors will be in a position to shed more light on the course design and the teaching and delivery methods. They form part of the focus group interview which included eight 2007 and 2008 first year part-time students. Brown et al. (1989) in Patton (1990, p.44) explain that 'groups are not just a convenient way to accumulate individual knowledge of their members; they give rise synergistically to insights and solutions that would not come about without them.' Focus groups are important because students at times feel more comfortable about expressing themselves in the presence of others than reflecting in an interview on their own. In this case, qualitative data can help elicit deeper understanding of participants' impressions about the ALC module.



### 3.3.3 Questionnaires

These are questions or statements that the respondents are expected to answer in most cases anonymously (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). They are similar to interviews with the main difference being that these questionnaires are usually answered in a written form whereas interviews are answered orally. There are two main advantages attached to the questionnaires as a tool of data collection; they are self administered and can be given to a large group at the same time. Also questionnaires are more likely to gather data which is valid and reliable in terms of the effect related to feelings of intimidation in interviews.

During this research, 30 questionnaires were distributed to both current and 2007 part-time students. The respondents were usually more comfortable with the questionnaires because they were anonymous; as such it was possible for people to give sensitive information easily.

The same questionnaires were administered to both the 2008 and 2007 part-time students to compare their responses and also to add to the validity and reliability of the information collected over a longer time period. Both open and closed questions were asked because it was felt that this would help me to get more accurate information. The questions were distributed by the researcher in person to students who had given their consent to participate in the research. A trial session was conducted with 20 students who had passed the module to make sure that the questions to the respondents were clear and unambiguous. After this trial, minor changes relating to analytical problems like the phrasing of questions, were made to the questionnaire before administering it to the sampled cohorts of students.

### 3.3.4 Focus group interviews

Focus group interviews were used to determine the experiences and perception of these students' participants about the role of the ALC module in developing the academic competences of part time students. The focus group interview that was tape-recorded lasted for 83 minutes. It was later transcribed.

Smith (Smith, 1954, p.59) defined group interviewing to be "...limited to those situations where the assembled group is small enough to permit genuine discussion among all its members. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, p.365) state that Merton et al. coined the term "focus group" in 1956 to apply to a situation in which the interviewer asks group members very specific questions about a topic after considerable research has already been completed. Krueger defines a focus group as a "carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment" (1988, p.18).

Qualitative research concentrates on words and observations to express reality and attempts to describe people in natural situations. The key element here is the involvement of people where their disclosures are encouraged in a non intimidating environment. It taps into human tendencies where attitudes and perceptions are developed through interaction with other people. During a group discussion, individuals may shift due to the influence of other comments. Alternately, opinions may be held with certainty. Kreuger suggests that the purpose is to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a predetermined and limited number of people" (1988, p.26). The group interview is essentially a qualitative data gathering technique that finds the interviewer/moderator directing the interaction and inquiry in a very structured or unstructured manner, depending on the interview's purpose (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.365). Merton et al. (1990) suggests that the focused interview

with a group of people "...will yield a more diversified array of responses and afford a more extended basis both for designing systematic research on the situation in hand..."

Given that the purpose of interviews are to collect data by actually talking to the participants, the interviews could give the researcher a level of in-depth information, free response and flexibility that cannot be gathered by other techniques (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). Secondly, the interviewer can come in at certain levels of the interview with particular cues that allows for more information to emerge that was not foreseen at the beginning. The interviewer can also elicit additional data if initial answers are vague, incomplete, off-topic, or not specific enough. The interviewees on their part also have the opportunity to ask further questions to clarify misunderstandings.

However, group interviews are not always completely successful as students and tutors might not be very open and honest at times about some of the short-comings of the course and this could impact on the validity of the data being collected.

Interviews can however have limitations as the responses are sometimes biased and inaccurate. This can happen when the interviewee and the interviewer are familiar with each other or when the issue under research is very sensitive like criticising a lecturers teaching and delivery method or expressing critical comments about the course content. In such cases the interviewee will fail to give the right information for fear of the victimisation. In the case of the students used in this study, interviews were conducted only at the end of the module after the students had written the examination. This was to give interviewees the opportunity to express themselves without fear of any prejudice. The timing was very important to help illicit reliable and valid data.

On the other hand, the interviewer can be biased in analysing the responses given by the interviewee. The interviewer with a particular impression about an interviewee can carry this impression into the analysis of the data collected. The interviewee on the other hand can also give biased responses based on the researcher's attitude or the issue under research. Some researchers believe that interviews may involve a selective recall, distortions and memory loss from the respondents, and subjectivity in the researcher's recording and interpreting of the data.

Also, inaccurate responses can sometimes occur when the interview questions are not written down and do not follow the same order. By this I mean that the researcher asks the questions randomly and it some times confuses the respondents. The questions should be chronological such that one question leads to the next. To prevent this, the questions in this research were written down and were administered in the same order to all those interviewed. Changes only occurred in cases where the responses of some of the respondents provided the opportunity to get more information that was not envisaged at the beginning of the research. Thus, further questions were posed immediately.

### **3.3.5 Participant observer**

Participant observation has a quite distinct history from that of the positivist approach to research. Positivist researchers employing questionnaires and surveys assume that they already know what is important. In contrast, participant observation makes no firm assumptions about what is important. This method encourages researchers to *immerse* themselves in the day-to-day activities of the people whom they are attempting to understand. In contrast to testing ideas (deductive), this may be developed from observations (inductive) (Bogdan, 1972).

Ostensibly, participant observation is a straightforward technique: by immersing him- or herself in the subject being studied, usually over a period of time. The researcher is presumed to gain

understanding, perhaps more deeply than could be obtained, for example, by questionnaire items. Arguments in favour of this method include reliance on first-hand information, high face validity of data, and reliance on relatively simple and inexpensive methods. (Spradley,1997).The downside of participant observation as a data-gathering technique is an increased threat to the objectivity of the researcher, unsystematic gathering of data, reliance on subjective measurement, and possible observer effects (observation may distort the observed behaviour). (Spradley,1997).

Action research is a subset of participant observation, where the participants (typically practitioners, such as Lecturers in a university setting) in some focused change effort (e.g. to improve teaching and learning) self-reflect on their experiences in order to improve practice for themselves or the organization. Action can be undertaken by one individual, by a group of individuals, or as part of a collegial team approach. If the latter is used, it may be termed "collaborative inquiry." (McKay, 1992).

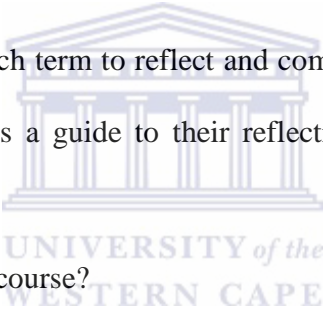
As a lecturer in the programme, this researcher is conscious of his role as a participant observer. One of the main advantages of participant observation is its flexibility. Fieldwork is a continual process of reflection and alteration of the focus of observations in accordance with analytic developments. It permits researchers to witness people's actions in different settings and routinely ask themselves a myriad of questions concerning motivations, beliefs and actions.

In addition, participant observation often employs the unstructured interview as a routine part of its practice. These two methods are compatible: observation guides researchers to some of the important questions they want to ask the respondent, and interviewing helps to interpret the significance of what researchers are observing.

However, the issue surrounding data production as mediated by the researcher is not peculiar to participant observation, but it relies heavily upon the researcher's powers of observation and selection and it is directly reliant upon their abilities. It is possible that researchers may omit a whole range of data in order to confirm their own pre-established beliefs, leaving the method open to the charge of bias (Denzin, 1978). To reduce the degree of bias and encourage validity and reliability of the data, all questionnaires were responded to anonymously and interviews were conducted by a colleague from another department. This does not completely solve the problem of data accuracy but limits it to some extent.

### **3.3.6 Student's reflections**

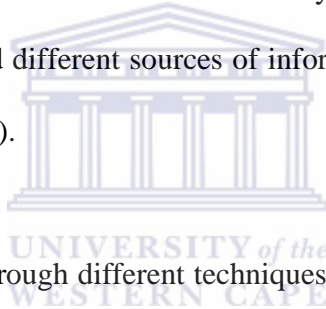
Students were asked at the end of each term to reflect and comment in writing on the material that had been covered in the module. As a guide to their reflection, they were asked to reflect and comment on:

- 
- What they have learnt in the course?
  - How the material is useful to them as part time students?
  - The manner in which the material covered was assessed?
  - How they have transferred the skills learnt in the course?
  - How to improve the content and delivery of the course?

It was necessary to find out whether the students could recall what has been taught in the course and also if the course content is particularly useful to them as part-time students. Since different methods of assessments were used, I was also interested to learn how they felt about the way information taught in the course is assessed. Although transfer of skills was not the main focus of this study, the researcher was also curious to find out if they were able to apply the skills taught in the course to other modules and in their place of work.

### 3.4 Triangulation

To strengthen the study design, the researcher used triangulation or a combination of data studies and methodologies in the study. According to Denzin (1978), triangulation is based on the premise that, “no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival casual factors.... Because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of observation must be employed.” Studies that use only one method or gather data from only one source are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method ( such as loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses) than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provides cross validity checks (Denzin,1978). To encourage validity and reliability it is important employ the method of triangulation. Triangulation is defined as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (Creswell & Miller, 2000).



When one analyses data collected through different techniques, one comes out with more valid and reliable findings than data collected using a single technique. A researcher may understand and describe a concept better if he can look at it from two or more different perspectives. If the results are the same, the researcher becomes more comfortable with his/her conclusion. This is what Denzin (1978) sees as the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon.

To ensure reliability in qualitative research, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial. To strengthen the study design, the research will use triangulation or a combination of data studies and methodologies in the study. According to Denzin (1978), triangulation is based on the premise that, “no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival casual factors.... Because each

method reveals a different aspect of empirical reality, multiple methods of observation must be employed.” Studies that use only one method or gather data from only one source are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method ( e.g., loaded interview questions, biased or untrue responses) than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provides cross validity checks (Denzin,1978). To encourage validity and reliability it is important to employ the method of triangulation.

### **3.5 Reliability and validity**

Patton (1990) explains that validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study, analysing results and judging the quality of the study. This view by Patton prompts a question asked by Lincoln and Guba (1985) “How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to?” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To answer this question, Healy and Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms. For example, while the terms Reliability and Validity are essential criterion for quality in quantitative paradigms, in qualitative paradigms the terms credibility, neutrality or conformability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are to be the essential criteria for quality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To be more specific with the term reliability in qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 300) use “dependability”, in qualitative research which closely corresponds to the notion of “reliability” in quantitative research. They also emphasize “inquiry audit” (1985) as one measure which might enhance the dependability of qualitative research. This can be used to examine both the process and the product of the research for consistency (Hoepfl, 1997). In the same vein, Clont



(1992) and Searle (1999) endorse the concept of dependability along with the concept of consistency or reliability in qualitative research. The consistency of data will be achieved when the steps of the research are verified through examination of such items as raw data, data reduction products, and process notes (Campbell, 1996).

Searle (1999) agrees with (Denzin, 1978) that while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” Reliability and validity are conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in a qualitative paradigm (Searle, 1999).

Searle (1999) explains that while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, the “trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability” Reliability and validity are conceptualised as trustworthiness, rigor and quality in qualitative paradigm (Searle, 1999).

One important source in qualitative inquiry is theoretical traditions and orientations. What distinguishes the discussion of theory in much of the literature in qualitative methods is the emphasis on inductive strategies of theory development in contrast to theory generated by logical deduction from a priori assumptions (Patton, 1990). An example is the theory of ethnographic research which focuses on the question of “what is the culture of the people?” The primary method of ethnographers is participant observation. As Patton (1990) explains, the critical assumption guiding ethnographic inquiry is culture and that every human group that is together for a period of time will develop a culture. Culture affects both programme processes and outcomes. Programmes develop cultures just like organisations do. Hence, ethnography has also become an approach to

programme evaluation and applied educational research by using the methods of participant observation and field work (Fetteman, 1989, in Patton, 1990). The Academic Literacy for Commerce is a programme with a culture of constant student interaction and interrogation of ideas with the purpose of learning not only from the lecturer but also from other students.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

When selecting a method for analysis, the researcher will have to consider the chain of operations that the study will follow. An important question is how to manage the analysis so that it produces relevant "output", the results that will be generated from the data and how these results would be used? All these links from the project outwards have to be taken into account when selecting the method of analysis, though the targets of the project may make some of them more important than the others (Patton, 1990).

The desired output is to be a logical starting point for planning the method of analysis in the case that the project aims at finding knowledge that is needed for a specific purpose. When the purpose is to ameliorate the object of study it will call for quite careful methods of analysis to help generate the right data specific to the outcome of the study. Patton (1990) explains that the goal of analysis is to arrange the collected material so that the answer to the initial problem of the project reveals itself. The problem dictates what kinds of information have to be analyzed, and the type of information depends on which tools should be used to handle it.

It is worth noting that once the questionnaires and interviews are transcribed, a large amount of raw data will be available to the researcher. To make sense of this data, both pattern and descriptive analysis will be used. Pattern analysis is a method using the sequence of repeated patterns as the basis of selecting data to be analysed. Goodman (1997) highlights the fact that pattern analysis can

be advantageous to elicit reasonable information from such a large data set like the one involved in this research. However, he also cautions that pattern analysis also has its limitations. Ireland and Russell (1978) cited by Goodman (1997) refer to patterns as ‘regularities of behaviour’ or ‘forms of interaction which occur over and over again’. Pattern analysis only selects data connected to actual patterns. This will have the effect of emphasizing certain data while other data unrelated to the pattern is ignored or remains in the background. Goodman (1997) explains that pattern analysis also structures data by organizing the content of the data. Similarly, patterns interpret data and are presumptuous about the nature of teaching and learning, hence it can be the key to a better understanding of teaching and learning issues (Attracker, Posar, and Somekh, 1993).

Since some of the student reflections were written as mini-essays, a descriptive analysis will provide detailed insights on students’ perspective about the module content and the teaching and delivery methods. According to Creswell (2003) descriptive analysis describes phenomena based on data collected by a variety of means (but does not address causes of those phenomena). This method is used in studying individuals by asking them to provide stories about their lives. The narrative is then given a structure by the researcher so that the final research provides a blended narrative combining the input of both the participant and the researcher. “Description involves a detailed rendering of information about people, places, or events in a setting. Researchers can generate codes for this description....This analysis is useful in designing detailed descriptions of case studies, ethnographies, and narrative research projects” (Creswell 2003).

In such reflection studies, the researcher looks for recurrent themes. This type of analysis is highly inductive, that is, the themes emerge from the data and are not imposed upon it by the researcher. In this type of analysis, the data collection and analysis take place simultaneously. Even background

reading can form part of the analysis process, especially if it can help to explain an emerging theme. The narrative outcome is compared with theories and the general literature on the topic. Once the initial classification of the data is done, pattern description is developed. The researcher begins the analysis with a description of evidence gathered from the data supporting or differing from claims of other scholars. The warrant for the claims can be established through a variety of procedures including triangulation. The descriptions follow the course of decisions about the pattern of descriptions, claims and interpretation from the beginning to the end of the analytical process. Sufficient details are given for transparency and validity of results (American Education Research Association: 11).

### **3.7 Limitations of the research**

To say that this study was carried out without any problems would not be true. Some problems were encountered during the course of the research although I have tried to overcome them. As a lecturer in the programme, this researcher was conscious of his role as a participant observer as data collected relied heavily upon his powers of observation and selection, and this is directly reliant upon his abilities as a researcher. It is possible that participant observer researchers may omit a whole range of data in order to confirm their own pre-established beliefs, leaving the method open to the charge of bias (Denzin, 1978). To reduce the degree of bias and encourage validity and reliability of data collected in this research, and also to strengthen the study design, triangulation or a combination of data studies and methodologies were used in the study. That is beside observation, focus group interviews, questionnaires, and student reflections were also utilised.

Some of the students who wanted to participate in the study were afraid that they might be victimized if they said negative things about the course and the lecturer. To solve these problems

students were given a consent form which clearly explained their rights and were informed to complete their questionnaires anonymously. Since the questionnaires were completed during the lecture period, students were asked to drop their questionnaires in a box and these questionnaires were collected at the end of the lecture. This was to reassure the students that their information will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Through participant observation, researchers can uncover factors important for a thorough understanding of the research problem but that were unknown when the study was designed.

However, the fact that the researcher was a participant observer in the research could have led to certain weaknesses in the methodology. The disadvantage of participant observation is that it is an inherently subjective exercise, whereas research requires objectivity. It is therefore important to understand the difference between reporting or describing what you observe (more objective) versus interpreting what you see (less objective). Filtering out personal biases may take some practice. This accounted for the lack of a critically reflexivity by the research about the shortcomings of the ALC course.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the methodology used in this thesis. It discussed the qualitative research design and methods used in the project. The different instruments used were questionnaires, focus group interviews, student's reflection and observation. The research population and how it was used in the study was also discussed. Triangulation was used in the method of data collection to ensure the reliability and validity of the information gathered. Limitations that were encountered during the study were also highlighted. Discussions of the main findings are presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Four**

### **4. Analysis of Findings**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter analyses the data collected through students' reflections, questionnaires, focus group interviews, and participant observations. The key focus is to determine the extent to which the course content and design of the ALC module course material, the teaching and delivery methods, help to enhance the academic potential of first year part-time students of the Economic and Management Sciences Faculty.

