

Changing conceptions of literacies, language and development

Implications for the provision of adult
basic education in South Africa

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Abstract

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on the circumstances under which adult education, in particular adult basic education, can support and occasionally initiate participatory development, social action and the realisation of citizenship rights. It traces developments in adult basic education in South Africa, and more specifically literacy and language learning, over the years 1981 to 2001, with reference to specific multilingual contexts in the Northern and Western Cape.

The thesis is based on four individual studies, documenting an arc from grassroots work to national policy development and back. Study I, written in the early 1990s, critically examines approaches to teaching English to adults in South Africa at the time and proposes a participatory curriculum model for the additional language component of a future adult education policy. Study II is an account of attempts to implement this model and explores the implications of going to scale with such an approach. Studies III and IV draw on a qualitative study of an educator development programme after the transition to democracy. Study III uses Bourdieu's theory of practice and the concept of reflexivity to illuminate some of the connections between local discursive practices, self-formation, and broader relations of power. Study IV uses Iedema's (1999) concept of resemiotisation to trace the ways in which individuals re-shaped available representational resources to mobilise collective agency in community-based workshops. The summary provides a framework for these studies by locating and critiquing each within shifts in the political economy of South Africa. It reflects on a history of research and practice, raising questions to do with voice, justice, power, agency, and desire. Overall, this thesis argues for a reconceptualisation of ABET that is more strongly aligned with development goals and promotes engagement with new forms of state/society/economy relations.

Keywords: adult literacy, adult basic education, agency, citizenship, critical applied linguistics, development, linguistic citizenship, multilingualism, reflexivity, resemiotisation, voice.

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*To William, Iphigenia, and Kim, without whom
nothing would be worth finishing*

In memory of Buntu Majalaza

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The present thesis is based on the following studies:

- I. Clifford, M. & Kerfoot, C. (1992). English: Language of hope or broken dream? In B. Hutton (Ed.), *Adult Basic Education in South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, pp. 152-217.
- II. Kerfoot, C. (1993). Participatory education in South Africa: contradictions and challenges. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27 (3), 431–447.
- III. Kerfoot, C. (2008). Transforming identities and enacting agency: the discourses of participatory development in training South African adult educators. *Journal of Education*, 45, 95–128.
- IV. Kerfoot, C. (forthcoming). Making and shaping participatory spaces: resemiotisation and citizenship agency. To appear in L. Lim, C. Stroud & L. Wee (Eds.), *The Multilingual Citizen: Towards a Politics of Language for Agency and Change*. Manchester: St Jerome Publishing.

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Implications for the provision of adult basic education in South Africa

Introduction

Looking back over the past twenty years has been by moments painful and exhilarating. Trying to do justice to the struggles of those determined to create a just and affirming education system is impossible. What I try to do is use this reflection to illuminate some of the ways in which adult education, in particular adult basic education, can support and occasionally initiate struggles for social justice or processes of participatory democracy. In particular, I hope to show how understandings of literacy, multilingualism, and resemiotisation or transmodality could contribute to increased agency and participation in a significantly refocused ABET system.

As Jane Freeland (2002) has pointed out, a thesis by publication cannot achieve the degree of theoretical and methodological coherence expected of a traditional thesis but may, by contrast, offer a greater reflexivity, given the increased perspective of hindsight. My purpose throughout has been to explore the potential of language and literacy education for equipping people with the capabilities to engage in participatory development, access socio-economic rights and address injustices. If anything, I am more puzzled than ever by the relationship between adult education and development, yet I hope that what I have to offer may point the way to a form of provision of adult basic education (ABE) that is more in line with sociological and sociolinguistic realities, and therefore more geared to development and transformation than is currently the case in South Africa. In order to do this, I need to find a way of framing the four studies presented here in a manner that provides insight into the broader political and economic contexts at the time when they were written.

This framing section will trace the developments in adult basic education in South Africa, and more particularly literacy and English language learning, over the years 1981 to 2001 with reference to specific contexts in the Northern and Western Cape. It will locate each paper in this collection within the political economy of its time as these perspectives informed my understanding of the purposes of adult basic education as well as the theoretical and methodological choices made in my research and teaching. Drawing on research and practice in community-based, trade union and formal learning centres during the period 1981-2001, it will provide three studies of attempts to implement transformative adult basic education, one written during the last years of apartheid, and the other two

after liberation. These studies are preceded by a book chapter written at the end of the 1980s as visions of a different future became possible. The first two components of this thesis contributed to the formulation of post-apartheid ABET policy, the second two investigated the implementation of this policy in the Northern Cape Province. The initial two were written from a position of resistance under apartheid, the next two from a new space of co-operation with an evolving state.

Adult Basic Education in South Africa in historical perspective

The work covered here can be seen to fall into three broad periods: the first is the decade of the 1980s, characterised by severe repression and increased resistance, the second is the years from 1990-1996, a time of hope and intensive policy development which spans the transition to democracy, and finally, from 1997-2001, a time of unfulfilled promises and political stagnation. The years since 2001, which fall outside the scope of this thesis, have seen a slow growth of political diversity and the emergence of a broader range of voices. While this is a hopeful development, the full effects of the global downturn in 2008 have yet to make themselves felt in the South. International experience suggests that Adult Basic Education is usually the first to suffer under such conditions.

Locating my work

For most of the two decades covered by this thesis, I worked for a non-governmental organisation (NGO), one of several small, politically committed literacy organisations that sprang up in the aftermath of Soweto 1976 as part of a broader response to increasingly repressive state policies. Our work grew out of the daily struggles of people coming to the city as migrant workers from the impoverished rural areas and living either in 'white' backyards, townships or in the informal settlements which sprang up around Johannesburg and Cape Town. Some were unionised workers in the formal sector, others, by far the greater number, were unemployed or partially employed, and most often women. By 1992 we were working with a range of organisations including church-run night schools, trade unions, community health workers, media workers, and cooperatives. Our staff included members of the communities we worked with and most educators/facilitators came from these communities.

Later, as chinks began to gleam through the armour of apartheid, discussions on the shape and nature of post-apartheid education began in earnest. A variety of policy processes were put into place drawing in all those perceived to be stakeholders in the future system of education and training (the then apartheid bureaucracy, the future education leaders, the trade unions, business/industry and civil society providers). As curriculum coordinator until 1995 for the National Literacy Cooperation (NLC), a coalition of about 160 NGOs set up in 1988, as leader of a research project into the core curriculum for Adult Basic Education on

behalf of the Congress of South African Trade unions (COSATU) in 1993 and later as member of two African National Congress (ANC) policy working groups, I represented at different times the Centre for Education Policy Development of the ANC, COSATU and/or the NLC in various education policy negotiations. I was also a member of the first Ministerial Task Team on ABET setup in 1994. A few years later I was employed by the Department of International Development (DFIDSA) to carry out a study on the implementation of ABET policy in the Northern Cape Province. The studies represented here thus reflect an arc from the grassroots to national policy development and back again, presenting an unusual opportunity for reflection on the complexities of education policy development and the ambiguities and contestations that accompany its realisation.

In many Third World countries, the provision of literacy or, more recently, Adult Basic Education has been seen as a key means of promoting greater participation in economic and social development. International frameworks for action such as the Dakar framework (2000) and the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012) see literacy and other 'essential life skills' as important factors in improving quality of life (poverty reduction, increased income, improved health, greater participation, citizenship awareness and gender sensitivity) (UNESCO 2005).

Given that the state is generally the largest provider of adult basic education, it is important to interrogate the relationship between development goals, development practices and the *kind* of education provided in state programmes. In contrast to some non-formal or NGO initiatives, literacy teaching in public learning centres is rarely conceptualised as a project of active citizenship: knowledge about 'rights', when it is provided, is seldom accompanied by the skills and capabilities needed to ensure their realisation. As Stromquist (2006) points out, 'considerable territory must be traversed to move from the acquisition of literacy skills to the exercise of citizenship' (p. 146). State adult literacy programmes do not generally provide maps for this journey.

The challenge then is to find a theoretical framework which can assist educators in state programmes to contextualise literacy and language acquisition in ways which tie them closely to the practices of citizenship. Such a framework would also need to allow scope for analyses of language, literacy, or other forms of semiosis, and power.

In the next section I will briefly locate and discuss each paper within the political and economic history of South Africa and related developments in conceptions of adult education and development. This section considers the first two papers in some depth to lay the basis for the themes that came to predominate throughout my work: voice and agency. In the second section, these two themes are taken up in relation to recent developments in thinking about citizenship, participatory development and governance, literacy and language. The final section draws out the implications for the provision of Adult Basic Education.

Phase 1: From Conscientisation to compromise (1982-1990)

The 1980s ended climactically with the fall of the Berlin Wall, an event which was to have significant effects on the course of South Africa's development in the next fifteen years. During the years leading up to this event, the West had grown less tolerant of anti-Communist dictatorships and the increasing support for sanctions against the apartheid state had begun to bite (Aitchison 2003a). The South African economy had in fact suffered a prolonged deterioration since the mid-1960s and by the 1980s the real economy was shrinking along with formal sector employment (May 2000: 52). Escalating unrest led to the imposition of a State of Emergency in 1985, which lasted for five years. After 1985, the government was cut off from foreign financing (May 2000: 57) and levels of income disparity, poverty and unemployment, already marked, increased rapidly. These years saw a dramatic resurgence of resistance within civil society, consolidated under the United Democratic Front (UDF), a non-racial coalition of about 400 civic, church, students', workers' and other organisations.

This growing resistance was accompanied by the rise of the independent trade union movement from 1985 onwards. This same year saw the creation of the huge Congress of South Africa Trade Unions, COSATU, which was to have significant effects on both the political and educational history of the country, and the emergence of the 'People's Education' movement which, although short-lived, had a significant impact on the development of education policy proposals in the 1990s (Nekhwevha 2002). People's Education (PE), developed under the slogan 'People's Education for People's Power' by the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), a broad-based social movement, was formulated at a National Consultative Convention in 28 December 1985 (Motala & Vally 2002: 180). The goals of People's Education included enabling 'the oppressed to understand the evils of the apartheid system and prepare them for participation in a non-racial, democratic system'; eliminating 'capitalist norms of competition, individualism, and stunted intellectual development' and replacing them with norms 'that encourage collective input and active participation by all, as well as stimulating critical thinking and analysis' (Sisulu 1986).

A significant feature of People's Education was the notion of 'capturing spaces' (Motala & Vally 2002: 175) in order to practise alternatives in education and to work towards creating a democratic future. These spaces consisted of grassroots organisations operating through small groups and projects in the 'community'¹ or the workplace, aligned with or affiliated to broader social movements, and deeply committed to democratic principles. This commitment interwoven with Freire's (1970) pedagogy of praxis became core to the practice of 'alternative education' (Alexander 1987). As all forms of political opposition were suppressed, wherever

¹ Irene Gujit and Meera Shah (1998), among others, have pointed out the importance of seeing 'community' as a living and contested entity rather than an unproblematic social category.

possible, adult education spaces were appropriated for political purposes (Aitchison 2003a).

Extreme political contestation was thus the defining feature of the 1980s. Looking back at this decade, several competing and sometimes overlapping conceptions of adult education can be discerned, each reflecting the interests and values of different social groups and their understandings of social change. The two major educational players, the state and organised labour, had opposing but equally monolithic conceptions of adult education. On the one hand, the apartheid state claimed to be 'modernising apartheid' by developing human capital for participation in the global economy (Kallaway 2002: 18). The profoundly ideological nature of this position was masked by an apparently neutral approach to the technology of literacy and an emphasis on functional approaches. As Colin Lankshear (1987) would ask, functional for whom? Racially skewed structures of power ensured that individual progress was forcibly circumscribed. On the other hand, organised labour drew on socialist models of worker education from Eastern Europe, the USSR, China and Cuba to develop an alternative to Bantu education and capitalist education. Heavily influenced by dependency theorists, they saw the path to development and equality through socialist revolution (Cooper et al. 2002, Walters & Watters 2000).

Sandwiched between these two extreme positions were a range of others, from missionary to liberal to radical, with corresponding views of literacy as salvation, adaptation, or power (Lyster 1992). Within the radical NGO sector, the alternative 'people-centred' approach to development created by Gita Sen and Caren Grown (1987) of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN) was a key influence. This was a populist model grounded in a feminist vision of women as full and equal participants in all areas of society which emerged in the 1980s as a response to the economic crisis in the South. For Sen and Grown, neither the 'trickle-down' concept associated with modernisation theory nor the 'structural adjustment' of neoliberal theory had addressed the unequal location of Third World countries in the international economy or the severe internal disparities which left many citizens of these countries unable to meet their basic needs (Youngman 2000). Most importantly, most development programmes had been 'top-down' and had ignored the voices of the poor. A people-centred approach would focus on the goal of eliminating poverty and oppressions based on nation, gender, class and ethnicity, and promote participatory democracy to 'empower' the poor².

Such perspectives offered the prospect of moving away from grand narratives towards a 'meaningful, dialectical link between the private and the public, the

² 'Empowerment' is a dangerously slippery concept, often recontextualised into discourses of management (Barr 1999, Starfield 2004), especially in South Africa where the concept of 'Black Economic Empowerment' associated with affirmative action has turned out to have little to do with addressing the conditions of poverty in which the majority of citizens still live but rather with the enrichment of a new Black elite.

personal and the political' (Usher et al. 1997: 35). Those NGOs concerned with literacy as a tool for social action were profoundly influenced by the work of Paulo Freire and subsequent approaches to popular education focusing on 'really useful knowledge' (Johnson 1988). These approaches aimed to be both practical and political and to engage directly with the lived experience of adult learners.

In the highly charged atmosphere of the late 1980s, liberal and conservative critics accused these more radical organisations of vanguardism, imposing a particular worldview, and privileging the political over the personal. At the same time, radical feminist popular educators who drew attention to the interconnections between gender subordination and race- and class-based oppression were accused by some on the left of sidetracking the struggle for liberation. All groups on the left accused literacy organisations that espoused needs-based or functional approaches of colluding in the social and cultural reproduction of apartheid.

Study I: English: Language of hope or broken dream?

It is in this intense, uneasy and often conflictual environment that the first study "*English: Language of hope or broken dream?*" is located. Co-written with a colleague, Marian Clifford, in 1989- 1990, it was intended both as a taking stock of South African work so far and as a tentative sketch of the way forward.

This chapter was part of the first book on adult basic education to be published in South Africa and was written while I was working for Uswe, an adult basic education NGO. The book as a whole was an attempt to provide a critical overview of the major debates, theories and teaching approaches in adult basic education. The intended audience was people working in community or rural development programmes, literacy trainers, planners and educators.

The chapter is divided into four sections: of these I wrote the first, second and fourth. The first two sections examined the contested role of English as a language of access in South Africa and the debates surrounding the language of learning for initial literacy. It also drew on Nicaraguan and Mozambican literacy campaigns to illuminate some of the consequences of decisions on language of instruction for large-scale campaigns. The third section, written by Marian Clifford, was a critical examination of current approaches to teaching English as a second language to adults in South Africa in terms of the understandings of language and language learning that underpinned them. The fourth and final section attempted to lay the groundwork for the second or additional language component of a future adult education policy. Framed by a vision of participatory democracy, it proposed a model which integrated theoretical principles from Freirean-inspired popular education, adult education and second language learning.

This first study opened with a political view of language as enmeshed in power relations and briefly addresses some of the language policy debates in Adult Basic Education, and more widely, in the run-up to the new political order. It assumed on the basis of political and economic history that English would be the language of

national and international communication in a post-apartheid South Africa but, as future leaders were beginning to talk in terms of a literacy campaigns, it presented an argument against running a campaign in English when the majority of adults who might be interested in such a campaign had little exposure to this language (p. 205). It also drew on evidence from revolutionary literacy campaigns in Mozambique and Guinea Bissau (Marshall, 1990; Freire & Macedo 1987) to emphasise that the goal of 'critical literacy' for creating and maintaining participatory democracy is almost impossible to achieve where learners struggle to make sense of print in an alien language. It further drew attention to the cognitive and affective challenges facing learners trying to become literate in a language that they did not know well. While stressing the importance of learning through the mother tongue, it nevertheless argues that given South Africa's limited human and material capacity, the large number of citizens who had less than a full general education (lower than Grade 9)³ and at least eleven indigenous languages, the country would not have the resources to run an effective mother tongue literacy campaign -- an argument borne out by two expensive and abortive attempts to get such a campaign off the ground in 2000 and, it appears, 2008.

A better alternative was felt to be the steady development of a solid adult education system which would go well beyond the acquisition of basic literacy skills. Learning English as an additional language would form part of this system but not necessarily the point of entry. With this in mind, the chapter presented an overview of current approaches to English language teaching. Discussion of theoretical principles and methods for teaching English as a second language masked intense political contestation over the purposes and practices of adult education. While describing the development of approaches from behaviourist onwards, the chapter attempted to illuminate the shortcomings of the different approaches to teaching language and literacy in South Africa and to point out the contradictions between espoused goals and actual practices as well as the consequences for the adult learners in each type of programme. While muted, as this was written in a time of bannings and heavy censorship, the chapter argued that language teaching methods should be critically interrogated to ascertain the extent to which they could equip learners to pursue strategies for change.

The National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) had in 1986 developed the concept of 'People's English for People's Power' which redefined the goals of communicative competence in English to include 'the ability to say and write what one means; to hear what is said and what is hidden; to defend one's point of view; to argue, to persuade, to negotiate; to create, to reflect, to invent; to explore relationships, personal, structural, political; to speak, read, and write with confidence; to make one's voice heard; to read print and resist it where necessary'

³ Estimated by adult literacy organisations and policy researchers, in the absence of reliable statistics, as 15 million. The 1996 General Population census estimated that 13.2 million or 50% of the population had not achieved a full nine years of schooling (Statistics South Africa 1998, Aitchison et al., 1999).

(NECC 1987: 38-39). The different approaches to language teaching were implicitly held up to this lens: the extent to which theoretical underpinnings resulted in learning processes and practices which could help learners towards these goals.