The data collected for this research revealed that the ALC module plays a significant role in bridging the gap between high school and university study. More importantly, the ALC module helps prepare part-time students, more than 75% of whom have not been studying for the past five years or more after passing their Matric, to cope with the demands of higher education. Another category for students of which the module plays a great role in enhancing their academic success are those entering the university through recognition of prior learning (RPL).

The qualitative data, viz. the questionnaires, focus group interviews, and participant observation were analysed through the use of Vygotsky's theory of the relationship between learning and development; and data collected through students' reflections, were analyzed through descriptive narrative. Classroom observation also formed part of the methodology, as it added to my understanding of what was actually happening in the classes and whether the teaching materials and methodology were appropriate for the needs of part-time students. In the collection of the data, the researcher realised that it would be important not to rely only on questionnaires, but to also carry

out a focus group interview with divergent stake holders (current and past students as well as tutors) to help in the examination of the extent to which the respondents' survey responses were supported by interviews and reflections and whether there were any contradictions in the findings of the different instruments used in the data collection.

## **4.2 Important Themes and Considerations**

The research findings are grouped according to the following three themes:

**4.2.1** Relevance of the module

**4.2.2** Teaching and learning approaches and methods

**4.2.3** Generic versus discipline specific academic literacy

### **4.2.1 Relevance of the module**

#### **A. The course content**

The course aims at developing the reading and writing competencies by affording students an active role in examining and evaluating instructional reading and writing techniques. The course was designed to make it easy for students to understand the relationship between the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. As students progress in the course they are exposed to the importance of these skills and how they are interrelated to each other.

The course also aims at making students aware that critical thinking is central to whatever activity they are engaged in. Skills learnt in this course are expected to be transferred to other courses and other contexts. Students are hopefully expected to understand and make use of diverse reading strategies and writing techniques as this academic knowledge and skills will have to be applied to a variety of academic specific and diverse situations.

#### **B. Analysis of students' needs**



A module, especially an academic literacy module can only be relevant if it takes into consideration the needs and aspirations of the students. When I started teaching this course, there was a course objective and course content in place. But the question that was not answered was whether these objectives and the content took into consideration the needs and aspiration of the learners. A needs analysis was conducted in the beginning of the course to give the lecturer a better picture of the situation.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) explain that a needs analysis must determine the ‘necessities, needs and wants’ of learners as well as the course objective. Such an analysis brings the student into the design of the syllabus and materials development. The content needs of the ALC course was the required instructional objectives which had been pre determined by the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of the Western Cape. These needs could be defined as skills, or knowledge that the students lacked as determined by content or discipline specific lecturers. To understand these needs better, a discussion with three content lecturers was arranged from Management, Political studies and Information Systems. The discussion was a success as it helped the lecturer to understand what skills and areas to place emphasis on in the syllabus and materials. In addition, I obtained permission from the lecturers to attend their lectures from time to time to further identify the needs of students. Students were also asked to anonymously explain in writing what they consider to be problem areas and what they would want included in the course.

The needs analysis and discussion created a positive relationship between this researcher and the content lecturer as it led to the beginning of a closer partnership that had not existed before. The discussion revealed that all three content lecturers were worried about the student’s language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). The following concerns were raised by the lecturers:



- The Management lecturer in particular expressed concern about the learners' oral communication skills. He explained that though they were mature students, he found it difficult at times to get contributions from them. He felt that students needed to ask questions about what is taught and also to respond to questions that are asked in lectures. This is because it is one way to gauge the understanding of learners in relation to material taught.
- All three indicated that reading skills were important to cope with the heavy workload and also to grapple with vocabulary and discipline discourse. Also, effective reading is imperative for learners to be able to identify main and supporting ideas.
- Writing skills were very important, especially for students to understand the conventions of academic writing as most assignments, test and exams require sound writing skills if students are to succeed in their studies.
- All three lecturers explained that because the pace in part-time studies was much faster than that of full time lectures, effective listening skills were important to cope with the speed and quantity of content delivered in lectures.
- Crucial information raised was the importance of critical thinking. Learners should be able to understand and relate concepts to other aspects of the course and also be capable of applying such concepts critically outside the classroom.

The discussion also gave me the opportunity to inform content lecturers on teaching and learning methodologies and how I intended integrating critical thinking into the course and to integrate the language skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing with a focus on content.

Considering the fact that most first year part-time students are second language English speakers and are also academically unprepared for tertiary education, a content based academic literacy course would be more beneficial and rewarding. This is because a traditional approach to academic

literacy would not effectively deal with the intricacies of disciplinary content. This is highlighted in Hutchinson and Waters (1987) and Jacobs (2007) who argue that content based academic literacies where language is the vehicle to content mastery provides a more effective way to assist students from the transitions to regular content courses. However, for this to succeed many practical considerations will have to be taken in to perspective, one of the most critical would be the need for academic literacies experts to build a strong and ethical working relationship with content lecturers.

### **C. The curriculum**

The aim of the curriculum is to empower students to become successful learners who enjoy learning, make progress and achieve; create confident individuals who are able to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives; and finally emerge as responsible citizens who make a positive contribution to society. The development of personal learning and thinking skills within a curriculum will help achieve these aims.

If students are to be prepared for the future they need to develop essential skills and qualities for learning, life and employment. These include skills that relate to learning in disciplines as well as other more generic, transferable skills. As such, a curriculum should be a dynamic one.

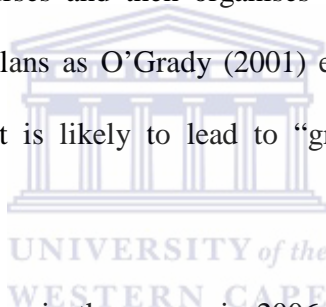
Young (2003) contends that a dynamic, forward-looking curriculum creates opportunities for learners to develop as self-managers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, problem-solvers, team workers, independent learners, and effective communicators.

Alongside the functional skills of language information and communication technology (ICT), personal learning and thinking skills are a fundamental part of learning across the curriculum. These skills should be embedded in the programmes of study as they are an essential part of any degree qualification.

When asked to comment on the course content, this is what one of the students said:

*I am just thinking about the many things that are being practiced at work ok, that I feel that when one creates a course content, you will expect that it links the workplace with the academic institutions that sort of thing especially in case of part time students.*

Before engaging in designing the Academic Literacy for Commerce course for part-time students, this researcher closely considered O’Grady’s (2001) notion that a successful course, one in which students learn what educators intend them to learn in a meaningful manner, is the result of many factors and the notion that a ‘successful’ or ‘outstanding teacher’ is frequently the one who carefully conceptualises his/her courses and then organises these ideas into working plans and detailed course documents. These plans as O’Grady (2001) explains provide a foundation and a guide for instructional practice that is likely to lead to “greater comprehensiveness, cogency, coherency and consonance”.



When this researcher started teaching in the course in 2006, he observed that the course design took into consideration what the content of the course would look like and what sequence it would follow. At first glance, it seemed appropriate and interesting but later it was evident that the content was not going to effectively serve the intended purpose for part-time students.

As earlier mentioned in chapter one, the ALC Course was designed to assist students to acquire tertiary academic and life skills. However, taking into consideration the differences (age, experiences, and prior knowledge) between full time and part-time students, it was evident that while academic skills such as reading and writing would be beneficial to both groups of students, life skills would not be too important for part-time students. For example, life skills such as self esteem and time management would be more beneficial to full time students who will need

encouragement and advise if they are to succeed in bridging the gap between school and university. The research is not saying that part-time students do not need life skills but that they need it less. Another weakness which the researcher found was the way life skills content was presented in the form of lectures. Many part-time students found this to be not only boring but also irrelevant as they believe that for one to decide to work during the day and study part-time was a big decision which obviously was given a lot of thought. Hence, for them to be reminded of the need to “belief in your self”, or “manage your time effectively” was not worth putting in an extra hour after a strenuous day at work.

Taking into consideration the fact that the life skills component is important no matter the nature of students involved, the researcher decided to restructure the manner in which the life skills component of the course was presented. Instead of presenting life skills in the form of lectures, text dealing with particular life skills were identified and used during the comprehensive and critical reading aspect of the course. This worked well in 2007 and 2008 as students did not look at it from the level of life skills like the part-time students of 2006, but from the level of text analysis. One of the texts that were used was “The power of motivation” by Justin Cohen. In this article Cohen (2008) emphasises the importance of self motivation and recognition as recipe for success. In analyzing this text, students were asked:

- To annotate the text
- What is the main claim of the author?
- In your own words what is the article about?
- What are the main and supporting points presented by the writer?
- Would you recommend this article to a friend? Why or why not?
- Construct a mind map of the article.

- Critically analysed statements made by the writer.

This scaffolding approach helped the students to not only to understand the subject matter but to also engage with issues discussed by the writer. I realized that students, besides being able to discuss the content of the text, could also internalize why self motivation is important. What was more important is the fact that the students have actively participated in acquiring not only a life skill but at the same time an academic skill.

The fact that the course did not take into consideration the wishes and aspiration of part-time students was evident in the 62% of 2006 respondents who were not satisfied with the course content and explained that the course content did not meet their expectations and also 62% thought that the course content demanded too much from them. This was true because in 2006 we spent almost an entire term of seven weeks teaching soft skills. It is worth noting that this was in the form of lectures which part-time students found very boring.

Only about 38% were satisfied with the course content commenting that it took into account the need to improve not only their communicative, reading and writing competencies but also providing important work related skills.

O'Grady (2007) suggests that at an early stage as many staff as possible should engage in discussions and activities that will help with the design of the programme. Although there is no agreed definitive list of principles of curriculum design, a useful set of principles for anyone engaged in curriculum design is to strive towards producing a curriculum that is holistic, coherent, inclusive, accessible, student centred, one that fosters a deep approach to learning, encouraging independence in learning and has links to research scholarship, based on feedback, evaluation and review. This experience was very important as it made the researcher reflect on other aspects of the

course like the need for closer collaboration with content lecturers. However, this was not always easy as some lecturers consider such collaborations as an encroachment in to their space. This was problematic at times because what emerged was an understanding of students, particularly less prepared students, having to negotiate a series of boundaries in order to assume membership of the larger academic community, on the one hand, as well as the different disciplines, each with its own conventions and discourse, on the other. In this context, the potential of an aligned and integrated academic literacy module to enable such negotiation would appear to have relevance.

The researcher observed that there had been very little interaction with discipline lecturers when the course was initially designed and also that there had not been a review of the course since its inception in 2002. The actualization and benefits of the collaboration between literacy lecturers and discipline specific lecturers will be elaborated later in the section dealing with teaching and learning approaches practiced in the course.

Another important aspect that the research found was the importance of knowing who your learners' are; in this case, the nature of part-time students.

#### **D. The nature of Part-time students**

This research focused on first year part-time students who are mostly adult learners. Bash (2003) contends that adult learners differ from the traditional student. In my observation as a lecturer working with part-time students for the past five years, Bash's opinion becomes very relevant. Adult learners come to the university with a wealth of experience and for different reasons, making them different from the traditional students.

Looking at some of their reasons for studying part-time, most respondents cited employment-related reasons for registering for their respective part-time programmes. They mentioned as reasons “quality of life “(44.2%), “special skills” (32.0%), income (16.6%) and work requirements (8.8%).

Less than half (40%) indicated that this was the only suitable study arrangement for them because they worked during the day, with slightly more than one fifth emphasising their need to work fulltime, and approximately one sixth cited specific career aspirations that influenced their mode of study.

As most part-time students are aware of the reasons why they have decided to pursue further studies, not only are they more demanding in relation to the expectations they bring to the campus, their entire approach to learning is different as well. With their age and wealth of experience, it is important and critical to enter the adult class room with an adult sensitive attitude and approach.

This point is echoed by one of the students in the focus group interviews:

*I don't think lecturers should treat us the same way as they treat full time students as we are not only working and studying, but are also adults with family responsibilities. I think we should be treated with some consideration and respect.*

This student raises the plight of the entire part-time class. It was observed that part-time students adult (who are mostly adult learners) face special challenges fitting learning into an already busy schedule, pursuing studies when their responsibilities are already likely to be over-extended. In addition, some consider environment as hostile and frightening. All the interviewees and respondents agree that it is not easy fitting studies into their already busy schedule. They contend that despite this busy schedule, they try as much as possible to make their study a success.

However, they contend that their efforts are not only good enough for some lecturers but are compounded by the demands and non negotiable attitude of some lecturers. They do not expect to be given preferential treatment but as the student above explains, they deserve “some considerations when dealing with them”.

The study reveals that:

1. Part-time students are predominantly working students who carry multiple responsibilities and have to juggle their limited time in this regard, a responsibly which is not only demanding but problematic as it is difficult for them to attend all lectures, tutorials and meeting datelines.
2. Part-time students are on average over 25 years old, indicative of how mature most of them are.
3. Central after hours administrative services are largely absent and mostly only available in a limited way in certain faculties and departments during registration and exams periods. This limits their ability at times to complete their assignment on time.
4. Other support services such as the Writing Centre and Student Counselling Centre, with exception of the main library are also available in a limited way and often only by appointment. Yet this is the students who need this facility most.
5. Less than 5% of respondents had previously registered at higher education institutions and two thirds had done so previously at UWC. Hence the need for literacy course to help them navigate academic discourses.
6. Adult learners seek direct, practical responses to their needs and are more demanding than 18-21 years old as they are more likely to see themselves as consumers or customers because adult learners needs tend to be more fluid than their younger counterparts.



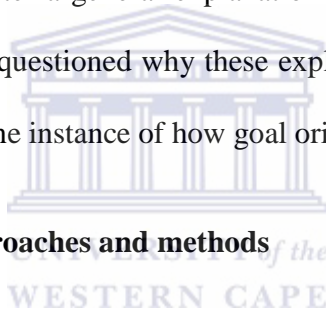
After personally working with and observing part-time students for the past three years, the designing of the ALC curriculum for first year part-time students largely took into consideration the following characteristics:

- Adult learners are autonomous and self directed who need to be free to have a sense of control over their own learning and that as a lecturer one should actively involve them in the learning process. Although they do appreciate traditional methods of lecturing, they often prefer the lecturer's role to be that of a facilitator. As one part-time student explains: *“it is boring and tiring to come to class and sit there listening to the lecturer go over slide after slide and explaining without given room for discussion. This makes you want to sleep as you are just coming from eight hours of work.*
- Another fundamental observation was the fact that literacy lecturers should encouraged learners to work on projects that reflect their interests. Experience taught me that one is most likely to be effective when guiding students from a starting point that draws on their own knowledge and experience rather than just supplying them with facts. For example, rather than supplying learners with essay topics, it is more productive to provide them with a theme and let them pursue a topic of interest from the theme. In 2008 learners were asked to write an argumentative essay on the topic ‘Black economic empowerment should be abolished for an equal opportunity society.’ The pass rate was about 58% and the highest score was 68%. But in the second essay, they were asked to write an augmentative essay on the theme BEE. I was not only surprised with how some of the topics were formulated but with the performances of the students. Most of the students commented that they felt happy with the fact that they were writing on what they found of interest to them. As such they took ownership of the assignment and had to go over board to perform well. The pass rate was 88% and the highest score was 82%.

- Adult learners have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge that may include work related activities, interest based experiences, family responsibilities and previous education. I have noticed that adult learners understand better when the lecturer tries to engage them in terms of their experiences and knowledge relevant to the topic under discussion.
- Adult learners are “relevancy oriented”. They tend to feel that they must see the need for learning something or understand the connection between the learning event and some aspect of their life. From the adult learners’ perspective, learning has to be applicable to their work or to other responsibilities to be of value to them. It should always be the purpose of demonstrating the link between course work and real life to them. This is true as this researcher experienced this in 2006 when he first started teaching ALC to part-time students. There was one curriculum for both full-time and part-time students and they could not understand why they should be spending time on soft skills like self esteem, peer pressure, ability to empathise and coping with emotions. Since they never took these elements seriously most of them failed the assignments under this section and this impacted negatively on their continuous assessment mark. They were strongly of the opinion that these soft skills are irrelevant to them but should be taught to first year full time students. This view was expressed by one of the interviewees:

*I think it (soft skills) was really not needed because first of all the self esteem is supposed to come from the person itself like the word says. I think maybe having a lecture on it and asking or having one lecture and that’s it, what is motivation etc, the support groups and whatever you want to mention in it. And just go through that and ask a couple of questions or something like that and then move on.*

Part-time students are also goal oriented. Before registering for any course, they usually know what goal they want to attain, as such they are very particular about a course which is not well organised and structured. For the past two years the part-time students under study have been focused and always plan ahead of time. Hence they do not take it lightly when assignment schedules are changed. This has taught this researcher of the need to create a clear, precise and accurate syllabus with every expectation specifically spelt out well in advance. Even in situations where one has to postpone the collection of an assignment for their benefit, some did not take it well as they believe they had spent sleepless nights in trying to meet the deadline. However it is only when it is explained to them that in the course of consultation it was discovered that most of them did not fully understand the question and after a general explanation with examples that the lecturer was forgiven. Even so, the students still questioned why these explanations were not given before they started the assignment. This is just one instance of how goal oriented part-time adult learners are.



#### **4.2.2 Teaching and learning approaches and methods**

The teaching and learning approaches used in the course are based on Vygotsky's theory of learning and new literacy studies advocated by Gee (1990, 2003; Street, 1996).