First and additional language in SLA: towards multicompetence

The chapter prefaced its overview of English language teaching approaches in South Africa with a problematisation of the concept of ‘mother tongue’ using a short case study of an adult learner (p. 155). Using Skutnabb-Kangas’ (1983) distinguishing criteria of origin, competence, function, or attitudes (internal or external identification), it questioned the unproblematic association of language and ethnicity, especially acute in an apartheid bureaucracy with its policies of ‘separate development’. This resonates with similar studies a decade later (see for example Harris et al. 2002; Heller 1999) and notions of ‘language expertise, language affiliation and language inheritance’ (Rampton 1990, Leung et al. 1997) who do not however include a category of ‘language ascription’, that is, an unwonted categorisation by others. At the time, however, in considering the relationship between the first language (L1) and second language (L2), I did not question the assumptions implicit in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies as identified by Vivian Cook (1996): that L1 and L2 are separate, self-contained entities, that L1 and L2 competences are separable, and that L2 learners are implicitly positioned somewhere on a continuum from incomplete to complete competence. A useful notion here would have been Cook’s (1992, 1996) ‘multicompetence model’ which argues for an integrated linguistic competence containing knowledge of two or more co-existing and overlapping languages. This view of competence could have moved us away from an essentially deficit position and allowed an understanding of changes in linguistic repertoires over time, ‘constant bleeding between and among languages as well as additions and losses in repertoires’ (Block 2003: 39). It would also have opened the way to an approach which went beyond the binary Mother Tongue/English and allowed greater scope for expression, an issue which is revisited in the fourth paper (Kerfoot 2009).

The issue of the term ‘second’ in Second Language Acquisition has also been problematic and in later policy work this awareness led to the adoption of the term ‘additional language’. In formal adult education contexts in South Africa, English was almost always likely to be the second language of instruction. However, the term ‘second’ does not take account of existing multilingual repertoires or previous language learning experiences. This was especially problematic in an apartheid context where ‘second’ had connotations of inferiority or second class citizenship and where multilingual resources were not valued.

A further problem with the term ‘second’, with particular significance for South Africa, is that it masks the issue of context (Block 2003). As Bonny Norton (2000) has shown, a naturalistic second language context is not necessarily

conducive to linguistic development especially where individuals and groups are constructed as inferior to the target language speakers. In such situations in South Africa, the only opportunities for adult learners to interact in English tended to be in situations of extreme power difference where overt challenge or contestation were generally out of the question. 'Input' under these conditions was not likely to offer the opportunities to develop the kind of language skills needed for bringing about social change as envisaged in 'People's English'.

Negotiating meaning, negotiating position

Given that adult learning groups or 'alternative' organisational contexts were likely to be the only spaces for interaction where learners might be considered 'legitimate speakers' (Bourdieu 1982) of English, the challenge was to find a second language pedagogy which was consistent with the aims of critical pedagogy. The chapter thus traces the development of understandings of language from linguistic competence to communicative competence to negotiation for meaning and the reflection of these different conceptions in approaches to language teaching. It evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of each in terms of conceptions of learner roles and goals for language teaching in an attempt to draw out underpinning ideologies of language and social positioning.

The theories of language and communication which came closest to meeting our⁴ needs were those associated with the Input, Interaction and Output (IIO) model (Gass 1988, 1997; Long 1996):

Negotiation for meaning is the process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved. (Long 1996: 418)

Such definitions of course raise questions of power: whose meanings? Under what conditions? They appear to assume unproblematically that speakers CAN negotiate meaning (Norton 2000) whereas in politically repressive contexts, the reality is very different.

The learning group was therefore usually the only space in which learners could negotiate meaning in English on a more equal basis. In line with Freirean insistence that the learning context should mirror the kind of society desired, we sought ways to reduce power differences and create more democratic relations between educator and learners. One such way was to promote learner control over the content and process of learning. Here we tried out, among other things, task-

⁴ The shift from the singular to the plural from here on is intended to signal that theories and approaches were the subject of discussion and debate amongst staff, educators and wherever possible learners. While the organization was started by two white women, it grew to a staff of over 60, the majority of whom belonged to the communities we were working with. The 'we' should thus not be understood as a generic 'other'.

based approaches associated with the IIO model (Candlin 1987, Breen 1987, Nunan 1989). These had two advantages. First, they paid attention to ideas of natural language acquisition through group problem-solving and decision-making (Breen 1987) and, second, they saw lessons as ‘social events co-constructed by participants’ (Block 2003: 65). Such perspectives suggested analyses of learners’ needs and wants and their ongoing involvement in monitoring and negotiating the syllabus. A third element present in the SLA literature at the time was a focus on learning strategies⁵ (see O'Malley & Chamot 1990, Oxford 1990) which we combined with grammatical consciousness-raising (Rutherford 1987) as these theoretical approaches seemed to offer an active, metacognitive approach to language learning. Through such means, we hoped to bolster independent and self-directed learning both within the learning groups and outside them.

These aspects of thinking around ‘negotiation for meaning’ thus seemed to coincide with our current practices and concerns as radical educators. Combined with principles of adult learning they contributed to the creation of a model for curriculum and lesson planning (see Figure 4.14 p. 208) based on the Freirean problem-posing cycle and the notion of ‘praxis’, that is, ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (Freire 1970: 33). Such a model seemed to offer the potential to respond creatively to local community realities within a wider framework of reconstruction and development.

However, while stressing the need for language teaching to look beyond the functional or referential towards critical analysis, creativity and collective action for change, the model does not theorise these more interactional and interpersonal aspects of communication but subsumes them under the general category of negotiation for meaning. As Block (2003: 81) argues, ‘traditionally the problem in SLA has been a tendency to want to limit the analyses of interaction to linguistic features such as morphology, syntax and phonology at the service of [negotiation for meaning], leaving other negotiations in the margins and dealing with identity only in terms of native speaker and non-native speaker’. Yet it was precisely these other negotiations that were at the forefront of our consciousness. What is interesting therefore is the constant but unidentified tension between our conceptualisation of SLA as a cognitive phenomenon and our daily experience of learners in different contexts trying to negotiate group membership, self-identity, solidarity across cultures, and so on.

We had early on moved to ‘whole language’ approaches to literacy and language teaching in order to focus on meaning rather than form. However, at the time we had not yet come across Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday 1985) which provides a conceptual bridge between grammar and social theory⁶. Its

⁵ O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 1) define learning strategies as ‘the special thoughts or behaviours that individuals use to help them comprehend, learn, or retain new information’.

⁶ South Africa in the 1980s was subject to an academic boycott. Moreover, NGOs generally had little if any access to university libraries and staff were often prevented from traveling outside the country. The Johannesburg resource centre for educators and learners which USWE created with

interpersonal metafunction, for example, is particularly useful in identifying strategic choices that can be made for negotiating roles and relationships⁷. What we lacked therefore was a more ‘socially constituted linguistics’ (Hymes 1974: 196-7; also Rampton 1997) which sees linguistics at the service of social functions which ‘give [...] form to the ways in which linguistic features are encountered in actual life’ (Hymes 1974: 196). In our case though, ‘actual life’ contexts were often conflictual or, alternatively, group contexts of visioning ways of being and communicating which did not yet exist. Negotiation for meaning needed to be complemented by ‘negotiation for positions’ (Block 2003: 74).

From information processing to agency

As described above, rather than questioning the orientation of SLA as a whole and its usefulness as a paradigm for this context, we took from the field those notions that seemed to offer scope for reshaping power relations within the learning group, affirming learners as knowers and thinkers, and building confidence in their ability to act individually or collectively. Despite an emphasis on the joint construction of knowledge through the analysis of ‘codes’, comparing experiences, analysing commonalities and differences, exploring causes and planning for action where possible, our underpinning view of language acquisition was nevertheless individual and rationalistic rather than social.

Although the chapter briefly mentioned the role of emotion, this was not theorised but left hanging. Working with learners whose everyday realities involved various forms of structural or personal violence, we were acutely aware that learners are ‘historically and sociologically situated active agents, not just information processing machines’ (Block 2003: 109). Facilitators had no counselling skills and no place to send people for help; every night learners left to go back into an abnormal society characterised by extreme political and patriarchal ‘surveillance’ (Foucault 1977) in public and private spaces. We were part of rallies, union marches, and protests, and witnessed the power of emotion in action yet we failed to theorise sufficiently the connection to learning, to feeling as ‘a source of knowledge – including oppositional knowledge – of the world’ (Barr 1999: 113). Frequently adult learners, especially women, were unable to remember anything from one session to the next or sat silent all evening, yet we saw this as a reflection on our pedagogy rather than the impact of experiences of violence on learning. Of course there are other possible interpretations of this, for example, as

some difficulty was firebombed by apartheid agents in 1984. All publications were heavily censored and books such as *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970) banned. The first time I read Freire’s work for myself, rather than learning about it in workshops, was in 1990 when I studied abroad for nine months.

⁷ Fairclough’s (1992) work on *Critical Language Awareness* illuminated the relationships between language users’ identity, power, and ideology but he did not yet have a fully elaborated systemic linguistic base as in his later work (for example, 2003).

strategies of avoidance or opposition (Canagarajah 2002: 145) when people were uncomfortable with discussions, felt silenced, did not enjoy tasks, or were simply exhausted. Yet at other times they were vibrant and engaged. Jenny Horsman's (2000) work on the impact of women's experiences of violence on their learning and her discussion of the 'fragmentation of knowledge, memory and emotion' (Herman 1992 cited p. 150) resonates⁸.

Freire (1998) often argues that we cannot learn or teach or know with reasoning alone:

We study, we learn, we teach, we know with our whole body. We do all these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reasoning. However, we never study, learn, teach, or know with the last only. We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. (Freire 1998: 3)

However, we did not have sufficient insight into the role of emotional and bodily experiences in blocking learning and the desire or ability to act. Sociocultural theories which explore how 'mental functioning [in this case, language learning] is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context' (Wertsch 1998: 3 cited in Block 2003: 99) would have enabled an expanded view of what acquisition involves and have been a useful complement to critical pedagogy.

Overall, then, although our pedagogies and processes started and ended with the social, our understanding of language acquisition had not yet taken the 'social turn' identified by Block (2003: 4): we needed theories which were more sociolinguistically oriented, took into account the complexity of context, and had a more encompassing view of what acquisition entails.

What rings through this first chapter is a modernist faith in progress and a belief that literacy and language teaching could 'make a difference' along with a fair degree of certainty that we had found a way for this to happen through the integration of language teaching with popular education and adult learning principles. We were convinced that such teaching would bolster the growing mass democratic movement and enable 'change from below'. As Alastair Pennycook (2001: 8) has argued, one of the problems with emancipatory modernism is its 'assurity about its own rightness, its belief that an adequate critique of social and political inequality can lead to an alternative reality'. It is true that I did believe this with a fair degree of naivety but my memories of those years are of a constant sense of uncertainty and of inadequate knowledge, a wrestling with daily contradictions, yet the need to help create a vision of a different future and to hold firm in the belief that this was possible in order to sustain others, what Freire (1994) might call a 'pedagogy of hope'.

⁸ Even when family violence and other extremely sensitive topics were raised by learners, my goal was generally to help people see personal troubles in a broader context as public issues (C. Wright Mills 1959), to use emotion as the springboard into critical analysis rather than to acknowledge and work with it. Other facilitators handled issues differently.

The 'pedagogy of possibility' (Simon 1987) discussed in the second study in this thesis details our attempts to come to grips with this challenge as a future of structural change began to open.

Phase 2: Revolution to restructuring (1991-1996)

The decade of the 80s ended with a huge show of defiance in all major cities but it is widely believed that, as a political settlement had already been secretly agreed, the state did not act to crush it (Aitchison 2003a: 145). Political and economic pressures from the international community and liberation movements finally forced the government to free political prisoners and lift the 30-year ban on leading anti-apartheid groups, such as the African National Congress (ANC), the smaller Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). At the same time, the end of the Cold War reshaped political and ideological alignments in the southern African region (Chisholm 1994). The resulting loss of Eastern Bloc support for the armed struggle, among other factors, persuaded the liberation movements to move to the negotiating table.

Negotiations on the transfer of power took place amid fears of a coup by the army, still under apartheid government control, and attacks by the Inkatha Freedom Party, a traditionalist Zulu organisation which, it later emerged, had been militarily supported by the apartheid government (Marais 2001, Saunders 1994). Accordingly the ANC as government-in-waiting focused on ensuring a new political and social consensus and tended to downplay 'the social and economic fault lines' in South African society (Morris 1993: 8 cited in Marais 2001: 90). In the lead-up to the elections of 1994, the ANC, SACP and COSATU, had attempted to prepare a coherent development strategy for radical economic and social transformation. The Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) was based on the central principle of 'growth through redistribution' (RDP White Paper 1994) and emphasised people-driven development. However, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc after 1989 meant that those cadres trained in exile to run an obsolete, centrally planned economy had very little capacity to plan and manage a development path under radically different conditions (Aitchison 2003b: 49, Marais 2001: 76, 84, 123). While the rank and file assumed a move towards nationalisation of the means of production, discussion documents at the time contained only the phrase 'restructuring of the economy' which, as Nicoli Nattrass (1994: 6) noted, 'could include anything from extensive state intervention to conventional market-driven structural adjustment'.

In this atmosphere of uncertainty over the future shape of the economy and the role of the state, negotiations over a new education and training system began. While People's Education had begun the process of developing a counter-hegemonic education strategy, the apartheid government had managed to prevent the development of a fully coherent policy vision 'from below' (Motala & Vally 2002: 184). The focus of this transition period was thus the development of policy in anticipation of educational transformation.

National education policy processes during the restructuring phase

Of the many policy processes at that time, I mention here only those that had a direct effect on the shape of the new Adult Basic Education and Training system. In 1991 the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), was set up by the anti-apartheid National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC), a coalition of progressive education and trade union stakeholders, to develop ‘policy options’ for the broad democratic movement, effectively the African National Congress and its allies. This project was tasked with addressing concerns around ‘equality and efficiency’ in educational provision and the consolidated report stressed the inherent tensions in trying to satisfy both equity and development demands (National Education Policy Investigation, 1993: 10-14).

Imperatives driving NEPI and all subsequent negotiations were thus, firstly, to transform and integrate education and training in ways that would promote both economic competitiveness and redress for historical inequities, and, secondly, to integrate nineteen separate racially- and ethnically-based education systems. The broad democratic movement envisaged the integration of education and training in a system of lifelong learning that would articulate adult basic education and training, formal schooling, and learning programmes for out-of-school children and youth. Structures representing civil society would ensure accountability and participation at all levels of this integrated system. A national qualification framework (NQF) would ‘plot equivalences between qualifications to maximise horizontal and vertical mobility’ (Christie 2004: 133).

Early discussions in COSATU (1991) and ANC (1992) mentioned the possibility of a ‘competency-based’ system as a means of integrating and streamlining education and training provision in the country and in 1992 the major trade union federation, COSATU, began a participatory research project (PRP) to flesh this out. As part of this project, the organisation I worked for, USWE, was commissioned to research the nature and content of a core curriculum for Adult Basic Education (USWE/COSATU 1993).

Two key contributions of this consultative research process can be seen as, first, the formulation of the ten core ‘critical competencies’⁹ which came to underpin the entire education and training system and provide a framework for a variety of qualifications and learning paths. The formulation of the competencies drew on the work of academics such as Elizabeth Burroughs and Pam Christie within South Africa as well as international work in, for example, Australia and the United Kingdom. The logic of these competencies was based on the Freirean cycle presented in Kerfoot (1993): the aim was to underpin a system that

⁹ Examples are: Thinking about and using learning processes and strategies; Solving problems and making decisions; Collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information; Participating in civil society and democratic processes through understanding and engaging with a range of interlocking systems (legal, economic, political, social); Using science and technology critically to enhance control over the environment in a range of fields and contexts.

facilitated democratic participation in a range of contexts, not just economic but also social, political, and environmental. A second significant feature was a bilingual language education policy which promoted education through the first or most familiar language for as long as possible, together with access to a language of wider communication, most probably English. A bi- or multilingual ethos to the curriculum was seen as promoting the importance and value of the first language in education and strengthening the cultural heritage and identity of the users of these languages. Moreover,

it promotes positive attitudes to other languages and their speakers and a more critical understanding of the ways in which language use enacts power relations. Thus it has not only a cognitive function (facilitating the acquisition of higher order literacy skills) but also an affective and therefore social function. (Uswe/Cosatu 1993: 24)

Considered a 'landmark document' in securing consensus on the way forward (Yates, 1998: 42; see also Aitchison 2003c: 3, National Training Board 1994a: 2, 1994b: Appendix F), the resulting recommendations and the ten core competencies were taken forward through a number of policy negotiations. These included the key National Training Board Working Committees consisting of representatives from the then National Party government for the State, the ANC as government-in-waiting, trade unions, NGOS, business and industry, and simultaneously the ANC's Centre for Education Policy Development Task Teams on Curriculum and on Adult Basic Education (CEPD 1995a, 1995b). These competencies, later called outcomes¹⁰, were presented in *Ways of seeing the National Qualifications Framework* (HSRC 1995: 102), the document which laid the basis for the planned integrated education and training system¹¹.

As Andre Kraak (1999: 43) argues, continuities with the radical rhetoric of People's Education made an outcomes-based Education and Training system palatable to most lay policy analysts. Examples of these continuities would be an emphasis on learning and critical thinking and on learner-centredness, which countered existing transmission models of teaching and learning. Discussing

¹⁰ Terminology was hotly debated. 'Competencies' were seen as too open to behaviourist interpretations; 'learning abilities' as too vague and not assessable; the final choice was 'outcomes' as seemingly 'non-ideological and as having some associations with pedagogy and conscientisation' (Aitchison 2003b: 53).