Teaching and learning in the ALC course is constructed with the notion of multiple literacies and taking into account the distinction between 'autonomous' and 'ideological' models of literacy, and literacy events and literacy practices (Street, 1998). The standard view in many fields, work from schooling to development programmes work on the assumption that literacy in itself autonomously will have effects on other social and cognitive practices. NLS challenges this view and suggests that in practice literacy varies from one context to another, and from one culture to another and so, do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions. The autonomous approach can be seen as simply imposing western conceptions of literacy on other cultures or within a country those of

one class or cultural group onto others. However, the alternative which is ideological model, offers a more culturally sensitive view of literacies as they vary from one context to another. The ideological model contends that literacies are social practices and not simply a technical and neutral skill and is embedded in social practices. Basically, it is about knowledge. For example, the way we address reading and writing are rooted in a concept of knowledge, identity and being. The ALC course is embedded in social practices such as preparing learners not only for the job market but also to be able to interact with members of the community.

This is in line with Vygotsky (1978) who contends that the overall goal of education is to “generate and lead development which is the result of social learning through internalization of culture and social relationships.” He stressed the importance of past experiences and prior knowledge in making sense of new situations or present experiences. Therefore, all new knowledge and newly introduced skills are greatly influenced by the social context of the student. Vygotsky stresses the importance of looking at each learner as an individual who learns distinctively. This is how one learner sums up her perception of the Academic Literacy for Commerce course.

*When I register for the course I did not know what to expect. When I started the course I thought it was going to be one of those boring English courses where we will be taught grammar and spelling and other stuff. I was actually not looking forward to this course because I hate writing and hate sitting there and listen to the lecturer asking us to write essays on strange topics I do not understand. But as time goes by, I said oh, this is different and the lecturer is interesting. The texts we used were very good and exciting and he gave each learner the chance to express their opinion. I started to enjoy the course and learnt a lot of skills from the course.*

Each learner acquires knowledge in a different way and each learner has different learning preferences as well as different learning styles. Some learners are visual while some are auditory.

However, no matter the learning style, the overall goal of education according to Vygotsky is to "generate and lead development which is the result of social learning through internalization of culture and social relationships." No matter the learning style of a learner it is important to take into consideration past experiences and prior knowledge in making sense of new situations or present experiences.

Because of their age and work experiences part-time students come to the university with a lot of prior knowledge that they integrate with the new knowledge acquired. Therefore, the acquisition of new knowledge and newly introduced skills can be influenced by each student's society, especially their work and family environment. This is very true as observed in the part-time ALC class where students come from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Discussions are often very heated depending on each learner's interpretation of concepts or ideas. This is because most of the learners tap from their prior knowledge and experiences to clarify or analyse particular topics. This prior knowledge according to Gee (1997, 2000) comes from a social context. This social context can be the work environment, family, community or even a sporting group of a learner. Take for example the previous essay topic BEE and affirmative action. A topic of this nature is bound to raise conflicting views from a part-time class with divergent background and in the ALC part-time class, this was the case. While some students considered it a reverse form of apartheid others consider BEE and affirmative action as a measure to redress the imbalances of the past. I can very much remember how one student narrated her personal experience of not securing a job because she was not black. Since language skills are particularly critical for creating meaning and linking new ideas to past experiences and prior knowledge, this was a good topic to stimulate and encourage students to learn to write.

"Learning", according to Vygotsky (1997), always involves "some type of external experience being transformed into internal processes through the use of language". It follows that speech and language are the primary tools used to communicate with others, and promoting learning. For students to interpret and fully understand some of the new ideas or skills, they need to understand particular register and discourses

This is very true as this researcher has personally observed that any new information to be passed on effectively to the learners must be communicated through a language that is understood by all learners despite their social or cultural orientation. Hence, ALC is designed to help to prepare the part-time students for the task ahead as far as academic discourse and engagement is concern.

This is however not easy as indicated by the findings. From the findings, only 10% of the part-time first years students registered for the ALC module are first language English speakers. 90% are second or third English language users. Thus, the need for a module designed to take into cognizance the needs of these learners especially the fact that English is the medium of communication and the language that will be used to promote learning and acquisition of knowledge. The course, as mentioned in Chapter One, is not an English course but a course that is supposed to help students use language skills effectively if they are to succeed in their studies. As new information was introduced into the course the researcher took cognizance of the fact that humans are not born with knowledge nor is knowledge independent of social context. Rather, one gains knowledge as one develops by way of social interactions with peers and adults. Knowledge is obtained through past experiences, social situations, as well as ones general environment. Hence, literacies should not be treated in isolation. Instead more collaboration is needed between academic literacy lecturers and discipline specific lecturers, as the effect of learning this particular literacy will be dependent on those particular context. Peers here may include teachers or instructors of

respective subjects or disciplines who impact on knowledge, like this researcher who was tasked with the important role of improving learner's language skills to enhance academic development. This is very important because the language acquired is expected to be used in a particular discourse community.

For example, students were asked in the Management course to interview a local Manager and write a report on how he performs his functions. They knew the functions of a manager and what to look for but did not know how to structure their assignment. It was also difficult for them to establish what register was expected of them by the lecturer. It was only after we did report writing that they were able to understand the register used in reports and integrate this with their knowledge of the functions of managers.

When learners enrol for university they become novice members of the academic discourse community and it is only through acquisition and mastery of these discourses that they can fully become members of these academic discourse communities. Vygotsky would agree that we develop as humans through the ways we interact with those around us and it is only through the way learners interact with those of the academic discourse community that they become members of that community. For example, students specializing in Accounting are expected to write in a particular way and also structure their information to be in line with the Accounting discourse community.

#### **4.2.1.1. The Zone of proximal development (ZPD)**

The zone of proximal development works in conjunction with the use of scaffolding. "Scaffolding is a step by step approach to assist learning and development of individuals within their zone of proximal development." (Feden & Vogel, 2003). Knowledge, skills and prior experiences, which come from an individual's general knowledge, create the foundation of scaffolding for potential

development. At this stage, students interact with adults and/or peers to accomplish a task which could possibly not be completed independently. This view is echoed by the student below:

*I am a second language English language speaker like many other students in the class. My English is really bad and any time I am to submit an assignment I am very worried and it take me time to even start writing. At times I understand what I want to write but to put it down in English is difficult. ....I think the fact that the lecturer gave us the chance to write a first draft and then the second draft before the final draft helps me a lot. I could see my mistakes and correct them and it also help me to pass at the end. Also the one to one consultation with the lecturer who was my tutor was the best as I could explain what I am trying to write in my essay.*

The mastery of the academic writing process; how to write an effective and well structured academic essay using an appropriate style and academic register is an example of how the zone of proximal development works in conjunction with the use of scaffolding to help students learn. When we started the academic essay writing process, students were given an explanation of the conventions of academic writing. But I later realized that it would be almost impossible for learners to write a good academic essay at their first attempt. Firstly, they would need to get basic aspects like the structure right and also to learn and develop their ideas logically and coherently. This takes time and to expect a student to get it right the first time (especially part-time students who have been out of school for years) will not only be impossible but unfair. This is true for all under prepared students and many would agree even for students coming from an advantaged educational background as the academy is a different environment requiring different demands, hence, process approaches to writing are useful to all learners.



In teaching academic essay writing in the ALC course, the process of scaffolding was used to give students time to understand each stage in the writing process. Firstly, I acknowledged the fact that one cannot write on a topic if one does not understand the topic and secondly students will learn, understand and write better on a topic they can relate to. This may come from their social or working experience or from other discipline specific themes. As such essay topics in ALC were chosen along such lines.

In one of the topics students, the students were to write an academic essay on BEE and Affirmative Action. Considering the fact that the students wrote essays in high school but not academic essays, I realized it was important to first ask students to reflect on the essays they wrote during high school and write down the basic characteristics of those essays. This, I thought would be a better way to introduce students to some basic conventions of academic writing and how it is different from their high school essays.

Earlier in this chapter, the importance of first year students to learn how to engage in academic discourse was discussed and that it is only through the interaction of their peers and instructors that this task is made possible. The process or stages involved in writing an academic essay and also how to be able to read a text and identify the main and supporting points, highlights how the zone of proximal development works in conjunction with the use of scaffolding.

Scaffolding process does not only help simplify learning but also lead to more understanding of information and development. During scaffolding, mistakes are made and corrected leading to the process of concept formation and acquisition. It is very important that these mistakes are made as they impact on future learning.

However, it is important to remember that the Zone of Proximal Development stresses the importance of the weaker student being supervised or guided by an adult or experienced peer for effective learning to take place.

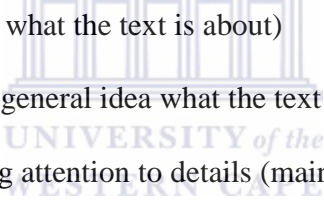
Vygotsky (1978) define those who are to teach as the "More Knowledgeable Other." (MKO). The MKO is anyone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, particularly in regards to a specific task, concept or process. Traditionally the MKO is thought of as a teacher, tutor or an older adult. However, this is not always the case. Other possibilities for the MKO could be a peer, sibling, a younger person, or even a computer. The key to the MKO is that they must have more knowledge about the topic being learned than the learner does (Galloway, 2007).

The ALC module makes use of lectures and tutorials. It is during the tutorials that special attention and guidance is given to students by tutors. In tutorials, material covered in lectures is being reinforced with more practical examples. Also, there is the use of group work were weaker students are being assisted by stronger ones. For example, in the BEE and Affirmative Action example essay, students were placed in groups of four to research and complete the essay. Small group is a good way to introduce students to new concepts and knowledge acquisition. This is because by nature of their size, even week students can learn from stronger ones (MKO) as they find it easy to ask questions. It is also a good place to start to boost the confidence of week learners before they can embark on the task on their own. Hence, the very first essay is completed and submitted as a group and later the second essay is completed individually.

Like writing, teaching reading also requires scaffolding. I realized that because most of the part-time students are second and even third language English speakers the ideal role of the teacher in

improving the reading competencies of the students, is that of providing scaffolding to assist students on tasks within their zones of proximal development. During scaffolding the first step is to build interest and engage the students. Hence it was necessary for me to choose a relevant and interesting text. Once students are actively participating, the given task is simplified by breaking it into smaller subtasks. During this task, the students are kept focused and to concentrate on the most important ideas of the assignment. The researcher found out that one of the most integral steps in scaffolding consists of keeping the learner from losing focus and becoming frustrated. The final task associated with scaffolding involves the teacher modelling possible ways of completing tasks, which the learner can then imitate and eventually internalize.

For example in interpreting the text in the ALC module, students are asked to first:

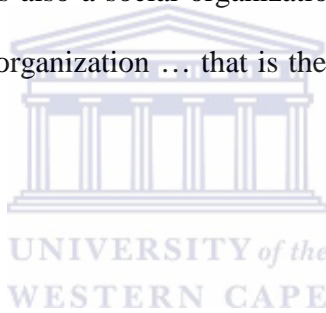
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- Skim the text (to get a gist of what the text is about)
  - Read it the first time (to get a general idea what the text is about)
  - Read it the second time paying attention to details (main and supporting points). This is done by annotating the text.
  - How do they relate to one another
  - Provide response to questions by providing textual evidence.
  - Lastly they are asked to provide a critical analysis of statements made by the writer and how they can relate it to other ideas or other modules

The implications of Vygotsky's theories and observations for educators are significant. Vygotsky (1978) believes the teacher has the collaborative "task of guiding and directing the learner's activity". Assignments and activities that can be accurately completed by a

student without assistance indicate that the student has previously mastered the necessary prior knowledge.

Mooney (2000) agrees with Vygotsky that the curriculum should generally challenge and stretch the learner's competence. The curriculum should provide many opportunities to apply previous skills, knowledge and experiences, with activities connected to real-life environment.

For Vygotsky, society (and therefore social interaction) happens in schools. Schools, like tertiary institutions are incorporated into the larger society with different disciplines and have such disciplines as their context, so that some of their activity settings are determined by this larger context. "The classroom therefore, is also a social organization that is representative of the larger social community ... it is the social organization ... that is the agent for change in the individual." (Vygotsky, 1978).

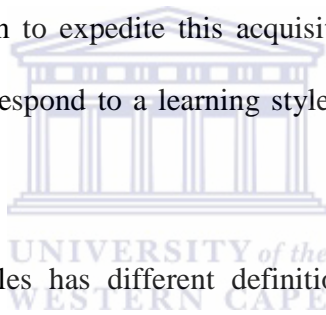


#### **4.2.1.2. Learning styles**

An important finding from this research is the fact that each learner has a preferred learning style. Situations where the lecturer knows and understands the learning style of the students helps in more effectively teaching and learning. I have realized in the past two years that by identifying the learning style of the student, it was easier to capitalize on their strengths and also improve the individual's performance and academic achievement (an important role ALC is supposed to perform) a notion highlighted by advocates of social learning theory like Vygotsky (1978) and new literacy studies like Gee (2000). Social learning theory has sometimes been called a bridge between behaviourist and cognitive learning theories because it encompasses attention, memory, and motivation. One of the key elements in getting students involved in learning lies in an understanding of learning style preferences which can have an impact on learning and performance.

The term 'learning styles' relates to the (often unconscious) processes we employ when we learn, which are the result of our brain structure, our personalities, our environment, our culture, and our educational history. A learning style may be defined as a 'distinctive and habitual manner of acquiring knowledge, skills or attitudes through study or experience'. (Sadler-Smith, 1996). A Learning style is '...the way each learner begins to concentrate on, process and retain new information' (Dunn & Dunn 1994).

Considering the fact that ALC is a support module aimed at assisting learners in "acquiring knowledge and skills," (Sadler-Smith, 1996) and to help learners "to concentrate on, process and retain new information" (Dunn & Dunn, 1994) it is important that the learning styles of part-time learners are taken into consideration to expedite this acquisition. Hence in the beginning of the course each learner is expected to respond to a learning style questionnaire to help identify their learning styles.



While the concept of learning styles has different definitions, learning styles are thought to represent an individual's unique approach to learning. Despite the wide range of learning models, the three basic perceptual learning styles that were taken into consideration in the beginning of the course are those described by Dunn & Dunn (1994). These include visual, auditory and kinaesthetic/tactile styles of learning.

From the learning styles questionnaires, 86% of the students were visual learners, 12% were auditory and 2% had an equal score as both visual and auditory learners. This was very informative as far as preparation of lectures was concerned as it became important that the lecturer include a lot of examples in the lectures to accommodate both groups of students.

Below is a brief explanation of the various learning styles and how it is taken in to consideration during teaching and learning:

**Visual learners** relate most effectively to visual displays like written information, notes, diagrams and pictures. They tend to prefer sitting at the front of the classroom to avoid visual obstruction, to have a clear view of the instructor when they are speaking so that they can see the body language and facial expression of the lecturer. Visual learners often prefer to take detailed notes to absorb information. They learn best by writing down key points, and visualising what they learn. They follow written instructions better than oral ones.

In the ALC module, visual learning was very dominant. For example, it was realised that after explaining the academic essay writing process and even after detailed feedback was given in the first and second draft, some students still found it a difficult process to follow. It was only after I used a sample essay and went through it step by step and explained what goes into each section that most of the learners actually get a good idea of what we have been discussing.

**Auditory learners** relate most effectively to verbal lectures, discussions and by listening to what others have to say. Written information may have little meaning until it is verbalised or read aloud. Auditory learners like participating in class discussions and debates, as well as discussing ideas verbally. They would rather listen to a lecture than read the material in a textbook. They are good at making speeches and presentations. These are the learners who hardly miss a lecture as they understand better by following explanations in lectures than reading on their own. Most of them will make an appointment for a consultation if they have missed a lecture. As one student explained:

*I don't like missing lectures because when ever I miss a lecture, I find it difficult to understand what was discussed in class even if I read on my own. But as a part-time working student, it is also difficult to attend all lectures because of work commitments. What makes it difficult is that most of the lecturers do not have dedicated consultation times for us part time students. What I normally do is to ask a friend to explain things to me before I read the material that was covered.*

*Because of such learners, I always take time to prepare lectures with lots of explanations examples to make it ear sire for them to understand and retain the information better.*

**Kinaesthetic/tactile learners** learn through moving, doing and touching. Kinaesthetic learners learn best through a hands-on approach. They may be considered hyperactive, take frequent breaks and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration. In learning, they skim through learning materials to get a gist of the content before settling down to read it in detail. They enjoy working with their hands. This is the view of a tactile learner:

*I hate attending lectures where the lecturer spent long hours explaining and going over and over slides without given us the opportunity to practices what has been taught. At times you come to class and a lecturer spend more than an hour going through slide after slide without given us an opportunity to write or practice the concepts he is teaching. I think this is not correct.*

Beside the learning styles discussed, adults have other learning preferences. Nevertheless most adults clearly exhibit clear strong preferences for a given learning style. The ability to use or switch between different styles is not one that we should assume comes easily or naturally to many people.

Simply, adults who have a clear learning preference, for whatever reason, will tend to learn more effectively if learning is orientated according to their preference. For instance, adults who prefer the

assimilating learning style will not be comfortable being thrown in at the deep end without notes and instructions. People who like prefer to use an accommodating learning style are likely to become frustrated if they are forced to read lots of instructions and rules, and are unable to get hands on experience as soon as possible

In my ALC lectures I have learnt to talk and give students the opportunity to practice what is being discussed. More so, literacy can only be attained by practicing and engagement. After explanations, students are asked to practice individually and also to discuss in pairs before sharing their responses with the class.