¹¹ I have laid this paper trail in some detail as no-one appears to have explored the origin of the ten core competencies. In research since 1994 they spring, fully formed, from nowhere. These competencies and other elements of the Uswe/Cosatu report can be found in *A policy framework for education and training* (ANC 1994), the *Implementation Plan for Education and Training* (ANC May 1994), the Report of the National Task Team on ABET under the Ministry of Education (September 1994), the *Interim Guidelines for the National ABET Curriculum Framework* (October 1994), and the *Policy document on ABET* (Department of Education 1997a), as well as the South African Qualifications Act (No 58 of 1995). They also appear in slightly modified form in Curriculum 2005 for the formal schooling system (Department of Education 1997b) and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education 2002).

parallel developments in Australia, Eileen Sedunary (1996: 383 cited in Kraak 1999: 42) points to the ‘paradoxical convergence between two discourses – radical education and outcomes-based “new vocationalism”’. For her, as in South Africa, this convergence was at the same time contradictory because each discourse emphasised a high-skill high-participation Education and Training system for very different ends: ‘empowering the individual-citizen with critical and “interpretive intellect” versus linking “instrumental intellect” to the needs of a rapidly changing economy’ (1996: 383).

A host of tensions quickly arose from these contradictory goals: most significantly, a modernist employer-driven agenda conflicted with the state-driven redress and development agenda, employers’ versions of skills-based education conflicted with labour and civil society visions of a more general education for the 50% (13.2 million) of the population who had less than nine years’ schooling (Statistics S.A. 1996). To overcome concerns that business and labour goals would narrow possibilities, the National Literacy Co-operation commissioned USWE to illustrate the potential of the ABET curriculum framework for development goals. *A Development-driven framework for the ABET curriculum* (Bock & Kerfoot 1994) focused on two key goals: education for democratic participation and social justice, and education for environmental sustainability, including income generation or livelihoods. It illustrated the possibilities of integrating literacy and language learning with, for example, a participatory process of securing safe water supplies and at the same time critically engaging with gender roles and responsibilities. The central concept driving this interpretation of the curriculum was ‘access to resources and power over choices’ (Bock & Kerfoot 1994: 2) in which the acquisition of ‘print literacy’ in any language would be embedded in purposeful tasks towards a broader goal of participants’ own choosing, that is, ‘real literacies’ (Rogers 1999).

The final ABET curriculum therefore was broadly equivalent to primary and secondary education at key points, but radically different in content and process (Bock & Kerfoot 1994; CEPD 1994a; Uswe/COSATU 1993). It encompassed far more than ‘literacy’ education, reflecting the perceived need for a ‘general conceptual foundation towards lifelong learning and development, comprising knowledge, skills and attitudes required for social, economic and political participation and transformation’ (Department of Education 1997a). In this way, it was close to the more recent definition of ‘basic’ as in Adult Basic Learning and Education (ABLE) which refers to ‘meeting *and expanding* basic learning needs of adult women and men’ (Lind 2002; Torres 2004, original emphasis).

In creating such a curriculum, we underestimated, among other things, the difficulties of transforming an education system in a post-colonial context, unique in that the ‘colonisers’ did not abruptly depart but remained to be integrated into the new imagined community of the ‘rainbow nation’. These issues are taken up in more depth in the discussion of the third historical phase covered by this thesis.

The discussion of the second study which follows locates the paper within the processes of policy development described above and relates it to theoretical developments and debates in language and literacy studies during this time.

Study II: Participatory Education in a South African Context: Contradictions and Challenges

Presented at a TESOL conference in New York in 1991, this paper contributed to my work on the various negotiating bodies mentioned earlier. It is an account of our attempts to implement the curriculum model suggested in Study I and a discussion of the implications of trying to go to scale with such an approach. It reflects the challenges of developing policies and systems to promote both democratic participation and economic growth, as well as the concern of those working in the NGO sector that labour policy objectives alone might ultimately shape curriculum design (p. 444). This path would exclude the majority of those with little or no formal education who fell outside the formal labour market. The paper thus presents and critiques a possible model for incorporating both political and economic goals.

In this paper the mood is more uncertain: it refers to postmodern notions of knowledge as contested and incomplete (pp. 436, 442, 444) and to contradictory voices (p. 434). It is much clearer about the limits of literacy or knowledge as power: 'literacy as empowerment is an illusion in any society where deeply entrenched structural inequalities are enforced by institutionalised violence' (p. 432). It also problematises language and power more explicitly, how 'power precedes and invades speech' (Cherryholmes 1988: 48), and details aspects of the participatory ESL pedagogy and curriculum designed to raise awareness of this and similar issues.

Voice and critical pedagogy

Given the focus on the relationships between language, literacy and power, a key concern that underpinned the proposed curriculum was the issue of 'voice'. As Giroux (1988: 199) argues, voice 'constitutes the focal point' for a critical theory of education: it represents the chief means through which learners affirm their own class, cultural, racial, and gender identities. Thus, '[u]sing, speaking, learning and teaching language is a form of social and cultural action; it is about producing and not just reflecting realities' (Pennycook 2001: 53). The name of the NGO for which I worked, Use, Speak and Write English (USWE)¹², reflects this orientation to language teaching and an early preoccupation with voice. Our first publication, *We Came to Town*, was a collection of learner writings (Kerfoot 1985), the first

¹² This name was conceived in 1982 by the founder, Basia Ledochowska, to emphasise the agentive aspect of language. The organisation later became known as Uswe Adult Basic Education Project to reflect the broadening nature of our work and the inclusion of languages other than English.

time in South Africa that the lives, preoccupations, dreams, desires, of those with little or no access to formal education were articulated publicly in their own words. It could thus be seen as ‘the subaltern’ speaking, a voice virtually effaced from texts during apartheid. At the same time, however, the different texts represent ‘the heterogeneity of the subaltern subject’ (Spivak 1993a: 79) often obscured in Marxist representations of the working class.

Voice within the context of critical pedagogy is tied to a vision of an alternative, more democratic society but, as this paper makes clear, voice is not enough. Just as ‘.... we might ask how it is that access to or awareness of powerful forms of language is indeed supposed to change social relations, we might equally ask here how the possibility of using one’s voice is supposed to be related to change’ (Pennycook 2001: 103). At that time, USWE’s goals in encouraging learners to write were affirmation, solidarity – a sharing of experiences across cultural and geographical boundaries¹³, a belief in the possibility that a future system might take their needs and wishes into account (housing, health, education, living conditions, livelihoods), and also implicitly an appeal to Bakhtin’s ‘superaddressee’ (1986: 126) – ‘an invisible third party, the court of social justice, or simple humanity’.

Judith Coullie (1997: 141) characterises this collection of writings as part of a subgenre of ‘worker testimonies’ and sees them as an important generic development because they contributed to the ‘creation of new knowledges which reinforce[d] the struggle for democracy by fragmenting from grassroots the grand narratives of history and sociology’. She further points out the importance of the fact that these worker testimonies were addressed to those who themselves had little formal education, in our case through their use as texts for adult literacy classes. Significantly, for her, this feature contested

normative textual practices that generally address whites in and on their own terms because of their positions as members of the hegemonic culture. In positioning white readers as Other, texts like *We Came to Town* and *The Sun Shall Rise for the Workers* challenge a white hegemonic interpretation of reality and represent an important shift in the politics of literary production. (Coullie 1997: 135)

Nadine Gordimer (1985: 2) in reviewing *We Came to Town* makes a similar point from the perspective of the white South African Other that ‘We who are not among [these beginner writers] are all beginners in recognising the truth about the lives lived by black workers’.

A further feature of this publication illuminated by Gordimer (1985: 1) was ‘the joy and sense of achievement expressed by some of the contributors at their ability, at last, to record what they know and feel’. Coullie too, citing Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992: 51), argues that producing such testimonies

¹³ Some of the writings produced by South African learners were published in a Canadian magazine for adult literacy learners which in turn was read by literacy learners in South Africa and elsewhere.

probably meant for many ‘the chance to sign, the chance to count’ (Coullie 1997: 138). Yet she points out that, at the same time, many writers told of experiences of lack of agency, which, unmediated, have the potential to ‘re-enact’ passivity (Coullie 1997: 139). Issues of mediation are taken up in the section on method on page 42. The next section discusses other theoretical and pedagogical challenges in working towards greater voice and agency.

Beyond narrative: other routes to voice and agency

In addition to autobiographical accounts, learning groups also wrote texts such as letters, petitions and action plans, created posters and placards, to address local issues or participate in broader struggles. However, as I argued in the paper, without structured access to economic, social and political resources, such learners had little hope of using their literacy or language skills to bring about long-term changes.

The task for those in literacy education was therefore to imagine a democratic future and to anticipate the kinds of practices that could help adults work towards and sustain such a future. The curriculum framework proposed attempted to take up the challenge of People’s Education that future syllabi ‘must proceed from different principles’ (Gardiner 1987: 6). Rather than a fixed linear structure, the curriculum framework was intended as a generative model, able to accommodate multiple learning needs and contexts. The paper raises a number of issues in this regard, key among them the tensions between suggesting ‘generic’ outcomes and practices for non-generic, heterogeneous learners in a wide range of learning sites.

As one way of addressing these tensions, the framework proposed a problem-posing cycle as a basis for developing knowledge and skills for participatory democracy (see Kerfoot 1993: 437). Such skills included analysing ‘codes’, comparing one’s own experience with that of others, collecting and critically analysing information (including graphs and statistics), creating action plans, planning and organising meetings, writing agendas and minutes, reflecting on and evaluating actions taken and then planning further action. This framework emphasised the importance of engaging the learners’ experience in the analysis of the code, of writing for meaningful purposes, of using learner-generated materials such as autobiographies, letters, minutes or reports, along with ‘real’ texts such as pamphlets, newspapers, union pamphlets, technical manuals, conditions of employment, legal documents, statistics, government regulations, and texts related to planning and managing small businesses or cooperatives¹⁴. The main goal was

¹⁴ Sets of published materials were produced together with educators and learners as generative models of how literacy and language skills could be integrated with participatory planning and action (see for example *Doors of Learning* 1995, *Speak Out* 1997, *Changing Lives* 1998, *Exploring Science and Technology* 1999). In a review of *Living Conditions in South Africa* (1994) submitted to the publishers, Harmans Bhola, a renowned international expert on adult literacy, wrote: ‘it has everything a workbook for use in general adult education could ideally have. [...] It is worth emulation as a model of a book to use with popular education groups. The assumption of education as emancipation, of mutuality in teacher-learner relationships, and of participation in

to promote access to resources, agency in decision-making, and achievements of outcomes of value to learners (cf. Kabeer 1999, Sen 1999).

'Critical consciousness'

Underpinning this framework were therefore the Freirean notions of 'praxis' (1970), or action-reflection, and 'conscientisation'. Mastin Prinsloo (2005: 32) while working in a similar environment in the 1980s found Freire's 'simple model of social consciousness and political awakening of the poor and oppressed' to be inadequate in South African conditions as 'levels of political awareness and analytical capacities were generally high and diverse amongst the poor in [...] late-apartheid South Africa'.

This statement raises the thorny issue of the notion of 'critical consciousness' (Freire 1972, 1973): in these and later works, Freire argues against a 'banking' concept of education, in which pre-defined knowledge is deposited into 'empty' learners, in favour of 'education for critical consciousness', a process of dialogue and critical reflection through which learners acquire a deeper understanding of the connections between their own lives and broader structural changes. For Freire, such 'conscientisation' then helps to foster action for change. However, as Rachel Martin (1989) points out, adult learners are already critically aware of the realities of their social context and the ways in which power manifests itself. To deny this, and to see the educator as the sole source of enlightenment, is to deny the wisdom which is essential to the survival of the 'subordinate' (Collins 1990: 208 cited in Barr 1999: 111). Who then is becoming critically conscious – educator or learners?

On the other hand, as Walker (1986: 78) argues, it is possible to romanticise 'the culture of the poor' by implying that it is the only source of agency and creativity without considering how it is also shot through by dominant ideology, as well as differences and ambiguities. In the same way, it is possible to romanticise 'critical consciousness' amongst the poor and oppressed, especially in a deeply stratified and patriarchal society such as South Africa. Many literacy workers came to see critical consciousness not as an either/or phenomenon but as unevenly manifested across multiple daily oppressions of race, class, gender, location, language and (formal) education. Our experience revealed that it was precisely because of learners' existing analytical capacities that problem-posing was sometimes successful in drawing adult learners into broader processes and also in interrogating the more private sphere of the 'home' (family, religion, sexual and gender relations). These capacities also provided a hedge against the charge of vanguardism. Freirean pedagogy provided the tools for attempting to 'bring to light aspects of experience, reflecting upon and making sense of them, finding

and ownership of the process of learning are carried through with sensible pragmatism, not compromise'. I include this as one of several similar reviews to indicate that implementing such a model in practice was possible.

concepts and drawing connections, pulling out and exposing the assumptions' (Walters & Manicom 1996: 11) which, for these authors, constitutes theorising.

This process of building new knowledge seemed to offer the most promising way forward. Although critics have taken issue with, among other things, Freire's undifferentiated understandings of power and subjectivity, his utopianism, and his failure to articulate a clear political framework within which action can take place¹⁵, education activists worldwide have nevertheless been able to adapt and contextualise his ideas in a wide variety of projects challenging structural inequalities¹⁶.

As indicated, the long-term potential of the proposed curriculum was premised on post-apartheid shifts in the structures of power and an agenda of reconstruction and development. Literacies and languages were seen as resources which individuals and groups might draw on to work towards or resist transformations. In this section I will consider two major aspects of our work which were unusual in South Africa at the time. These are an emphasis on strategic competence and on text-based approaches to literacy development.

Language and power: rethinking strategic competence

As mentioned above, a focus on language that might offer scope for critical thinking and engagement, for social action and/or livelihood development meant an emphasis on meaning rather than form. For learners at all levels we encouraged the use of text-based, discourse level approaches. We moved in this direction for both linguistic and political reasons: first, as a non-syllabic language, English didn't lend itself to the disaggregation and recombination of syllables as suggested by Freire; second, as this was an additional language, it seemed to be easier for learners to make sense of sentence or paragraph-level stretches of text than of single words; third, using meaningful stretches of text seemed a more logical way of addressing language and literacy for analysis and action, for 'reading the world' (Freire & Macedo 1987). Those working with SWAPO¹⁷, the resistance movement in Namibia, followed similar paths (SWAPO 1987) as did two progressive academics in South Africa working with first language literacy in another non-syllabic language, Afrikaans (Wedepohl 1988) although these were not developed much beyond simple paragraphs level. I later discovered that Nina Wallerstein and Elsa Auerbach had been developing such approaches with immigrant workers in the United States (Wallerstein 1983; Wallerstein & Auerbach 1987, 2004). Drawing on the example of Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) in the

¹⁵ See, for example, Coben (1998), Luke (1996), Rockhill (1993), and Weiler (1994).

¹⁶ Examples include Arnold et al. (1985), Auerbach (1992), Rivera (1999), Shor (1987), Wedepohl (1988), and a number of 'Reflect' projects around the world (see Archer & Cottingham 1996a, 1996b; Riddell 2001; SARN 2008).

¹⁷ South West African People's Organisation.

United Kingdom, we encouraged learners to use their knowledge of the purpose and layout of various kinds of texts in order to try and make sense of them. We also experimented with learners with reading strategies such as skimming and scanning, essential when dealing with bureaucratic documents and other long texts in either the L1 or an additional language.

Where educator and learners shared a common first language, discussion and analysis generally took place in this language and then moved into English language tasks geared towards language for personal expression and social action. The kinds of goals envisaged above, critical thinking and engagement, are rarely achievable in a language of which learners have very little knowledge and seldom encounter in their daily lives (cf. Auerbach 1993, Freire & Macedo 1987, Marshall 1990). Consequently, although we still saw languages as parallel, separate systems of communication, our pedagogy encouraged learners to use languages in any way that met their learning needs. In this way, continuing the implicit tension between our theory and our practice identified in my discussion of the first study, our understanding of language lagged behind our practice, which was edging towards more post-structuralist conceptions. Such conceptions see languages as interdependent (Heugh 2003) and learners as able to draw on multiple linguistic resources.

Overall, then, we were thus groping towards a notion of communicative competence that was not based on a static version of the social order (Peirce 1989) but might contribute towards transforming it. Teaching in contexts of extreme poverty and injustice often led to heightened sensitivity to what might be taught along with the language, later succinctly stated by Allan Luke (2002: 1) as ‘patterns and practices of intersubjectivity, and thereby freedom and unfreedom, identity and non-identity, relative constraint and agency ...’ and ‘[a] sense of one's own social worth’ (Bourdieu 1991: 82), although we didn't always know what to do about it. Emphasising appropriacy in a context where learners were not seen as legitimate owners and users of English seemed inappropriate, although of course appropriacy could not be ignored. In seeking a pedagogy that was underpinned by a view of language as productive rather than merely reflective of social relations, the best we could find at that time was a kind of expanded notion of *strategic competence* where the compensatory aspect as defined by Michael Canale (1983) was no longer primary¹⁸. Rather, the emphasis was on the ‘element of conscious **choice**’ (Cohen 1990:5, emphasis in original), discussing existing strategies, evaluating, trying out new ones, and considering the contexts and texts for which each might be useful.

¹⁸ Canale (1983: 10) defined ‘strategic competence’ as an element of communicative competence involving both verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be used to compensate for breakdowns in communication often due to ‘insufficient competence in one or more areas of communicative competence, for example, paraphrasing, ways of addressing strangers when unsure of their social status, and ways of achieving coherence in texts when unsure of cohesive devices’.