However, it was difficult at times to always consider all the learning styles in every lecture as one of the goals of the course was to encourage critical thinking and learner independence. Allan (2003) and Phillips (2005) believes that for active learning to take place learners must develop learning-independence, awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, understanding of their own learning processes, ability to select appropriate learning strategies, judgments and the confidence to use knowledge flexibly and creatively. As many forms of active learning involve working in a group, students also develop interpersonal and active listening skills. I agree with Allan (2003) and Phillips (2005) that active learning is important if we are to enhance the learners' tertiary education survival skills and abilities. These are all important skills and abilities that the Academic Literacy module aims to develop in the students.

A large proportion of adult learners have a dominant visual learning style followed by an auditory preference. A smaller proportion of the adult learners are tactile learners. It is possible that some of us may have a combination of styles. However, no one uses one of the styles exclusively. For example, when given a new task, visual learners prefer to see a demonstration, diagram or slides



before embarking on the task; auditory learners prefer verbal instruction or talking with someone about it; while the tactile learners would prefer to jump right into the task. In a learning situation, instructors could adapt to the diverse learning styles of different individuals by using multiple approaches of 'hearing', 'seeing' and 'doing' activities. For example, in a lesson, the use of good audio-visual aids and good presentation skills will appeal to the visual and auditory types, while group interaction and activity will appeal to the tactile type. In addition, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are essential in enhancing learning through teamwork, and reflection on individuals' strengths and weaknesses. By appealing to different learning styles, more effective learning can be achieved to facilitate attention, motivation, memory and comprehension.

There are several approaches to be used in involving multiple learning styles in a course. One good example is project-based learning. For example one of the tasks the students were required to complete in a group of four, was to interview students to establish if they are aware of UWC's HIV/AIDS policy. They were to interview and analyse their findings in the form of a report and this report was to be presented in class.

Such projects inevitably demand that students approach a topic with multiple skills: verbal, visual and kinaesthetic. It also assists students to contribute using their own preferred style while experiencing other styles. The activist can contribute effectively through his/her enthusiasm and initiative in generating ideas; the pragmatist in his/her practical approach will get the project started; the theorist will ensure the project is carried out in a logical sequence based upon certain hypotheses; and the reflector will effectively put together evidence of prior experience/knowledge and integrate them into the project (Philips, 2005).

In conclusion, although it is not possible to take into account all the learning styles of each individual student, by closely examining students' reflections, teachers can make their approach more comprehensive in its appeal to diverse learning styles. Some studies have supported matching teaching to learning styles; there is, however, no consistent agreement on the benefits of stereotyping or labelling individuals to certain learning styles. In fact, exposing students to different learning styles may be a more practical approach to help them develop their multiple-intelligences to their maximum potential.

#### **4.2.1.3. Assessment**

A good curriculum with an effective teaching and learning method will fall flat if the material is not properly assessed. The way in which we assess students will impact on the way they learn, as assessment shapes learning. Assessment is at the heart of a successful curriculum and is a fundamental part of good teaching and learning. It enables learners to recognise achievement and make progress, and teachers to shape and adapt their teaching to individual needs and aspirations. Effective assessment enables learners to make smooth progress throughout their period of study.

Gibbs (1999) contends that effective assessment draws on a broad range of evidence from different contexts and reflects learners' attitudes, dispositions and skills as well as achievements in subjects. The ALC programme of study provides many opportunities for young people to develop skills and attributes that can help them enter work and adult life as confident and capable individuals who make a positive contribution.

Approaches to assessment try to reflect this new emphasis by developing a picture of the learner that values a broad range of attitudes and skills found in the aims of the curriculum, as well as valuing pupils' personal, learning and thinking skills. In the ALC module assessment of skills

draws on evidence across and beyond the school environment. It was noted in the research that making these kinds of links can be particularly motivating and useful to part-time students as it helps them to connect the skills and aptitudes they show outside school with those needed to succeed in the classroom.

Hence, the ALC module at times makes use of integrated approach to assessment. This is because integrated assignments which involved the collaboration between the ALC and other modules like Management and Public Administration helped the researcher designed a curriculum around the needs, capabilities and aspirations of the learners, and also used assessment as a tool for planning and the strengthening of learning. For part-time students to develop the skills to become independent enquirers, creative thinkers, reflective learners, team workers, self-managers and effective participators, there needs to be a clear sense of what progress looks like in these areas, what evidence of achievement would look like and what systems could be used to gather it.

#### **4.2.1.4. Assessment methods:**

Assignment methods used in the course ranged from short answer questions in the case of reading comprehension and analysis, problem solving for individual or groups, case studies, academic essays, to reports and oral presentations. These methods are assessed against different criteria depending on the assessment task.

Assignment tasks set in the course were based on the principle of aligning assessment tasks and assessment outcomes in order to maximise learning. I took into consideration Winberg's (2006) notion of understanding the difference between methods, sources and instruments before setting each task:

- Methods refer to the approach used to assess learning such as essays, problems, case studies multiple choice questions and so on.
- Source refers to the person who will do the assessing such as lecturer, tutor, peer or self assessment.
- Instrument refers to the criteria or marking scales.

These three elements guided this researcher in considering what task can be peer marked and which task required detailed and expert assessment. Despite taking all these into consideration, some of the students believed that the assessment tasks were too difficult.

One of the students expressed mix feelings in the way assessment is carried out in the course:

*I think the ALC assessment, the continuous evaluation process is very unfair process. On the other hand, I feel that sometimes the requirements in the final exams are too much for us, not only to us part-time students, but to all students, being full time or part-time. I remember the June exams; I left the real matters for something else because of too much information and limited time. That is how intimidating the exams were. I failed. I think we shouldn't expect too much from students at that time. Going back to the continuous evaluation; we had to write three drafts and one final draft for our academic essay. And the way he wants us to do this was a really fair and continuous process because obviously we knew exactly where your mistakes are, you know exactly where you are weak and that in itself is trying to help you with. And I think the June exams were very intimidating.*

This students' view of the ALC (June 2008) assessment expressed by this student as seen above was reiterated by 60% of the students in the focus group interviews and 64% of part-time students

who responded to the questionnaires and more than 70% of the class when asked to comment on the nature of the exams. The interviewee's view is not very clear if the exam was difficult or if it was because he/she failed to apply appropriate examination techniques.

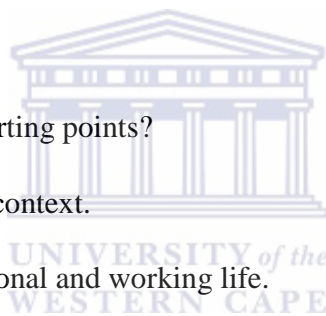
However, I think the interviewee has some merits in his/her observation as the paper was too demanding not in terms of academic demands but the time allocated was limited. The paper consisted of a reading comprehension, summary and an essay to be completed in three hours. Students were given three weeks before the exams to prepare and they were expected to master the text in advance. The researcher agrees that to have a comprehension, summary and essay in three hours was demanding. This demonstrates how important student reflections are as we learnt a lot from their comments

Assessments in the ALC module have always been contentious as students believed it was not often fair and relevant. Take for instance in the early part of the course where students are introduced to soft skills like self esteem and time management. Most of them were shocked when they were assessed on such theories. About 60% failed this part of continuous assessment and it affected their course work mark negatively. Also, students were not happy that they were assessed on mind mapping as they consider mind maps as an optional planning tool. Hence, they were not happy when they were forced to do mind maps as some of them preferred out lines or summaries. Students believed that such assessment encouraged surface learning as they aim to reproduce information to meet assessment demands and appear to be focused on passing the assessment instead of gearing towards learning. Biggs (1999) explains that assessment should match the exit level and that assessors need to think of assessment tasks as learning tools rather than gate keeping tools and set tasks that are relevant to the level. In the ALC module we were at times guilty of

setting task that were not very relevant (as mentioned above) and did not very much promote teaching and learning.

The research demonstrated that assessment for learning should be used to enhance all learners' opportunities to learn in all areas of educational activity. It should enable all learners to achieve their best and to have their efforts recognized. Hence there was a subsequent change on how these soft skills were assessed. Instead of the usual theoretical questions that were used, the researcher introduced an integrated approach where text emphasizing these soft skills were used for reading analysis. Students found it important analysing aspects of the text as:

- What is the main claim of the author?
- What is the article about?
- What are the main and supporting points?
- Explaining words as used in context.
- Relating the text to their personal and working life.
- Critically analysing statements.
- Providing a summary of the text.



Students were ask to look at the questions individually and later spend some time discussing such questions with each other in pairs at the end of the class. It was realised that this method more than double the students' long-term retention of what they have been taught and profoundly improve their understanding thereof. The soft skills became seem to become a worthwhile investment.

What was also observed in the ALC assessment method above was the fact the such assessment for learning develops learners' capacity for self-assessment so that they can become reflective and

self-managing learners who in future will have the ability to seek out and gain new skills, new knowledge and new understandings. It made the part-time learners to be able to engage in self-reflection and to identify the next steps in their learning. The researcher acknowledged that it was important to equip learners with the desire and the capacity to take charge of their learning through developing the skills of self-assessment.

What was very interesting to note is that with this method of assessment there was an intention to understand and create meaning from what is being learned, rather than an intention to reproduce.

#### **4.2.2.5 Formative and summative assessment**

This interviewee comment on the nature of the June 2008 exams raised two important issues relating to assessment in the ALC Course worth discussing - formative and summative assessments.

The difference between formative and summative assessment is often an area of concern for teachers and students. The essence of formative assessment is that undertaking the assessment constitutes a learning experience in its own right (Biggs, 1999). The academic essay and group reports demanded that students conducted interviews and presented their findings to the class were examples, of both valuable formative activities which helped to as enhanced substantive knowledge as well as developed research, communication, intellectual and organizational skills. This is because such assignments called for effective time management, diligent planning and meticulous gathering of information: a skill they would transfer to other modules.

The student rightly points out that formative assessment can give one the opportunity to improve as there is continuous feedback. It gives the lecturer the opportunity to develop a plan of intervention. Timely feedback was given to essay drafts to enable students to improve their performances and

build on their weaknesses. Since the goal of formative assessment is to gain an understanding of what students know (and don't know) in order to make responsive changes in teaching and learning, techniques such as teacher observation and classroom discussion have an important place alongside analysis of tests and homework. Some of the formative assessment methods used in the ALC includes:

- Assignments like essay or reports for individuals or in small groups.
- Asking students to discuss their thinking about a question or topic in pairs or small groups, and then ask a representative to share the thinking with the larger group.
- Asking all students to write down an answer, then ask a few volunteers to read out their answers to the rest of the class
- Have students write their understanding of vocabulary or concepts before and after instruction.
- Ask students to summarize the main ideas they have taken away from a lecture, discussion, or assigned reading.
- Have students complete a few problems or questions at the end of instruction and check answers.
- Interview students individually or in groups about their thinking as they solve problems.
- Assign brief, in-class writing assignments.

Such formative assessments methods used in the ALC module assisted me in knowing how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, and I used this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as re-teaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. These led to improved student success as they became more confident.



Besides formative assessments done in the ALC module, it also makes use of summative assessment as a basis for reporting grades and meeting accountability standards. However, the task of summative assessment for external purposes remains quite different from the task of formative assessment to monitor and improve progress. While final exams provides a picture of a student's performance on a given day under test conditions, formative assessment allows teachers to monitor and guide students' performance over time in multiple problem-solving situations.

#### **4.2.3 Generic versus discipline specific academic literacy**

The model of teaching ALC when this researcher became part of the staff in 2006 was basic generic academic literacy (involving the teaching of generic skills) rather than discipline specific academic literacy which calls for collaboration and integration between academic literacy and content lecturers. However, after the first year of lecturing it was evident that this is actually not very effective in helping students understand the demands of discipline specific discourses. As discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, most of the students are not only second or third language English speakers, but are very visual in nature. The implication is that they lack the ability to understand basic generic skills, let alone applying them effectively to their other courses or discipline subjects. As visual learners they need to be shown or be given practical demonstrations before they can fully grasp a concept. Indeed, while it is acknowledged that certain skills are generally acceptable across all disciplines, it is overly simplistic to argue that one can transfer the same linguistic structures operative in one disciplinary community to another as this poses considerable challenges. Also they may not be transferable because of the different nature of the disciplines.

This dominant understanding of academic literacy as an autonomous list of transferable generic skills leads to the integration of these 'skills' alongside a disciplinary curriculum in a rather superficial model of academic literacy teaching. Jacobs (2005) suggests that it is through sustained

interaction with academic literacy practitioners that lecturers are able to make their tacit knowledge of the literacy practices and discourse patterns of their disciplines, explicit to students. Such collaboration enables both academic literacy practitioners and lecturers to shift towards a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacy and disciplinary discourses. This was evident in the collaboration which I started with the Management, Political Studies and Information System lecturers. They provided me with some very educative texts which were very discipline oriented. This helped in laying the field for me to enter into discipline specific discourses - a notion which would have been difficult without collaboration. One of such text was on group dynamics. This is a concept that the ALC module provides theoretical lectures as one of the soft skills students are suppose to acquire. But as mentioned earlier, it was not very effective like when it was taught as a management concept. The students could make the link between main and supporting points and why it is important for managers to have effective people's skills.

I was not the only one who benefited but also the students as they could relate to the content of the text. Also, there are issues of transfer here as making explicit connections between the mainstream discipline and the ALC course help to promote and make transfer possible.

The example above is in line with New Literacy studies theory which contends that the literacy practices and discourses of academic disciplines are best acquired by students when embedded within the contexts of such disciplinary disciplines. Gee (1990, 2003) argues that students are best inducted into discourse communities by modelling themselves on 'insiders' who are part of the discourse community. The implications are therefore that discipline-specific academic literacies are best taught by 'insider' disciplinary lecturers, who have mastered the discourses of those particular academic communities.

Jacobs (2005) suggests that academic literacy practitioners and disciplinary lecturers need to take co-responsibility for making the rhetorical dimension of disciplinary knowledge explicit for students and redefine their respective roles within the process of making this ‘invisible’ process explicit for students at tertiary level. It is Jacobs’ view that this is very important if the current mindset, prevalent in higher education practices, continues to separate academic literacies that are taught and the disciplinary knowledge that students are accessing. The implications according to Jacob (2005) is that higher education needs to create discursive spaces for the collaboration of academic literacy practitioners and lecturers, to facilitate the embedding of academic literacy teaching into disciplines of study.

Gee (1990, 2003) argues that students are best inducted into discourse communities by modelling themselves on ‘insiders’ who are part of the discourse community. The implications are therefore that discipline-specific academic literacies are best taught by ‘insider’ disciplinary lecturers, who have mastered the discourses of those particular academic communities.

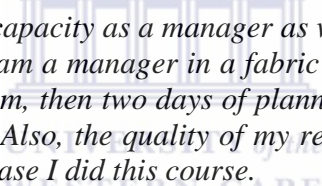
This research is in agreement with Jacobs (2005) and Gee (1990, 2003) that a shift away from the ‘study skills’ view of academic literacy which supports an autonomous model of literacy, to the ‘acculturation’ view of academic literacy which supports an academic socialisation and proposes a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies.

### **4.3 Transfer of Learning**

Collaboration between discipline specific lecturers and academic literacy practitioners will make it easier for learning to be transferred. This is because according to my observation, the most effective context to practice transfer of learning is within the classroom. This makes it much easier to transfer new skills and knowledge to the job.

Transfer of learning is the influence of prior learning on performance in a new situation. (Bernstein, 2000). If we do not transfer some of our skills and knowledge from prior learning, then each new learning situation would start from scratch.

Eraut (2004) agrees with Bernstein, (2000) that some trainers only think of transfer of learning (or transfer of training) in terms of "the classroom to the job environment." However, these trainers fail to realize the importance of "task variation" within the classroom. That is, practicing on a variety of tasks will enhance and quicken the learning process compared to practicing on the same category or class. Also, the learners become accustomed to using their newly acquired knowledge and skills in new situations, thus encouraging transfer of learning from one situation to another. This is evident in some of the students' reflections below:



*I have used time management in my capacity as a manager as well, because in my line of work, that is production, it is very important. I am a manager in a fabric store and if I don't get material two days ahead of time in the cutting room, then two days of planning of production is down the drain, lost of labour cost and time wasted. Also, the quality of my reports has improved as I have learnt how to structure my reports. I am please I did this course.*

*The concept of critical thinking has enabled me to look at issues and consider all angles of any given information and try to stay objective. Also being open minded in evaluating a situation without making any assumptions and avoid emotional reasoning. I have learnt to be open minded and only speak when spoken to and not just say what I want to say but rather to think of what I want to say and the consequences or effects of what I say, when and how, both at work and at home*

*At work, I am normally reserved and would most of the time prefer to do my own thing. I have come to realize that I have to ask more questions, be more critical, and seek more answers and to look at things objectively before taking action. I have become more active and assertive at work. I also try to be more of a team player – to obtain a common goal. My self esteem has grown greatly.*

*I have used listening skills at work, listening to my bosses and colleagues with more intent. I have used it at home as well, with two boys I think your listening skills must be up to standard. I never knew to keep eye contact in listening skill is just important as giving respect to the other persons as well.*

While this does not demonstrate transfer, it does point to a potential that might be realized and could form part of a follow-up study to establish how students have integrated their learning in a future longitudinal study.

However, transfer is more likely to happen if one develops a deeper understanding of the task and if we bring some knowledge or skills from previous learning. Therefore, to produce positive transfer of learning, there is a need to practice under a variety of conditions.

People, generally, benefit (or suffer) from their prior experiences. People improve in their ability to learn new skills more proficiently because of prior practice on a series of related tasks. This helps educators to acquire new views on a topic by looking at the task from a different angle, which strengthens their understanding of the topic. For example, after teaching students reading strategies, greater learning occurs not by re-reading the same text, but by reading another text on the same subject matter. Transfer of learning begins with the learning of a task in a unique situation and ends when students quit learning (experimenting) with that task. The power of varied contexts, examples and different practice scenarios, cannot be overemphasized. No matter whether someone is learning simple or complex concepts, stimulus variations are helpful. Encouraging transfer of learning through collaboration between discipline and content lecturers (as demonstrated above) do not only intensifies learning and understanding, but also provides a context that enables skills and knowledge to be successfully implemented outside of the class (Gee, 2000).

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter dealt with the analysis and presentation of data from focus group interviews, questionnaires, classroom observation and students' reflections. In the analysis, the main question was to reflect to what extent the course content and teaching and learning methodologies used in

the Academic Literacy for Commerce module (presented to first year part-time students) helps in developing their academic competencies. The researcher also reflected on what would be the most effective model to enhance the academic potential of part-time students: a generic model or the discipline specific model. The next chapter will present a summary of the main findings and some recommendations will be made.



## **Chapter Five**

### **5. Conclusions and recommendations**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Leedy (1993) explains that in the final part of a study, the researcher should ask him or herself the question “What does it all mean?” The researcher should attempt to provide an interpretation of the findings in such a way that it can be understood by all. The study has to make connections with real-life situations so that the findings could be applicable to teaching and learning practices in the EMS faculty.

This chapter will present a summary of key findings that arose from the interviews, questionnaires, students’ reflections and participant observation that were used in the research. Some suggestions will be made on how to improve the course content and the teaching and learning methodologies used in the course to make the ALC module more effective and responsive to the needs of first year part-time students.

##### **5.1.1 Summary of key findings**

The findings have shown that academic literacy is fundamental for the success of first year students, especially part-time students, many of whom have been out of study for a long time as well as for those who are entering the university through recognition of prior learning (RPL). The Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC) course has had a great impact over how students express and present themselves in a scholastic environment. The tools used to effectively read, write and critically think which are covered in the course are skills that not only help a person in the tertiary academic environment, but also in personal discovery. Through positive experiences with academic

literacies, people not only learn to improve their reading, writing and other critical skills, but they also apply this toward learning about themselves and becoming a more confident person in everything they do. Creating a positive environment for students to engage in and become comfortable with their surroundings is an effective way to aid students to master these essential skills.

An important finding is the fact that more than three quarters of students entering into institutions of higher learning in South Africa are second or third language English speakers who often do not have the competency level required in the medium of instruction to successfully negotiate academic curricula (Mouton, 2001). Academic literacy plays a significant role in the student's life, and is impacted on by many different factors. However, being English second language users, there are many difficulties to surmount in the course of attaining academic literacies. Academic literacies go beyond just studying and being literate in a scholastic setting. Some research seems to suggest that students often do not develop literacy skills even in their mother tongue, so it is doubly difficult to develop them within a target language.

Another important finding is that lecturers can have an impact on how students (especially adult learners) learn to apply their academic literacy skills. The population of adult learners entering into higher education worldwide is increasing beyond that of any other segment of the global population. (Bowden & Merritt, 1995). Therefore, teaching academic literacies to adults is an important academic practice. Adult education is a source for information and services for some and it is a way to achieve higher degrees, promotions and an increase in wages for others (Ashcroft, 2003; Elman & O'Rand, 2004; Goodson, 2002) Adult education is advertised as having the ability to change an individual's life (Denyer, Gill, & Turner, 2003). Ntiri (1999) described the typical



adult learner as employed full-time in a technical, business, or professional field. These students are called non-traditional since they differ from the average college students ranging in age from 18 to 24 years. The average age of the part-time student was 26 and they need to be treated in line with their experience and maturity.

This is because when the support is there, students are more likely to apply themselves. The lecturer plays an important role in helping the students gain confidence and should set a tone that learners will carry with them throughout their studies. This will include taking learner's needs and aspirations into consideration in the case of course design and in the realization of expected outcomes. Since students study in different ways, it is imperative that the presentation of lectures and tutorials take into consideration the various learning styles of the students. Adults who have a clear learning preference, for whatever reason, will tend to learn more effectively if learning is orientated according to their preference. For instance, adults who prefer the assimilating learning style will not be comfortable being thrown in at the deep end without notes and instructions. People who prefer to use an accommodating learning style are likely to become frustrated if they are forced to read lots of instructions and rules, and are unable to get hands on experience as soon as possible. Hence, the lecturer should provide lectures, notes, and practical examples where necessary to accommodate all learners and learning styles.

The adult learner needs to have an active role in their learning process and what they learn must be applicable to their daily lives. The adult learner is highly motivated, self directed and brings a wealth of experience to the classroom that lends itself to cooperative and experiential learning (Dinmore, 1997). This can only be successful with good planning of the academic literacy curriculum. Planning for any academic literacy course must include a credible understanding of the learner and how they are likely to perceive and respond to different instruction and this is very

important as the educational environment or context of learning is created through our students' experience of our curricula, teaching and assessment procedures (Ramsden, 1992).

Also under scrutiny was the fact that traditionally, literacy has been narrowly defined from a technical perspective as the "acquisition of literacy skills that is, reading, writing and speaking a language" (Mouton, 2001). The neutral quality of this definition that focuses on the process of decoding and encoding the text fails to take into account the socio-political and cultural dimensions of literacy. For example, reading was narrowly conceptualized as a decoding process that is, finding oral equivalents of written language. In terms of literacy acquisition the dominant perspective considered learning to read as learning to decode.

This view of reading has been challenged in recent years. An alternative perspective, emergent literacy, based on a different and broader conceptualization of reading and development has gained prominence. Literacy is not viewed merely as decoding but rather the whole act of reading, including comprehension. Reading as part of a social practice as well as an individual cognitive achievement and is embedded in social contexts and social practices.

It is evident that this traditional conception of literacy does not take into account the richness and the diversity of "literacies" that exist in multicultural societies like South Africa. Educators need to focus their efforts on tapping into the students' existing communication abilities to help them acquire the required literacy levels by building on the foundation of their sophisticated linguistic and cultural abilities. This is echoed by Vygotsky, (1978) and Gee (2001) who stress that social learning is important for development and also that the internalization of these social context (linguistic and cultural) abilities lead to higher thinking skills. The use of peers and tutors (what Vygotsky calls the More Knowledgeable Other) have proven to be useful in the ALC module where

students are exposed to different social contexts, the use of scaffolding, and multiple drafting processes to guide them in improving their academic reading, writing and thinking skills.

### 5.2.1 Recommendations

Based on the above findings, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- A.** For a part-time module to be effective, it must learn to become responsive to learners complaints, flexible, open and sensitive to listeners, and should be adept at developing and improving the course according to an ever shifting set of demands. This is very important because part-time students are working adults who know exactly what they expect to gain from a course. Failure to be responsive to the students' expectations will only alienate and discourage attendance and destabilise the work ethic of the students.
- B.** For academic literacy to be more beneficial to the students there must be a collaborative effort between discipline lecturers and academic literacy practitioners. Previous studies (Boughey 2002; McKenna 2000; Jacobs, 2007) have shown that academic literacy practitioners, as well as mainstream lecturers, need to change their conceptualisations of academic literacy as an autonomous body of knowledge. Such understandings have the potential to undermine the collaborative role that academic literacy practitioners and lecturers can play within disciplines of study. Understanding of academic literacy as an autonomous body of knowledge engenders a perceived need in both lecturers and academic literacy practitioners to protect their domain.

This misunderstanding leads to both parties asserting their perceived disciplinary expertise over the 'other' and this needs to change to a more collaborative approach.

The potential benefits of this move towards a more systematised integrated approach go beyond the obvious benefit of achieving more with fewer resources. A greater number of students would be encouraged to develop the necessary metacognitive awareness of literacies related to workplace and academic practice. Academic staff, too, would have the opportunity to reflect on and enhance their teaching and assessment practices, and possibly to achieve practice-based certification.

**C.** Academic literacy teaching is not something that should be confined to the first year.

If academic literacy teaching is conceptualised as a process of inducting novice students into the disciplinary discourses of their chosen field of study, then such development cannot conceivably happen by the end of the first year of study. This conceptualisation of academic literacy teaching sees the need to develop a disciplinary identity in students, something which happens gradually, across the entire undergraduate phase of their studies and into the post-graduate phase. This conceptualisation sees an academically literate student as the goal or endpoint of their studies. This has implications for the collaborative relationships between academic literacy practitioners and lecturers as well. Clearly such relationships also need to extend beyond the first year of study and beyond just one lecturer.

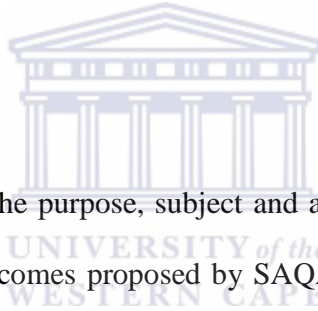
**D.** Although it is not possible to take into account all the learning styles of each individual student, by closely examining students' reflections, teachers can make their approach more comprehensive in its appeal to diverse learning styles. Some

studies have supported matching teaching to learning styles; there is, however, no consistent agreement on the benefits of stereotyping or labelling individuals to certain learning styles. In fact, exposing students to different learning styles may be a more practical approach to help them develop their multi intelligences to the maximum potential.

- E.** Students should be exposed to as much textual (prose) material as possible, given the amount of non-linear material they absorb through multimedia (television, video games, or the Internet). Such prose material should be text that the students can relate to and should also be academic text. These texts should be stimulating and also provocative to draw the best out of students. This is because a stimulating text will encourage critical and analytic thinking from students and a provocative text will enhance their ability to engage in academic discourses and also assisting them to develop an academic voice.
- F.** Faculties need to create discursive spaces within their curricula for sustained collaboration of academic literacy practitioners and lecturers, distinguishable from the ad hoc collaborative efforts that tend to characterise academic literacy works. As explained or hypothesized by Jacobs (2007), academic literacy teaching is not something that should be confined to the first year. If academic literacy teaching is conceptualised as a process of inducting novice students into the disciplinary discourses of their chosen field of study, then such development cannot conceivably happen by the end of the first year of study. It should be continued through out their undergraduate programme and beyond.
- G.** It is pedagogically advisable for lecturers to make use of a variety of assessments tools. The purpose of an assessment will suggest or point to the appropriate

assessment tools. For example, an accreditation review requiring representative statistics or examples of student work will prompt the use of surveys, testing, or portfolios. There are times, however, when certain assessment tools will not accomplish the intended results.

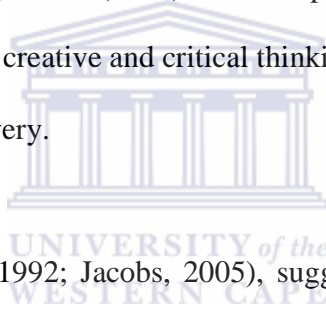
The subject matter of the assessment must be considered when selecting assessment tools. Assessment efforts focusing on varied subject matter, from student learning to satisfaction, are best captured with specific tools. For example, student learning may best be measured with testing, portfolios, or performance based measures and student satisfaction with surveys, focus groups, or interviews. Standardized tests and inventories are available for assessment use with subjects such as critical thinking methods.



This will depend on the purpose, subject and audience. It is interesting to note that the eight learning outcomes proposed by SAQA would be broadly expected of any graduating learner from a higher education program. Yet, when choosing assessment items, lecturers tend to stay with the known or the 'tried and true methods', because they seem to have the ring of academic respectability, or possibly because it was the way the lecturers themselves were assessed as undergraduates. From learners' perspectives, however, it often seems as if lecturers are turning students into 'essay producing machines' or 'examination junkies'. When choosing methods it is important to offer variety to learners in the way that they demonstrate their learning, and to help them to develop a well-rounded set of abilities by the time they graduate.

The is because the importance of graduate attributes like communication is increasingly recognized internationally in higher education and by industry, government, and accrediting bodies. However, integrating the development of graduate attributes, such as critical thinking and critical reflection, has proved challenging in business education.

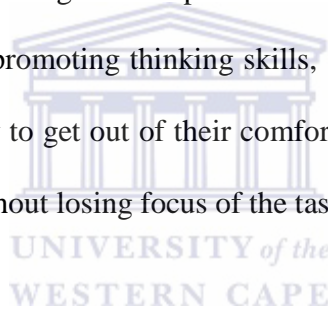
**H.** Academic literacy lecturers should not only focus on the four language skills but should strongly promote critical thinking skills as thinking is central to whatever activity students embark on. The works of Kolb (1984), Gibbs (1992), Rogers (2001), and Giarrusso, et al. (2001) about deep learning suggest that teachers can help students develop creative and critical thinking skills through their course organisation and delivery.



I agree with (Kolb, 1984; Gibbs, 1992; Jacobs, 2005), suggestion that lecturers should present students with the following:

1. Concepts, ideas, theories, methods, perspectives, and facts of the disciplinary area in integrated wholes rather than bits and pieces. Teachers should motivate students to identify, understand, and explain the relationships among the pertinent dimensions of these issues.
2. Present students with problems and provide them with a supportive climate to take the risk to learn what they need to know in order to solve them. The focus here is on the process of solving the problem, not the problem to be solved.

3. Provide students with assignments that require them to work in small discussion groups in class and outside of class. This framework encourages students to think and develop effective strategies to negotiate meaning and manipulate ideas. Also, group dynamics will form an integral part of their future lives. This is an area in which the ALC Course will need to pay more attention to in the future.
4. Provide students with questions and exercises that will compel them to make sense of experiences, concepts and theories from many viewpoints as this is what students will be engaged with in their discipline specific content modules.
5. Present students with assignments that require making evaluations, drawing conclusions and explaining. It is important to note that although teachers may play an important role in promoting thinking skills, students also have their part to play. They should be ready to get out of their comfort zone and be ready to try new ideas and new methods without losing focus of the task at hand.



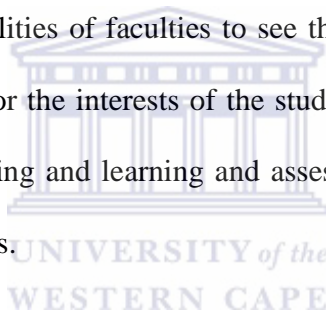
## **Conclusion**

The importance of academic literacy modules like ALC cannot be overemphasised as academic literacies have been receiving considerable attention recently in tertiary education in most universities all over the world including South Africa. As a result of globalisation and the new political dispensation in South Africa, more adults are enrolling both full-time and part-time in tertiary institutions. However, because of the dominance of English as a medium of instruction in most universities in South Africa, it is imperative for academic literacy programmes to help bridge the gap for students entering institutions of higher learning. Since more than three quarters of students entering into institutions of higher learning in South Africa are second or even third language English speakers who often do not have the competency level required to



successfully negotiate academic curricula, academic literacy should be taken very seriously by institutions of higher learning. Hence, there is the necessity for innovation and change in the way academic literacy has been presented with a focus not only on academic reading and writing but in applying a holistic approach to literacy teaching. Academic literacy lecturers should take into consideration the needs and aspirations of their learners and should reflect often on their course content as well as their methods of teaching and delivery.

Importantly, there should be a collaborative effort between academic literacy lecturers and content lecturers and curricula should address issues of general and discipline-specific reading and writing and skills. While these have been the main findings of this research, it is worthwhile to assert that it is the responsibilities of faculties to see that lecturers get out of their comfort zone and work collaboratively for the interests of the students they are required to serve. This research has relevance for teaching and learning and assessment practices in the EMS faculty and for higher education practices.



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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### Focus group interviews

#### FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As a part time student what are your impressions / opinions about the course content/ material covered in the ALC 101.
2. Reflecting on the way teaching was done in the course what comment do you have to say about that?
3. What is your impression on the way material taught in the course is being assessed? (Assignments, test, exams, group work)?
4. How did you find the use of group work in the course?
5. What aspects or material covered in the course has helped you as a part time student?
6. If you were to make suggestions about the course, what would you have to say?
7. ANY OTHER COMMENTS
8. **Thanks for your participation**

## **FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

### **Lecturer's Opening:**

I want to thank all of you for taking time out TO BE PART OF THIS FOCUS GROUP.. It is actually a difficult time and I never expected to get any people. ALL of you know why we are here. The essence of this discussion today is to assess the ALC 101 course. We want to look at the relevance of the course on you as part time students. What is the impact of this course to you students?

We are not going to be long here. Remember, any information given here will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Names will not be mentioned. I'm going to use codes 1,2,3, or A, B, C to represent respondents. Anyone who wants to leave at any given time is free to leave.

I have 7 questions, but they are not very detailed questions. We have three sets of people here today: Current 1<sup>st</sup> year students, last year part-time students and tutors who have also been in the course. This is what is called triangulation. I want to get information from different sources. I don't want to get from people who did the course last year or people who are doing the course this year or just from the tutor's perspective. Now if I get information from three different perspectives, it is going to give reliability in terms of the data collected.