‘Competence’ as a way of understanding the goal of language learning has lost favour since the post-structuralist turn, as it is underpinned by essentialist assumptions of a ‘complete competence in the target language which is possessed by L1 speakers of that language’ (Block 2003: 37 citing Cook 1992) and, by implication, of L2 speakers as being in deficit. Nevertheless, employing Spivak’s (1993b) notion of the ‘strategic use of essentialism’, Pennycook (2001: 72-3) reminds us that essentialising concepts can be ‘crucial tools in critical applied linguistic struggles’: existing notions can be strategically recontextualised to try and bring about a shift in the power relations that shape learners’ lives. For Starfield (2004) *strategic competence* is an example of one such tool; she broadens the concept to include a more social dimension, located within a community of practice and able to activate collective potential. For us, in hindsight, this collective potential was further enhanced by the more metacognitive, reflexive dimension that a focus on learning strategies added, tapping local knowledge where possible and building new knowledge where necessary. Interestingly, researchers in other contexts of the South, India and Sri Lanka, came to similar conclusions, that a focus on learning strategies may function as an ‘heuristic to develop an appropriate pedagogy from bottom-up’ (Kumaravadivelu 1994: 32) and that this may be particularly useful in multilingual contexts where people negotiate meaning, identity, and status in multiple languages (Canagarajah 2002).

The agentive and reflexive dimensions implicit in this expanded notion of strategic competence can be seen as valuable additions to the notion of ‘multicompetence’. These dimensions are crucial when approaching and making sense of, or creating, unfamiliar genres or texts, which brings us to the contested meanings of literacy.

Literacy and power: beyond the everyday

At the time when Study II was written, ethnographic research was beginning to challenge the existence of one ‘literacy’, a universal set of skills with invariable social and cognitive effects (Street 1984), and to focus on the construction of literacy in the ‘local’ (Heath 1983).

Increasingly, international and local research under the aegis of what came to be known as the New Literacy Studies (NLS) presented significant cross-cultural evidence to substantiate an ‘ideological’ view of literacy as variable, multiple, and shaped in relation to community, institutional and wider social contexts and discourse formations (Street 1984, 1993, 1995). Such perspectives in these and later studies are helpful in drawing attention to the countless ways in which people with little or no formal schooling engage with both literacy and development activities, often in a variety of languages or language varieties (Barton & Hamilton 1998; Baynham 1993; Herbert & Robinson 2001; Martin-Jones & Jones 2000, Prinsloo & Breier 1996; Rogers 2001).

However, in striving to emphasise the active, meaning-making nature of people’s engagement with literacy practices, early research tended to underplay

the impact of powerful literacies emanating from beyond the local. South Africa under apartheid and even earlier¹⁹ was replete with examples of human ingenuity in resisting or turning imposed literacies to alternative ends; nevertheless, the majority of citizens were more often what Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton (2002: 354) have termed the 'weary shock absorbers' of meanings and practices invented by others in a large-scale system of oppression extending far beyond the local²⁰. Even under democracy, local practices are often powerless in the face of rapid shifts in discourses and modalities (see, for example, Kell 1996) and the ability to 'take hold' (Kulick & Stroud 1993) of a particular literacy is constrained by the individual's position in a particular configuration of power relations.

Despite the richness of studies within the NLS paradigm and their detailed uncovering of patternings of literacy use within various systems of power, South African studies such as those contained in Prinsloo and Breier (1996) uncovered very few examples of the use of 'powerful' literacies, those which enable people to expand their capabilities and 'act to transform social relations and practices in which power is structured unequally' (Lankshear 1987: 74). It seemed clear that the everyday literacy practices in which adult learners engaged were those with which they had already found ways of coping²¹ (see Baynham 1993; Fingeret 1983; Prinsloo & Breier 1996).

If literacy was to be part of a social change agenda, it seemed critical to help learners access texts, practices and discourses which they did not already control, in addition to improving their engagement with existing practices should they so desire. In South Africa, this often entailed the acquisition of an additional language, usually English, which was unfamiliar and which, for poor and marginalised communities, had few social practices associated with it, except those that carried others' meanings. Social practices approaches thus provided a partial 'map of' existing practices but offered little guidance to those concerned with creating a 'map for' imagining a democratic and sustainable future. In such cases, it would seem to be the *absence* of practices that needs to guide the ethnographer's eye, the barely visible traces of 'literacy-in-action' (Brandt & Clinton 2002: 349) which provide clues as to the possible starting-points for taking on systems of power.

A further conceptual limitation of work in the NLS at the time reduced its usefulness for policy purposes: a tendency to essentialise 'schooling literacy', to equate it uncritically with autonomous literacy orientations (Wallace 2002)²² and, in turn, with the formal provision of adult basic education. This resulted in a

¹⁹ See, for example, Harries (2001) and Hofmeyr (1993).

²⁰ One example of this was the infamous 'pass' system which all black people had to carry and which dictated possibilities for love, livelihood and location. Many people could not read the document they carried but were still subject to its meanings.

²¹ Ways of coping identified included the use of mediators, networks, and a range of self-generated strategies.

failure to interrogate the relationship between the discursive practices of ‘schooled literacy’ and the practices routinely used when adults engage in participatory development, social or livelihood activities. Activities such as ‘ranking items in order of importance’, ‘presenting information in a short aural text in a different form, for example, a table, diagram’, ‘identifying main points’ and drawing mindmaps which are described by Catherine Kell (1996: 250) as deriving from the discursive practices of ‘schooled’ or ‘essay-text’ literacy are in fact communicative practices used in many participatory development processes to engage communities in analysis and decision-making. Moreover, ‘schooled’ practices such as skimming and scanning, although not identified as such, are demonstrated in informal contexts, for example, by Kell’s research participant, Winnie Tsotso (1996: 236) while identifying different documents and locating specific items of information. Such practices may thus be very close to natural ‘unschooled’ strategies that people employ when trying to make sense of text, especially in an unfamiliar language. As such they would form a sound bridge into more formal learning. Ironically, these practices, dismissed as ‘schooled’ by some theorists within the NLS, are similar to those identified by Street himself in his seminal work (1984: 152, 227) as ‘social skills, not neutral, “autonomous” ones’ and ‘literacy skills and knowledge clearly of a different kind and range’ from those taught in schools (at the time)²³.

This theoretical slippage can be seen as occasioned partly by a relative lack of attention to text, language within texts, and text processing (Baynham 1995; Tusting et al. 2000; Wallace 2002). Research under the New Literacy Studies umbrella in the 1990s tended to focus on the social practices of literacy and to downplay the ‘complementarity and interrelationship between linguistically based and socially contexted approaches to understanding literacy’ (Baynham 1995: 216).

The NLS’s relative lack of attention to process, text, and connections beyond the local were taken up by a second group of literacy researchers known as the New London Group (1996). They proposed a ‘Pedagogy of Multiliteracies’ to address the demands of an increasingly technologised, multimodal world while simultaneously valuing cultural and linguistic diversity. This proposal incorporated situated practice, but acknowledged its limitations as the sole basis for pedagogy, and emphasised agency through the concept of ‘Design’ in the meaning-making process (Cope & Kalantzis 2000: 7). However, this ‘programmatic manifesto’ (NLG 1996: 73) was as yet ungrounded in the specifics of practice. As a result, it read as somewhat utopian (Cameron 2000; Newfield & Stein 2000) with citizens and workers in a universalised, post-industrial capitalist world creatively designing

22 These issues are addressed to some extent in work a decade later by researchers in, for example, the edited collection by Brian Street on *Literacies across Educational Contexts* (2005).

23 Here Street (1984) is citing the kinds of literacy skills prioritised by the Adult Basic Literacy Skills Unit (ALBSU 1981).

their social futures. Questions for those working in developing countries related to the relevance of the political and economic project: the political project seemed to amount to ‘civic pluralism’ (NLG 1996: 72) with scant attention to structural constraints on citizenship and the economic to the challenges of ‘fast’ capitalism, which play out very differently in emerging democracies and economies in transition. Key for literacy-in-development debates, then, was the need to engage more rigorously with questions of power at both micro and macro levels: the multi-layered effects of social positioning on an individual’s ability to design his or her future. As we were interested in the conditions under which literacy could contribute to agency, we needed an alternative to both overly localised accounts of literacy practices and overly globalised theories of literacy pedagogy.

These then were the challenges awaiting us after 1994. However, these theoretical challenges were barely addressed in the six years that followed. Even two years after the new government took over, indications were that the broad social programme of which ABET was a part was falling prey to growing pressures from an altered and increasingly neo-liberal macro-economic framework (Amutabi et al. 1997; Bond 2000; Marais 2001).

The next section situates the final two papers within this postliberation context of negotiation and compromise.

Phase 3: From vision to mirage (1997- 2001)

This phase was characterised by an inexorable shift from mobilisation to markets, from conscientisation to compromise. In creating a new democratic state, the ANC placed a high priority on building legitimacy as a government and as a player in world affairs (Christie 2004: 128). This entailed negotiations and compromises not only with the previous government but with the other two members of the tripartite alliance, COSATU and the SACP, that had helped bring the liberation movement to power.

This alliance had long agreed on a two- stage approach towards socialism (Christie 2004, Marais 2001). Nevertheless, within two years global and domestic pressures had ensured the rapid displacement of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) by a new neo-liberal macro-economic policy, GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution).