### **QUESTION 1**

As a part-time student, what are your impressions or opinion of the course content, that is, the material that has been covered in the course for the whole year?

### **Responses**

#### **Student A:**

In my opinion, I think that the course was interesting. As time progresses, what the course is about the material became I suppose, how to reference and how to read. What we covered mostly was in the summary part, how you read and how do you summarize and we go back to the course material and any material or the writer's **material** actually shows you how you practice certain stuff and I think that's what helped me.

**Lecturer: Thank You.**

**Student B:**

I think like the previous speaker. Initially when we got the guy, I first thought he was going to be like the other guys and it wasn't worth it at all. But it came out to be valuable especially the reading and writing and critical reading. I think listening. Most of the skills, sometimes you don't appreciate it but obviously it helps especially in business with reports and trying to read between the lines when people doing so many things. I think with report writing it is very good with report and assignments. I think it helps with critical reading and writing and listening skills. Because sometimes someone is talking and you don't listen, I think it's very helpful to listen.

**Student C:**

I just want to comment on the second speaker's point. I remember the lecturer is giving a lecture and it comes to critical things, unfortunately or fortunately we don't use the stuff adequately and that's where critical thinking comes in..... A lot has to do with your ..... ability and we have to do something about that.

**Lecturer:**

Any comment from any the tutors about the content?

**Tutor 1:**

I agree with the part time students because I also did ALC as a ..... student and that time I wasn't working already. So I found that most of the things has to do with self esteem and somethings I can't even remember. But I think report was really valuable for me at that particular time because my work was more in reports and me doing presentations, so what helped me the most was the report writing like the structure and the summary and also the presentations skills that was [sic] covered. That was very helpful because as a part time student and also working, some of these things that were covered weren't really that important and when I mentioned the report writing and presentation skills, those were the relevant things and even the group dynamic exercises, because it helps you on how to meet with other people, how to speak louder and such things. The rest, I don't remember.

**Tutor 2:**

Yes, the sense of good self esteem is what we really need, especially the part time students, they just need something to start up with and most of us have experience in reading and establishing the power points and for most of us who didn't have jobs I think I must find that interesting and also

one other..... I think it was important that we were able to do this. In fact, seeing that we had training in doing summary writing and also report writing especially what we did with essay because that is different from business writing. I mean, I just liked it at first because I was not sure, but this has worked really well and also as some of the other stuff such as the report.

Tutor 3: Well, I can write ... well, I can do a report and power point. On the scheme list, I think that we need more better that we have more like in with the full time students that come to the varsity not knowing exactly what to do. We should make sure that we have coaching, like in the writing skills, that is my worst area. How to structure critical reading, because ALC helps us structure how to study, looking for what is necessary and analyzing stuff like the topic, not just with the writing, but also with what you studying as an individual. That obviously covers a lot of work and ALC really helped me. I just want to make an example where they wrote a test and the test results were bad, in some of the classes the results were bad, especially the full time class and I know the guys .... I know it was really hard to work in the real world whereby what you are getting vis- a-vis when writing a test and the results were ..... The problem you are asking was is it wrong and you take out the ALC as a little test. That is what am saying in terms of this.

**Lecturer:**

What do you mean when you say that ALC is not structured , or what do you mean?

**Tutor 3:**

They asked a simple question, for example explain operations management and you start writing what is operations management, just like that with no structure. I think you need to structure what you are writing and the marks will be better. I have actually consulted with the department of Management and they said to us when the writings increased the results were actually better, people get ABs.

**Tutor 4:**

I think I can agree with speaker number 3 about the benefits of both the academic writing process writing process, at first my perception of the course was that I wrote before I actually did the course and I taught that my structure will actually dampen my credibility to write. But I find that the guidelines actually help you quite a bit in terms of feeling what you already have. It gives you far more strength on one of the biggest questions that people normally ask when you are writing anything. And with the academic for business purposes, where do I start? How is the topic? And I think because we go through stuff like the ..... and the guidelines, it just sort of helps you focus on the information that you have and organize it in a coherent way in terms their ..... So we did the

course, speaker Number 1 and I did the course 5 years ago and the connections we made for the groups, I'm still in contact with some of my group members after all this time and even though we don't expect people on a daily basis we still have that kind of rapport and that comes with the necessity of support structures and that inadvertently results in positive group dynamics. Its done as an exercise, but you find that it still helps you in a practical way.

**Tutor 5:**

Can I just add a little more on what Speaker 4 just said. Initially what we are doing in our group is "I refer (?) to the campus as a person, and use the word 'I'. Now, we talk about 'we', and that's how we operate on campus these days, not about 'I', but about us".

Tutor 1: I also want to add one thing, initially I registered for this course late, and so I started a bit late, like a week or two after that. We had the group dynamics, and I think the primary thing that evening was the one that supported me and helped me grow out on that module. Now, it was not easy getting on board because there were such a lot of problems with admin and stuff that I sort of just skip a lot of things and I think ..... definitely helped because it helps with other modules because you had that sort of foundation in one course and ALC allows that foundation to be real so that one cannot only use the skills that is required throughout the course but they also it as a sort of support at different levels.

**Lecturer:**

Remember not to use names, rather refer to the others as speaker 1, speaker 2, speaker 3, speaker 4, and

**Student 3.**

Tutor 1: I just want to mention some other thing. I am just thinking about the many things that is being practiced at work ok, that I feel that when one creates a course of content, you will expect that what links the workplace with the academic institutions that sort of ..... So it comes to these small exercises on self esteem that says that at work you get training and all those things that are important now. So number one, the work place has already created that sort of space, but in the academic institution, where would that be for the report writing? Now, when you think of content, think also of what is the working life like on the people and what can the academic institutions offer to fill the gaps.

**Tutor 3:**

I have a point I want to argue which is that within the academic in service, we have to go into research and that research part opens up .... Terms like a can of worms. Now you have to know

more, you want to more and more and I think that in itself helps a lot. Because as soon as you come across something you don't understand, then you have to go research on it. That was wrong in the beginning when we started, but fortunately for ELC, we had that ... process, what we call variously when working, we look at the ..... and I think the ELC model is like more advance so that other models can look up to.

**Lecturer:**

OK. You people have raised very important aspects about the first part of the course which is what we call Tertiary Education Survival Skills. That is the name we give to work such as self esteem, self concept motivation. Now, consider that some people, some part time students stay for long without coming to study, some of them doubt their ability. Is it important that these things should be included to give the students that motivation?

Do you think we should do it in detail or what do you think about this particular aspect?

**Tutor 1:**

I think we must not get into too much detail. We write about four paragraphs each. We are dealing with like four to five sentences and we find that quite difficult.

**Student 1:**

I think it was really not needed because first of all the self esteem is supposed to come from the person itself (sic) like the word says. I think maybe having a lecture on it and asking or having one lecture and that's it, what is motivation etc, the support groups and whatever you want to mention in it. And just go through that and ask a couple of questions or something like that and then move on. But not making those academic essays because I think it turns out to become something like some of our modules or assignment where actually we didn't do well in because we thought it was so funny. It was just like we couldn't see how you could actually ask us to do things like that. So honestly we didn't pay a lot of attention to any detail and we just accepted that you just wanted some background information. I would like to call it that and it negatively contributed to our year mark because if you look back correctly I suppose you'll find those first assignments like the one that you gave we had 50% and that was shocking.

**Lecturer:**

Ok. A lot of things have been covered. Let us get to the second question. Let us reflect at the way teaching is being carried out in the course. Now look at the content and look at the way teaching is being done in the course. What comments do you have to make about the method of delivery?

**Response 1:**

At first I thought that this was not an English class. I said to myself that ok, what are we doing here?

**Lecturer:**

It's not an English course?

**student 1:**

Yes, if its not an English course then what are we doing here? We are here to recognize what the teacher does and all that .... Anyways, my personal impression was that they were very helpful, very very helpful consultations especially for part time students were always available. He was always opening his door for us. Our group was split into three and we have one of the trained tutors. At the end of the day we credit our tutor and our tutor inspired us. That was done for us a couple of weeks before our exams. There was stuff that we were not happy with or were uncomfortable with and the tutors were willing to help us. And even with the ....., I don't think we could have cope with the university and to complete with this, there are other departments in the university where you ask for help and they look at you and look around. In fact, with this our department, we still have people here also; we don't say we want people in this university to lead us by the hand, but at least all we are asking is for some guidance, people should give us some guidance in this category.

**Response 2:**

I think that guidance will obviously be there, that's for sure. I was very motivated in the communication module and things like writing. But the thing is I never believed in it that much. I was very surprised with this because I thought if its going to be another communications module I have done those and I was going to be bored in lectures. I found it very easy to follow up in class, and not just that, if I couldn't make it to lectures, I found it easy to make it on what I was missing out. Also what we did, both and all the advice from the tutors, they were always ready to assist me; I never had problems with this department. I just found that you know it's a very easy going department that is always assisting us, always ready to guide us. If I had any queries I know where I could find help and I was always assisted by one of the tutors or by my lecturers. So I find that was very good, yes.

**Lecturer:**

You have made so many positive comments. But weigh the content, some of the writing, the reading, the tertiary education survival state, the group dynamics. Do you think that the lectures, the methods and ways used by the lecturers and tutors in the message **competent?**

### **Response 3**

1: The way they pass the information to me as a person was sufficient and I think it was structured. The tutors' comments, like I said were structured. They will criticize you on certain spots and they will tell you where and on which spot needs help and the way this information was presented to you; I remember one tutor who will make a joke in between comments so that you understand the content. Talking about it, you realize by examples what she is talking about.

Response 2:

I think the presentations went well. It was very good especially during that presentation programmes. I really enjoyed that. I think out of that, they are very motivating. It was easy to listen because sometimes when someone speaks is one tone and it's something very interesting some person is not able to hear what they are saying. So, the way they say it sort of contributes to it because we have a lot of other modules and I think ALC is one of the leading module or skill module. And the others are lacking in information as well. And you find that often if an hour is like four or five slides or more, people are getting up and leaving. Whereas in ALC we go through a lot of things as well, but people are still staying as well. So it must say something about the way you present, but also the course content. We've established that the reading and writing skills, both are good for research and there should be a lot more attention on detail on those and not more on the others like self esteem etc.

Lecturer:

Tutors, anything on the way the information is being passed?

### **Response 4:**

I think, coming from when you are actually part of the part time group and doing the course. As one of the respondents already mentioned, in other courses you wouldn't be seeing as much support and so as a tutor what I tried to do was to teach in a manner which I want to be taught in. So we look at the pitfalls of teaching in other areas and also look at what I needed as a student and I try to reason in that way. And mostly in terms of the support nature, one of the respondents mentioned that some ... need to be mentioned in terms of the content measure and I agree with that, but rather it should be that aspect of self esteem and motivation that should be part of the teaching and that the teaching equals to your ....., for example, acquisitive information will support the statement. So even though teaching is regarded in a content way, it spoke through the way you interact with students as well as how information is presented in a support matter. For example, when you scheme in academic writing like reading and writing skills, I always relate it to every day examples that part-time



students will be encountering. For example, if they need to write a letter to the traffic department to squash a fine, or to the insurance, you actually need the content here. So, once you get a feel on the transference of skills, not just a matter of information presented, but also of information actually allowed

**Lecturer:**

Thank you very much. Next.

**Response 5:**

A lot of things that we've said make one want to sympathise, in terms of the uniformity of the content. For us who have been full time students being asked to tutor part-time students, it's very intimidating coming from a full time background and interacting with part time students because we have the feeling that this people are not well established in their study and here you are, you are going to interact with them. It forces one to actually do a lot of trial reading, and also translate those skills. So, I think that what has actually assisted me is the fact that I was able to seek out what their problems where. Its very important when you interact with part-time students. Because at times you find that when we have a lesson with part-time students, you find that one person will keep you on your toes by asking you a lot of questions and if you are not capable of confident with yourself, because at times you have a question that will put you in a tight corner, and the issue will be how to get out of that corner.

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**Response5**

For me, in such a situation the solution is a two way process. I learn a lot and they learn a lot. They must assist me in learning because if there is one question from the class and I'm unable to answer that question, that must not put me off for the rest of the lecture. Some of them (students) are managers, some of them are directors and detectives, and their aim is to determine whether you are lying or not, so the moment you don't show confidence in class, that will not motivate them to come to your class or they will just be there for attendance sake or just to get attendance marks and that's it. But in as far as you show confidence and engage with the class; they are going to look up to you. Because, as much as you are teaching ELC, it is possible to think of practical environments, think about economies, about houses, even in your reports or in your essays. It is all encompassing in this basket of aims whereby you can actually choose. So for me, I learn a lot, I've developed a lot.

**Lecturer:**

Ok. Let us move to third question which is about the way material thought in this course is being assessed. What is your impression looking from the tests, assignments and exams?

**Response 1:**

I want to start with that Mr. Chu. I think the ALC assessment, the continuous evaluation process is very unfair process. On the other hand, I feel that sometimes the requirements in the final exams are too much for us, not to our part-time students, but to our students, being full time or part-time. I remember the June exams; I left the real matters for something else. That is how intimate the lectures were. I failed. I think we shouldn't expect too much from these particular students at that time. I went back to the continuous evaluation; we had to write three drafts and one final draft for our academic essay. And the way he wants us to do this was a really unfair and continuous process because obviously we knew exactly where your mistakes are, you know exactly where you are weak and that in itself is trying to help you with. So that is almost like .... And I think that in itself help me..... and I think in order for me to pass a module. And I think the June exams was very intimidating,

**Lecturer:**

Why? When you say intimidating, what do you mean?

**Response 1:**

It wasn't exactly like when we had to write a summary. I had to write a sort of not academic prose, writing an assignment, and reading comprehension. Those two things was (sic), I don't think I was able to do two.

**Response 2:**

I think it had a different rating than in exams and I didn't feel it as well. Actually, that was one subject that I haven't done. But I think it was also, especially with the mind map, I find that the issues I thought I knew with the mind mapping ..... and when I came here the basics on mind mapping was not sufficient. It was basically an outline and the thing is I find that with my fellow colleagues, did my supposed outline of a mind map and wrote almost an essay on it. And that is why I obviously didn't come through and my feeling is that maybe they need to focus on the structure of it. They need to focus on the amount of information needed in the really key places because there are definitely some key places to consider. And also the time constraint is too much. A summary writing assignment and a comprehension writing, I think it was a bit too much. And also I think they went to a lot of details about the two which was great, but it was almost as if they did that in a funny fashion because even when I say it in my understanding, it couldn't connect. I

think that we need a warning like that. Surprisingly, much of the exams seem better. It was much better and I think the timing was good. I also think that they understood the subject itself much better. So I think the first half to be honest they need to focus on giving us throughout course evaluation and just stressing to the student how important it is. Because if you are going to teach stuff about self esteem, you need to stress how important that is, that it will contribute 5 – 7% of your year mark. If they don't know about such things, they can't spend as much time on it as well. Yah, that's my assessment, I think they have to look at the mind map and the outline.

**Response 4:**

I think mind map is what you do, although you have an option of the outline. But I think the outline is almost like writing the essay. So, they go both for me; that was my experience. Writing a mind, I could remember the day Mr. Chu came in from two separate angles and it was intimidating looking at your mind map and telling you to do it this way or that way. But at the end it was well. The other thing I want to mention is I thought doing ALC and the other course is a bit of a waste of time. But seeing myself say.....

**Lecturer:**

Since you've mentioned that, let's just talk about that quickly. Do you think that the ALC is going to work because they are taking it down at the end of the semester?

**RESPONSE 1:** For all modules or all the learning assignments in the semester, I'm not sure about that because people who are in different lectures and even the part time people, I believe that part time people in different lectures do have a lot of work. They have other modules that are actually big, they have three, four modules and there was a clash on Monday for two modules. And the same modules appear on Tuesday evening and on Thursday and usually assignments have to be in on Thursday which means I only have the next day to go through because they do ask for help a lot. So for the part timers, it's going to be a bit difficult, I'm not sure about the full time students because I think they do have a bit more time. But I think the part timers will struggle and their results might not be that great.

Response 2: I think for the module to be valuable to the students, I think they should read their books, especially in terms of the learning atmosphere, the self esteem and where they study, it is important especially for the part time students. It might be ok with the full time students. And the mention of the way the academic assignment or the assignment they have to write, was it just an essay, and that was all done in the first semester. The second semester is the basis to work on. So in

other words, what you are doing now is the academic assignment of six weeks and it's not going to be of good quality. At the end of the day, a lot of students will not know what to write.

Lecturer:

Tutors, any comments about assessments?

Response 1:

I personally feel that in terms of the content, it's ..... than the course ..... unfortunately. Now, when it comes to the part time group, I feel that there should be a different type of content or course reader or something for the part time group because they (the part time students) are coming with experience already, so once again and I think I mentioned this earlier, their work experience will be considered. So, I say that should the course be revamped for the part time students, and that will actually be very useful.

Response 2:

I disagree with the above view on the basis that when we say that we must tailored the ALC to suit part time students, many other students will be left out because in terms of output, we must ensure that the ALC course benefits all the students, full time and part time. So, I'm not so sure about that as much as for instance, they are battling with issues like self esteem, issues which more focus should be given to the students. You still find that if you do that to the part time students, even if they graduate, they still need self esteem at the post graduate level. So, for me, I must advice that we need to do something different, but not in the content.

Response 3:

You are saying that there are two different parts of the course, and number two, you talk about the self esteem and yes, I heard you say that all students are battling with that. Where is the inneeds to be placed?

Response 4:

I think both of them are valid in the way that it is not so much for content to change drastically, but how this change is actually presented. The content that I've mentioned so far, the topics that are

used for instance. The other thing is why there should be a difference in how the course is presented, for example, the part time versus full time students. The issue that how does a tutor prepare a varsity student for the work place, but now you have a case where you have people who are already in the work place. So, how do you do something that is still valuable for them and they can take something away from it? You do that by scheming the content to meet the means from which they came from in the work place. And I'm speaking from the point of view of an ELC student and also working at the same time. I would for example think of a content in terms of how can I use it to maximise my productivity in the work place, and that is only done in terms of using both contextual examples and similitude to demonstrate how this can be done etc.

Response 5:

I think as my friend has said, it is the recognition of prior learning because when you came out of the work place then you are already skilled and you get into the university and you certainly are in a much better situation than the full time student. So I think may be like a respondent mentioned, may be not entire changes, but definitely some adjustments. Because there are some things that I feel where not applicable for us. When we have an assignment we talk about ..... 2003 and when you look at the course, it is the same. Nothing has changed and it is sometimes about the feedback that we get; because sometimes the feedback that we get at that stage is five years old, and we were also part time students at that time. So the feedback is number 1 and the content itself in that course and what has been done is necessary for the part time students.

Response 6:

If we do say that there must be more emphasis on issues that matters on the students such as teaching and how information is transferred, how would that even, for example, the exam paper itself, how would it be structured since there is different emphasis with both groups?

Response 7:

I want to answer on that question. In the paper that we wrote in March, there was no mentioned of topics such as self esteem. That came just as a preliminary remark about tertiary education survival strategy. So, there was nothing like that especially in report writing and academic essays and that will be your fundamental, your core in the module and within this there are other stuff that you can size in which other respondents have mentioned. So what I'm saying is just remember that

academic essay, your summary and those things are the core elements of the module. If you walk away and somebody asks you what you have learnt, your answer will be that you've learnt about academic writing, critical listening, and learning and reading and stuff like that. Those are the important issues, so the continuous assessments should be revolving around areas such as report writing, summary writing etc and that is writing words, sentences and paragraphs.

Lecturer:

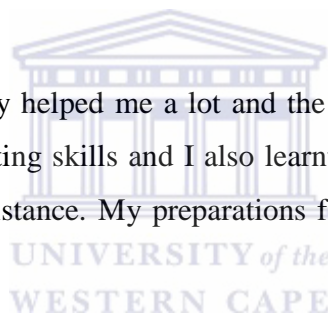
Thank you very much. To the part time students, if you were asked what areas of the material that have been covered in the course actually helped you as a part time student?

Response 1:

I would say summary writing, report writing and possibly proposal. Because I didn't know what to write and sometimes it requires you to write so many things and stuff and with that you can bring up things that were mentioned in your course and develop other things.

**Response 2:**

I think definitely the academic essay helped me a lot and the course itself teach you to think and that is what I've benefited. The writing skills and I also learnt much with the mind maps, we just wrote exams and those were of assistance. My preparations for the exams were easier due to the mind maps.



Lecturer:

Ladies and gentlemen I have to thank each and every one of you. I think the other questions we were to touch include "if you were to make suggestions about how the course could be improved, what would that be and how do you find the use of group work in the course?" But you have already touched those. And you people also made are comments that I find necessary. I want to thank you very much and I hope this research is going to be taken very seriously. I'm going to capture it and look at the theories and make the authority know that this is the way you people feel about the course. Thank you.

Responses at random: (Students great the lecturer, thanking him and depart happily.)

## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRES

#### Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to reflect on the Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC 101) module and to find ways to best improve on the course content as well as the quality of teaching and learning. Your assistance will be highly appreciated in the honest completion of the questionnaire. All information furnished in this questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Please answer the following demographic questions. The questions will be used for statistical purpose. For these set of questions please mark the right answer with a cross [x].

1. Gender

Male	Female
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2. Age

20-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	50-55
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3. Home language

English	IsiXhosa	Afrikaans	Isizulu	seSotho	Other
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4. If English is not your home language, is it your .....

Second language	Third language	Fourth language
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5. What are your primary reasons for returning to study? You may tick more than one answer.

Community	Won a Scholarship /bursary	Work Requirements	Income	Special Skills	Quality of life	other
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6. How did you gain admission to the university?

Matric	RPL
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7. The language of instruction at UWC is English. How would you rate your level of English when you arrived at the university?

Poor	Very poor	Average	Good	Excellent
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8. Which of the styles below best describe your learning style?

<b>Visual</b> Understand better by seeing things. Eg likes to see examples and visualize how things are done.	<b>Auditory</b> Understands better by listening. Eg. lectures	<b>Tactile</b> Needs more practice and real life situations to understand better.
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Use the scale below to answer the following questions. Answer the question by writing just the letter of the appropriate response (A-E) indicated below.

A= agree	B= strongly agree	C= not sure	D= disagree	E= strongly disagree	
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	Answer
9. The lecturer takes in to consideration my learning style in helping me understand the skills that are taught in the module.	A
10. The lecturer encouraged and motivated me.	A
11. The course stimulated my thinking.	A
12. The course has increased my ability to analyse material.	A
13. The course has improved my reading skills.	A
14. The course has improved my writing skills.	A
15. The course has improved my listening skills.	A
16. The course has improved my note taking skills	A
17. The course has improved my time management skills.	A
18. The course has taught me to believe in my abilities. (self esteem).	A
19. The course has improved my ability to work as a member of a team or group	A
20. The course has improved my presentation skills.	A
21. The course has helped me to understand and pass other courses.	A

22. I have learnt the following skills in the ALC Module. (Mark with a cross x)

Self motivation		Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading		Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	X
Research	X	Presentation	

23. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module do you find useful as a part-time working student?

Self motivation	X	Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading	X	Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	X
Research	X	Presentation	

24. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your place of work?

Self motivation		Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading		Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	X
Research	X	Presentation	



25. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your other modules?

Self motivation		Listening	
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading		Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	X
Research		Presentation	

26. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your community?

Self motivation		Listening	
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading		Time management	
Academic Writing		Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	
Research		Presentation	

27. What do you like about the ALC Module?

The Lecturer (Mr Chu) has a passion for this module

28. What do you dislike about the ALC Module?

None

29. What would you like to see added in the module?

None

30. What suggestions do you have to improve the course content and teaching of the module?

None

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Your effort is highly appreciated.

## Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to reflect on the Academic Literacy for Commerce (ALC 101) module and to find ways to best improve on the course content as well as the quality of teaching and learning. Your assistance will be highly appreciated in the honest completion of the questionnaire. All information furnished in this questionnaire will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Please answer the following demographic questions. The questions will be used for statistical purpose. For these set of questions please mark the right answer with a cross [X].

1. Gender

Male	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female
------	--

2. Age

20-25	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 26-30	31-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	50-55
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3. Home language

English	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IsiXhosa	Afrikaans	Isizulu	seSotho	Other
---------	--	-----------	---------	---------	-------

4. If English is not your home language, is it your <sup>2nd</sup>.....

Second language <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Third language	Fourth language
---	----------------	-----------------

5. What are your primary reasons for returning to study? You may tick more than one answer.

Community	Won a Scholarship /bursary	Work Requirements	Income	Special Skills	Quality of life <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	other
-----------	----------------------------	-------------------	--------	----------------	---	-------

6. How did you gain admission to the university?

Matric	RPL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
--------	---

7. The language of instruction at UWC is English. How would you rate your level of English when you arrived at the university?

Poor	Very poor	Average <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Good	Excellent
------	-----------	---	------	-----------

8. Which of the styles below best describe your learning style?

<b>Visual</b> Understand better by seeing things. Eg likes to see examples and visualize how things are done.	<b>Auditory</b> Understands better by listening. Eg. lectures	<b>Tactile</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Needs more practice and real life situations to understand better.
--	--	--

Use the scale below to answer the following questions. Answer the question by writing just the letter of the appropriate response (A-E) indicated below.

A= agree	B= strongly agree	C= not sure	D= disagree	E= strongly disagree	
----------	-------------------	-------------	-------------	----------------------	--

	Answer
9. The lecturer takes in to consideration my learning style in helping me understand the skills that are taught in the module.	A
10. The lecturer encouraged and motivated me.	A
11. The course stimulated my thinking.	A
12. The course has increased my ability to analyse material.	B
13. The course has improved my reading skills.	B
14. The course has improved my writing skills.	B
15. The course has improved my listening skills.	B
16. The course has improved my note taking skills	B
17. The course has improved my time management skills.	A
18. The course has taught me to believe in my abilities. (self esteem).	B
19. The course has improved my ability to work as a member of a team or group	C
20. The course has improved my presentation skills.	C
21. The course has helped me to understand and pass other courses.	A

22. I have learnt the following skills in the ALC Module. (Mark with a cross x)

Self motivation		Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	X
Reading	X	Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	X
Business writing		Group dynamics	
Research	X	Presentation	

23. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module do you find useful as a part-time working student?

Self motivation		Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	X
Reading	X	Time management	
Academic Writing	X	Goal setting and planning	
Business writing	X	Group dynamics	
Research	X	Presentation	

24. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your place of work?

Self motivation	X	Listening	X
Critical thinking	X	Note taking	
Reading	X	Time management	X
Academic Writing		Goal setting and planning	
Business writing	X	Group dynamics	
Research		Presentation	

25. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your other modules?

Self motivation		Listening	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Critical thinking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Note taking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Reading	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Time management	
Academic Writing		Goal setting and planning	
Business writing		Group dynamics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Research	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Presentation	

26. Which of the skills taught in the ALC Module have you been able to apply in your community?

Self motivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Listening	
Critical thinking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Note taking	
Reading		Time management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Academic Writing		Goal setting and planning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Business writing		Group dynamics	
Research		Presentation	

27. What do you like about the ALC Module?

Learning about new skills

28. What do you dislike about the ALC Module?

Too much work for part-timers

29. What would you like to see added in the module?

Nothing

30. What suggestions do you have to improve the course content and teaching of the module?

None

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Your effort is highly appreciated.

## **APPENDIX C**

### **STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS**

#### **Topic: Reflection on ALC COURSE**

**REFLECT ON THE MATERIAL COVERED IN THE COURSE AND HOW YOU HAVE APPLIED THEM AS A PART TIME STUDENT**

##### **STUDENT 1**

###### **How do I apply what I have learned to my work?**

I have learned many soft skills that will enable me to enhance my performance as an employee. I have learned about myself with self evaluation exercises, and have learned how to utilize an important life skill such as time management. I have been introduced the concept of noting the differences between active participation versus critical participation e.g. the difference between active listening and critical listening, and have also learned how to focus and work optimally on my own, utilizing all of the above to achieve my career goals and objectives. I have used the skills I have learned by using acronyms when being introduced to new business processes and rules. I have remained focused on the subject matter at hand, and I have been better able to memorize, retain and recall facts and information by employing study methods such as using acronyms, skimming and scanning texts and by using mind maps if necessary to complete assignments and essays. I often underline keywords and phrases in business plans and memo's I am seeing for the first time and look forward to learning how to properly draft and deliver business proposals and plans using skills acquired during this course. I now begin reading business proposals by first skimming and scanning, then engaging in critical reading to properly understand the intent and content of the document. I employ critical listening and thinking to analyse, decipher and comment on work issues within my department, and critical writing has improved quality of weekly and monthly management reports. My note taking skills has improved and is now an essential tool I use when in meetings to highlight and expedite action items for myself. I now have clearly defined goals in terms of my career and succession within my organization.

### **How do I apply what I have learned to my personal life?**

I have learned what my learning style is; critical listening, and critical thinking which helps me in dealing with others. I have been introduced to the concept of how to work effectively in a group and how to contribute optimally in a team environment which is beneficial in any social setting where one interacts with others. I have learned about myself with self evaluation exercises, and have learned that an important life skill like time management can also be applied in ones sphere of personal influence as well.

### **How do I apply what I have learned to my community?**

I think that by being someone who actively participates in their community and being aware of issues and having the soft skills to properly understand, analyse and decipher issues makes me a positive contribution to my community at large.

## **Student 2**



### **Listening Skills**

I am able to differentiate between listening and hearing. I was able to improve my listening skills showing interest in the communication and to be assertive. I will always interfere when someone would speak and would want to raise my point. I am still improving on this as it is difficult to let go of a bad habit. I do believe that it is best to allow the other person to complete whatever point they would want to make before I should comment. By keeping eye contact and to concentrate on what the speaker is saying is a skill that helps. This skill is a necessity in my working environment and it has made different situations and circumstances so much easier.

### **Note taking**

I realised that by not taking notes in class can make my studies more difficult. It is very important to take notes while the lecturer is speaking as I can do revision at home with my own notes. By doing this, I could study better during exams, with the complete notes from the lecturer as well as my own notes that I took during the same lectures. I had difficulties in studying with the mind map. By using the outline method, I could prepare myself better for the exams. I am still struggling with

the mind map and I know that this can be a benefit with future studies and will still try to get used to it.

### **Group/Teamwork**

I enjoy working in a team or a group. I am a team player. This is very important in my working environment, as we cannot work as individuals, but need to work in teams. I have my own team of people and by communicating and motivating each other on a daily basis we understand each other. I am part of a study group, as this is also very important. We assist each other with studies and explain if one does not understand. We also share our knowledge.

### **Pre-reading techniques**

In our studies it is very important to read with an understanding and also effectively. I get bored by reading long chapters or texts. By using the skimming and scanning skill, I get an idea what the text is about. This has helped a lot during study time. I have practiced this on the business newspaper and I really enjoy doing this now. I get to know what is happening in the business world by just skimming and scanning the business reports.

### **Time Management**

In my working environment it is important to meet deadlines and to prioritise. By sorting my daily work into batches of urgent to do things and the not so urgent to do batches; I am able to get through my daily work. This helps with a clear desk policy that I have for myself. I believe in setting daily goals for myself and to achieve it. I have also long term goals and by keeping the due date in mind I work towards this. Sometimes when not meeting my goals that was set, I do not become despondent, but just try to work harder the following day. By doing this, I have achieved great success.

## **Student 3**

### **1: What I learnt and how did I apply it:**

#### **Critical Thinking:**

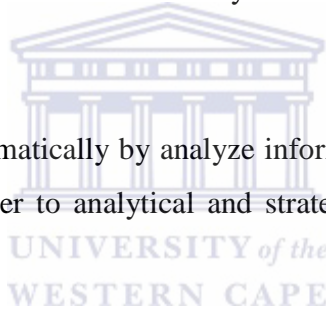
Personally it gave me the ability to start thinking outside the box and not only to go on my past believes and opinions. You tend to think that you always have the right answers to all the questions.

Critical thinking it makes me look at problems and situations in a different context by analyzing and gathering all the necessary information before coming to a conclusion. In today's business world and my personal capacity problems and situations always arises in which I need to evaluate the necessary evidence and ask the necessary questions to find new solutions.

The tools method assisted me in my decision making and problem solving aspects of my work environment. Where I need to consider the necessary steps that need to be implemented before any decision can be made. I started considering all the factors at hand; recognize what the problem is, other people views, setting of objectives and the consequences of my final decision.

In my working environment it also assisted me when I had to conduct performance appraisals and disciplinary hearings. Where you need to stay objective and think critically. In the community, work and home you need to analysis situations and try not to be bias because all situations need different approaches.

I am enable to solve problems systematically by analyze information and integrate diverse sources of knowledge. I can contribute better to analytical and strategic decisions by expressing myself better and clearer.



### **Listening Skills**

That hearing is the physical ability to hear sounds. Where listening is the active process where you need to give your full and undivided attention. People like to talk to people that listen attentively . Therefore people prefer to listen to what you mean, and not to listen to what you say. In the listening process I discovered that you need to do the following, “Shut you mouth, Shut your mind, Shift your focus to the whole message”. Listening skills has a great impact on your communication process as we tend to formulate the message that is being communicated to us. By analyzing the message you can determine what is taking place and why. By probing however it allows you to show the speaker that you are concentrating on the message and shows respect and politeness. By focusing on the speaker and keeping eye contact. Listening to the message that is brought across allows you to give constructive feedback without misunderstandings and mistakes. It therefore increases your interpersonal relationships due to the fact that you have shown that you are



interested in what they are saying, showed empathy where necessary and openness to new ideas and possibilities.

Different types of listening can determine your approaches to the situations on hand or discussions. This will in turn determine the outcome of the situation and how it will be dealt with in the appropriate manner. The best way in assisting a speaker is to encourage the other person by probing, reflecting your awareness and understanding of the situation.

Barriers to listening however can be divided in two parts: internal barriers and external barriers. Internal barriers are based on feelings and emotions. Examples: frame of mind, confusion, perceptions, fear, education, religion, body language and stress. External barriers are based on the outside feelings. Examples: noise, interference, distributions and breakdown of technology. The barriers of listening has a great impact on how we see and determine what the sender wants to relay and how we receive the message.

People tend not to listen due to being impatient with the speaker and do not concentrate. They do not see that we all see the world differently. They jump to conclusions and react emotionally to what they hear. People formulate a reply before allowing the speaker to finish which shows disrespect to the speaker.

Listening skills has assisted me at work by understanding that we work with different cultures of people with different characters. It also assisted me in determining where the gap is between my staff members and which route to follow in order to fill that gap. The more you listen to different views of people the more you understand people and you can actually split them up in different groups. In my personal life I realized that my partner is a good listener. He will listen to me and then analyze the situation and together we will determine a solution. With the listening skills I learnt I have changed a lot of people's perception about myself because I was not a very good listener before. I enjoyed people listening to me but when it came to my turn I would turn a deaf ear if the topic did not interest me. My horizons have broadened because you can learn a lot form people by just listening to them. Today I actually help people that are lacking listening skills as I have first hand experiences.

### **Note-taking**

Note-taking is an important part of your day to day working and study experience which include using abbreviations. Two major systems of taking notes is linear format or mind map. It gives you an understanding of the topic that is discussed and what you see as being important factors that might not appear in the prescribed text books. This is also an effective tool which can be used when studying for major examination or when sitting in board meetings. By using this tool you will acquire new techniques which can only improve your knowledge ability.

While taking notes you need to adopt attentive listening and understanding the topic which is discussed. By applying yourself you will determine the important points which need to be noted and afterwards analyzed. Currently in meetings I tend to take note of all the important points as this tool has given me a foundation of how it needs to be done. My notes make much more sense now and I know how to construct minutes properly. I have transferred these skills to some of my employees and family members in order to assist them with there studies and day to day activities.

### **Taking notes from textbooks**

In this process you need to use your SQ3R. Survey the text by gathering the information necessary to focus on and formulate the goals pertaining to the text. Question the necessary information in order to engage your mind and concentrate. Read whereby you need to fill in the information around the mental structures you've build. Recite whereby you need to concentrate and learn as you read. Reviews whereby you refine your mental organization and begin building memory.

This was the most difficult part of studying for me before I was exposed to this course. I am the type of person that wants to study every single word that is in the text book. By applying the SQ3R I realized that everything is base on our you analyze the given topic. This assisted me in work environment where you need to analyze and strategize also shared this information with my family members currently on high school as this will help them in there current environment and it will be a stepping stone for them should they want to further there education.

### **Mind map**

This is part of a note-taking tool. It's a diagram used to present words, ideas, tasks or other items. It is normally arranged around a central key word that has sub words or phrases to express what is being said. With a mind map it visualizes or structure ideas around what you need to study, problem

solving and decision making. However mind maps can also be used as an assignment for a written text. This assisted me in gathering my thoughts of a certain topic or situation that I was face with. Current at work we are busy implementing a new system and I am part of the project plan team. By using the mindmap I could separate my task and prioritize which one to approach first and support that why I think it should be a priority. Mind map also assisted me in planning for the next couple of months as you need to analyze what needs to be done, or will be involved and targets.

### **Self-esteem**

With this chapter I have learnt a lot about how I see myself and how other people see me to be. Self-esteem is based on the value you give yourself, the acceptance of yourself, the acceptance by others and the positive feedback. However you need to accept yourself first before other people can accept you. You need to understand that there need to be a balance between the following attributes: intellectual, physical, social and moral. Self-esteem can be improved by you acknowledging that you do not have to match anyone's standards but yourselves. You should know that you are important and has as much right as anyone else. You have the right to say yes or no for yourself. I never really had a balance in life because what ever I took upon myself I always want to succeed with the greatest of marks. I therefore realized that sometimes everything is not achievable at the same time and that's the time that you loose focus on what is really important. This course made me realized that you have to have a balance even if it seems so hard at times you need to stay focus.

### **Self concept**

This is a general idea we have of ourselves. Positive self concept can contribute positively to you studies. Therefore you need to be aware of your strengths and weaknesses. By focusing on this you can determine what you need to do to improve and how you can make things better going forward. By building on you self concept your general level of self confidence will increase. Self confidence is however a process that comes from staying motivated and true to yourself. However in life we need to choose a role model and know what we admire in that person in order to follow that the person. I was scared of doing presentations at work, school and outdoor life doing this course and interacting with the different types of people made me self confident. I can run meetings without feeling inferior, I can say what is on my mind without thinking that it is a stupid idea, no idea or question is stupid.

### **Barriers to self acceptance**

Always looking at the negatives and putting one down at all times. Saying no before even trying to accomplish a new event or task due to fear of failure or low self esteem. Confusing feelings with facts as stated. Here we refer to statements like “I should instead of I will or I am going to. Due to the fact that I could not handle criticism I ended up looking for negatives before I even attempted to tackle a task or a situation. Therefore I caused my own barriers. I then adopted the attitude that if I want to be successful in life I will have to handle criticism no matter the outcome. This however has assisted me as I took out the negative and the positive out of a situation and turned the negative into a positive.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is the key to self growth and success by setting your future goals. Being self motivated you need to know yourself and improve on your self worth. Keeping your team (business aspect) motivated you need to realize that people are motivated by different types of needs. It can be basic needs as money, food, comfort and security. Others can be determine by achievements, recognition and achieving there goals. Therefore by increasing your self awareness in this respect you will be able to give your best at all times. The more successful you are the more motivated you will be to go further and achieve your goals.

The skills that I have adapted from this chapter were very personal because it made me realize that I have a very high self esteem. I tend to set very high standards for myself and will do everything in my power to achieve this. I believe in success and my biggest weakness was failure and criticism but after attending this lecture I realized that you only learn by getting things wrong before you getting it right, and that constructive criticism can be positive and not only negative. It all depends what you make out of a situation. I am self motivated and in order to be successful you need to be motivated and motivate the people around you to do there best at all times

### **Barriers to motivation**

Settings of unrealistic goals .You do something to please people for example your parents but not yourself. You do not like what you are doing and in return you do it because you need to not because you want to. Example: being a call centre operator. You have a lack of confidence and a fear of evaluation.

### **Criticism**

This can be seen as a good and bad it all depends the context in which it is being used. When someone criticize you, listen to what the person is saying without interrupting or start excusing yourself. Agree where possible but tend to disagree if you think it is unfair. Ask for the necessary clarification and when you are wrong admit to it and apologise. However when criticizing keep calm and criticize the action and not the person. This can caused a person to have a low self esteem.

Criticism you need to handle on a day to day basis as personally it make a stronger person and build up your character.

### **Group /Team Work**

Group is a collection of individuals with different believes, emotions, performance and experiences. In this process you need to show acceptance and understanding of the other individuals. A group is only as strong as there weakest link. Group members need to share ideas, information and concerns where necessary. For a group to be successful you need to have structure where you vote on a leader, time keeper and note taker in order to fulfill a task and where everybody is effectively interacting.” Like they say too many cooks spoil a broth”. Furthermore you need to trust your members and know that you are working towards the same goal. Therefore setting of goals needs to be set by the entire group and not only by one particular person in the group. This will cause those members loose interest in achieving the set goal.

As an individual I believed in working alone because it was always about me and what I have to offer. This lecture has open my eyes in the sense that two heads thinks better than one. By working in a group you are expose to new ideas and thought s which you maybe never even considered. You start trusting in people and find yourself in a supportive climate where you can depend on your group members and they can depend on you.

### **Reading for academic purpose**

Firstly what I determined was that there is 3 parts to reading. Pre reading techniques, Comprehensive reading and Critical reading.

### **Pre Reading Techniques**

#### **Skimming**

This technique enables you to find the relevant information quickly without reading it comprehensively. What we need to determine or look for is your topic; theme or key words (normally bold words in a text). This also assists when searching for information in a library, internet or public, private institutions.

### **Scanning**

This technique enables you to find specific information quickly without having to read everything. With scanning we look at specific key words. Therefore you need to know where to look and find the information required.

### **Comprehensive Reading**

Refers to detailed reading in order for you to understand what the text or chapter is all about. There are certain steps that need to be followed when reading comprehensively. Your first step would be to read to get an overview of what the text is all about. Your second step would be to read for structure. Where you will be able to determine how the information is presented, what will be discussed and the controlling statement. Furthermore you will also be able to identify the main ideas in the paragraphs. Your third step would be to determine what type of supporting details are given for each main idea.

### **Critical Reading**

This refers to more intense reading where we read looking for ways of thinking about the text and subject. Critical reading you develop your own ideas, thoughts and insight to the written text. Whereby you visualize what the author wants to bring across to the audience. With critical reading you analyze and critically discuss the statements in the text in order to give you a clear understanding of the information presented to you. When it comes to critical reading you always ask the necessary questions and examine the evidence as supporting details.

It supplied me with the necessary techniques and skills that I required in reading. Reading an article has become more interesting to me because I read it with the mindset to understand what the author is trying to say in the message that he/she wants to bring across. Therefore analyzing the article and asking the necessary questions, determining if it is facts or opinions and who is the audience they writing to.

### **Goal Setting**

Planning is the starting point of goal setting. It is a fundamental element that predetermines our accomplishments and how it intends realizing its goals. Planning gives direction and clarifies the objectives and determines their feasibility. Goals therefore need to be complete, focused and consistent. By setting goals you are turning your vision into reality. Goals must be stated in a positive way. (Eg. I will.....not” I might” or I hope.....”). It involves your behaviour and not someone else’s. It needs to be written down and specific dates needs to be set when you will be working on your goal. However it also needs to have a projected date when the goal will be reached. Therefore when setting your goals it needs to be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and within a time bound. Goal setting applies to your work, home and studies. You can set long term or short term goals.

### **Time Management**

Scheduling this process you need to look at the time available to you and plan how you will use this time to achieve the goals which you have identified. By using a schedule or an activity list you can manage you time effectively by planning your day, week or month. Understand what you can realistically achieve with your time. Plan to make the best use of the time available. Leave enough time for things you absolutely must do. Preserve contingency time to handle the unexpected. Minimize stress by avoiding over commitment to yourself and others.

Goals need to be smart and thought through in order for it to be obtained. Your goals determine where you want to be in the future. Therefore before setting a goal you need to understand the detail and planning that goes into it to make it realistic. Time management has assisted me in my day to day life by drafting an activity list and prioritized what needs to be done and the time available to me in order to complete it.

### **Study Tips**

Study tips was provided in this course which was very helpful for a good preparation for exams or any courses that you want to achieve. The strategy and steps provided supplied us with a good foundation in order to make studying a little bit easier especially for the part time students.

Study groups are also an effective way of preparing for class discussion or test. Study groups provide benefits such as you can rely on knowledge sharing, group discussions about difficult questions. The knowledge of the group is much greater than the knowledge of the individual. A

study group also gives you the opportunity to compare notes with you fellow students in order to complete your notes. Study groups are depended on each other and inspire each other.

### **The writing process**

In this chapter we went back to the basics in the sense of how a sentence is constructed and how a paragraph is made up. Furthermore we were thought how to construct an essay. This was a very informative chapter as we tend just to write without putting thought into our writing or any structure. We were introduced to how to plan your essay egg introduction, your body and your conclusion and how it must flow into each other. Furthermore I learnt about how to grab your reader's attention in your introduction in order to make people want to read your essay. In this essay writing we were introduced to controlling thesis statement – topic of discussion, topic sentence - tells you more about the paragraph and how each paragraph must have a concluding sentence. I am not 100% confident in the essay writing but I understand the basic requirement.

### **Summary Writing**

It requires careful reading and reflective thinking of the article. You need to analyze the article and summarize it in your own words without changing the characteristics of the original text. You need to cover all the main ideas the author has brought forward with the supporting ideas. You need to stay clear from opinions or ideas as the reader needs to understand that you and the author are in sink with each other. This has assisted me personally in my day to day working environment because as a manager you need to conduct summary's based on board meetings and strategy planning.

## **STUDENT 4**

I've learned the meaning of critical thinking. I've learned to understand the logical connection between ideas. Identify which ideas is relevant to the subject I'm studying. What critical thinking is not? That it is an important life skill that is used in all spheres of life .To apply guidelines of becoming a critical thinker.When I am at work and a crisis arises I think of the Tools Method example: thinking of what would happen or consequences is there any other alternatives to the problem .I ask more pertinent questions relating to the crisis not shying away from it anymore. My Listening Skills has definitely improved .For example I would sit in workshops and not actively



participate in discussions .Now I'm more involved in discussions. I make more eye contact .I jot down questions so that I can ask them to get clarity .Note taking has also become easier for me now that I streamline my notes by using symbols etc. I now have more time in capturing the essence of the workshop or conference .And being able to identify signal words has enabled me to identify when the person wants to bring a point across .I use to sit in a workshop walking out there with only retaining half of the information given to me. I want to do more now and understand things better for myself and not feel inadequate. Now By improving my Note Taking I'm now able to explain to my colleague's important details if they missed it, for me this was always a drag, but now I practise more at work. My Self Esteem has increased in so many ways. I am able to diffuse miscommunications in the office by reasoning with both parties and assist in solving the problem .I am more assertive of what I want from my job . I am now applying for positions without doubting my abilities as I previously did .I now feel adequate in giving advice because, of me feeling more confident about myself. I don't shy away from scenarios at work no more. If I can assist anyone I do it .As for my future career goals I am more aware of what I want to achieve and is ready to work hard for it. I see the door opening for me and love what I am seeing, because I now see that furthering my education will only better my family and me in a positive way.

## Home

When I am in a argument at home I don't just jump in and say what ever comes to mind no, I now think of the consequence of my actions, is it worth it .Listening to my husband and hearing is different. He appreciates it more when I look at him .I use to shout from example the kitchen now I would go to him and talk to him about what he wants for supper .My self esteem has definitely improved I no longer ask him all the time what he would like for supper, now I will cook because I know that what I cook he will love. I have become more assertive in our decision making, if we want to go away for a few days I will jump in and start hunting for a place to go too. I feel good about myself, more than I did then. Our communication in general has improved so much. In practising better Time Management I have learned to set goals and priorities. And setting up my short tem and long term goals .To manage my personal and professional time more effectively by scheduling.

## APPENDIX D:

### SAMPLE LEARNING STYLE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Learning Style Inventory

To better understand how you prefer to learn and process information, place a check in the appropriate space after each statement below, then use the scoring sheet to evaluate your responses. Use what you learn from your scores to better develop learning strategies that are best suited to your particular learning style. This 24-item survey is not timed.

Respond to each statement as honestly as you can.

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom
1. I can remember best about a subject by listening to a lecture that includes information, explanations and discussion.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I prefer to see information written on a chalkboard and supplemented by visual aids and assigned readings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I like to write things down or to take notes for visual review.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I prefer to use posters, models, or actual practice and other activities in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I require explanations of diagrams, graphs, or visual directions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I enjoy working with my hands or making things.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I am skillful with and enjoy developing and making graphs and charts.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. I can tell if sounds match when presented with pairs of sounds.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I can remember best by writing things down several times.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I can easily understand and follow directions on a map.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. I do best in academic subjects by listening to lectures and tapes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. I play with coins or keys in my pocket.			✓
13. I learn to spell better by repeating words out loud than by writing the words on paper.			✓
14. I can understand a news article better by reading about it in the newspaper than by listening to a report about it on the radio.		✓	
15. I chew gum, smoke, or snack while studying.	✓		
16. I think the best way to remember something is to picture it in your head.	✓		
17. I learn the spelling of words by "finger spelling" them.			✓
18. I would rather listen to a good lecture or speech than read about the same material in a textbook.			✓
19. I am good at working and solving jigsaw puzzles and mazes.		✓	
20. I grip objects in my hands during learning periods.		✓	
21. I prefer listening to the news on the radio rather than reading about it in the newspaper.		✓	
22. I prefer obtaining information about an interesting subject by reading about it.	✓		
23. I feel very comfortable touching others, hugging, handshaking, etc.			✓
24. I follow oral directions better than written ones.		✓	

## Scoring Procedures

**DIRECTIONS :** Place the point value on the line next to the corresponding item below.  
Add the points in each column to obtain the preference score under each heading.

OFTEN = 5 points

SOMETIMES = 3 points

SELDOM = 1 point

VISUAL		AUDITORY		TACTILE	
NO.	PTS.	NO.	PTS.	NO.	PTS.
2	<u>3</u>	1	<u>5</u>	4	<u>3</u>
3	<u>5</u>	5	<u>3</u>	6	<u>3</u>
7	<u>1</u>	8	<u>5</u>	9	<u>3</u>
10	<u>3</u>	11	<u>3</u>	12	<u>1</u>
14	<u>3</u>	13	<u>1</u>	15	<u>5</u>
16	<u>5</u>	18	<u>1</u>	17	<u>1</u>
19	<u>3</u>	21	<u>3</u>	20	<u>3</u>
22	<u>5</u>	24	<u>3</u>	23	<u>1</u>
VPS = <u>28</u>		APS = <u>24</u>		TPS = <u>20</u>	

VPS = Visual Preference Score

APS = Auditory Preference Score

TPS = Tactile Preference Score



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If you are a **VISUAL learner**, by all means be sure that you look at all study materials. Use charts, maps, filmstrips, notes, videos, and flash cards. Practice visualizing or picturing words and concepts in your head. Write out everything for frequent and quick visual review.

If you are an **AUDITORY learner**, you may wish to use tapes. Tape lectures to help fill in gaps in your notes. But do listen and take notes - and review your notes frequently. Sit in the lecture hall or classroom where you can hear well. After you have read something, summarize it and recite it aloud. Talk to other students about class material.

If you are a **TACTILE learner**, trace words as you are saying them. Facts that must be learned should be written several times. Keep a supply of scratch paper on hand for this purpose. Taking and keeping lecture notes is very important. Make study sheets. Associate class material with real-world things or occurrences. When appropriate, practice role playing.



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