The effects of this on ABET were dramatic: first, a macro-economic environment characterised by deregulation, privatisation and budget discipline was ‘inimical to the kinds of redistributive policies declared in formal education policies’ (Jansen 2002: 211). International donor funding had been switched from NGOs to the state at the request of the new government. However, the promised expansion of ABET never happened: despite policies which were ‘astonishingly visionary and responsive [...] (particularly in respect of adults)’ (Aitchison 2003b: 50), the strong ABET base in a national Department of Education was never created and system planning was undermined by an almost total failure by the state to invest resources in ABET (Aitchison 2003c). The resulting lack of capacity

meant that national and regional implementation plans and other programmes were badly planned and rarely followed through to success. In 1999 a new Minister of Education tried to start a literacy campaign, the South African National Literacy Initiative, which failed (Aitchison 2003c). Jonathan Jansen (2008) citing Vincent Mapai in relation to the government as a whole speaks of the *juniorisation* of the civil service: junior people were taken into leadership positions in the civil service because they were activists or ANC aligned. One of the effects of this trend was an inability to understand the deeper vision behind the ABET policies which resulted in overformalisation and an obsession with micro-level outcomes (Bhola 1997). With respect to language, insisting on micro-level outcomes may well have resulted in a form of neo-colonisation when outcomes for English language teaching were translated into African languages without consideration of the discursive conventions of these languages (McLean 1999). A further problem with micro-level outcomes is that they assume a universal and correct order of learning with a smooth progression from simple to complex. This assumption of uniformity in language learning experiences is at odds with both sociolinguistic and pedagogical realities, particularly for adult learners.

A further consequence of the lack of material support for policy positions has been an over-reliance on political symbolism and on claims to address inequalities, confront the apartheid legacy, achieve redress, democracy, transformation, and so on (Jansen 2002). At the same time, the dispersal of leftist activists and organisations after 1994 has diminished the potential for critique of a narrowing policy orientation (Fataar 2008). Consequently, although ABET policies tried to clear the space for contextualised practice, diversify contexts of provision, and create multiple points of access, the under-resourced, over-controlled, and bureaucratised nature of implementation has meant that 'of the flowers of possibility only the tyrannical bits remain' (McBride 2007).

A final blow was the scrapping of the proposed integration of education and training on which the mobility and flexibility of the new system depended. This further limited access through Recognition of Prior Learning for those with little formal education but solid vocational or technical skills, and severely constrained the potential of Public Adult Learning Centres (PALCs) to provide adults with the knowledge and skills they need to earn livelihoods.

Despite this bleak picture, there have been moments of light. One such was the donor-funded partnership between the Department of Education in the Northern Cape Province and the Centre for Adult and Continuing Education (CACE) at the University of the Western Cape during the years 1996-1999. This partnership was conceptualised within the goals of the RDP and therefore placed great emphasis on the role of adult educators as agents of change and of development, with a particular focus on improving the position of women. Two tertiary level programmes were offered to members of previously disadvantaged communities, an Advanced Diploma to build managerial capacity and a Certificate for Educators of Adults. During the duration of this partnership in 1997, the national government

launched the Ithuteng campaign to recruit 90,000 new learners nationally (Aitchison et al. 2000: 8). This seemed to herald the desired expansion of ABET, although this later proved to be a mirage, and the Northern Cape government put substantial resources into the development of Public Adult Learning Centres and the training of adult educators on the Certificate programme. Key projected outcomes for the Certificate were to conceptualise ABET programmes with development potential and to operate effectively as development practitioners in the field of ABET.

In 2000 DFIDSA (Department for International Development South Africa) commissioned a research project to investigate the impacts of the partnership. One of the unexpected findings of the research was the extent and variety of Certificate participants' involvement in development projects and structures (Kerfoot et al. 2001). The last two studies in this thesis retheorise the data from this research in order to try and understand the conditions under which adult education, literacy and language can contribute to greater voice and agency.

Before I discuss these two studies, I briefly discuss shifts in understandings of participatory development and of citizenship in recent years. These shifts provided part of a framework for rethinking the nature of ABET provision.

Locating participatory development

As previously mentioned, South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was conceived as a participatory, people-driven process to 'give the poor control over their lives and increase their ability to mobilise sufficient development resources, including from the democratic government where necessary' (RDP W/P 1994: 2.2.3). Conventional development programmes have frequently been criticised for privileging 'Western' knowledge systems over others and consequently suppressing local cultures, women, identities and histories (Escobar 1995; Gujit & Shah 1998; Williams 2004). Participatory approaches, in contrast, see development as a context-dependent process, and stress 'the empowerment of communities to act in their own interest, to be recognised as legitimate "knowers", to extend their understanding of power relations and determine their ideas of development' (Nelson & Wright 1995: 18; also TCOE 1996; Williams et al. 2003). Such approaches have recently been 'mainstreamed' by global institutions such as the World Bank, at least in principle (see World Bank 2001). While viewing these moves towards the local as promising, Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke (2000) note that the 'paradoxical consensus' by the radical left and neoliberal worldviews over the role of local participation in development practice is fraught with dangers.

A central danger, they argue, is that both ideological positions tend to 'essentialise the local', seeing it as a relatively autonomous, bounded space, wholly separable from the 'non-local' (Kenneh 1999), and consequently failing to engage sufficiently either with local inequalities and networks of power relations, particularly gender (Mohan & Stokke 2000; Gujit & Shah 1998; Kothari 2001) or

with the wider power relations that frame local development problems (Williams 2004; Hickey & Mohan 2004). In this way, insufficient awareness of both internal and external operations of power may lead to an imperfect understanding of how processes of change may come about.

Another effect of 'going local' for Mohan and Stokke (2000) is the tendency to see local civil society as separate from both the state and the economy. This has the effect of downplaying both the importance of state power and related struggles (Mohan & Stokke 2000) and the constraints exerted by market forces (Bebbington 2000; Hickey & Mohan 2004). An overemphasis on the local can also exaggerate the extent to which local communities contain all the resources for their own transformation (Cleaver 2004; Williams 2004) which, in turn, can lead to blaming communities for failures engendered by forces beyond their control.

Overall, then, for participatory approaches to be transformative, the 'locus of transformation' must go beyond the individual and local, avoid a simplistic opposition between local and global (Auerbach 2005), and involve multi-scaled strategies that include the institutional and structural (Hickey & Mohan 2004). Moreover, the more positive examples of participatory development tend to be framed by some form of transformative political agenda (Williams 2004).

Towards participatory citizenship

In the last few years, in order to increase the possibilities of transformation, the focus of participatory development, which has tended to lie at project level, has begun to shift towards increased *political* participation and rights-based approaches (Gaventa 2002). As Lister (1997a: 41) points out, 'To *be* a citizen in the legal and sociological sense means to enjoy the rights of citizenship necessary for agency and social and political participation. To *act* as a citizen involves fulfilling the potential of that status' (my emphasis). This emphasis on citizens as active agents of change has led to calls for participation itself to be reframed as a basic human right (Lister 1998, Ferguson 1999).

According to Giles Mohan and Samuel Hickey (2004), Lister's concept of 'citizenship participation' represents a significant conceptual advance within understandings of participatory development for several reasons: first, it covers the convergence between participatory development and an increasing focus on participatory governance (Gaventa 2002, 2004), that is, on strengthening the state/civil society interface. Second, it provides a stronger political, legal and moral focus for agency within development than is currently the case. Third, it offers a means of transcending the distinction between immediate, short-term and strategic, long-term forms of participatory development, allowing for analysis of the broader structural factors that shape popular agency beyond particular interventions.

In South Africa, this notion of active, participatory citizenship was always part of alternative resistance discourses under apartheid and shaped the Reconstruction and Development Programme. The RDP emphasised democratisation and gender

equity along with opportunities for previously marginalised citizens to expand their livelihood strategies. Combined with the socio-economic rights enshrined in the Constitution, this should have provided a strong basis for the realisation of substantive citizenship.

Asymmetries of citizenship

However, citizenship participation in South Africa has been constrained by two key paradoxes inherent in rights-based approaches. Both relate to the tension between the universal and the specific, and have had a particular impact on the participation of black, rural, working class women in a context where the rural poverty rate is 72% (May 2000: 303) and the poor are largely African women (May 2000). The first paradox is most clearly illuminated within the debates on gender equity. The universal notion of women within women's rights discourses and inscribed within new state structures and policies promoting gender equity in South Africa can hide differences within the category 'women' and obscure the specific discriminations experienced by black, working class women (Manicom 2005: 36). It may thus remarginalise those whom it was intended to benefit. The second paradox is that while rights necessarily operate within a universal and transcendent idiom, their articulation is highly specific and filtered through local social, economic and political structures (Manicom 2005, McEwan 2005). This paradox plays itself out through four interlocking and potentially exclusionary dimensions of citizenship for those living in poverty.

Social citizenship: the informal and the hidden

Feminist analyses of citizenship have pointed to the need to rethink the 'social' aspects of citizenship, in particular, the distinctions between both formal/informal and public/private dimensions. Women, who are generally active in the more local sphere of 'informal politics', are often the driving force in local civic and political action (Nnaemeka 2005, Mohan & Hickey 2004). In South Africa, women are active in community-based structures such as civics and street committees but are still largely isolated from local governance structures (McEwan 2005). Ensuring inclusive citizenship would thus entail recognising as 'political' all the organisations of social and cultural life (Gould 1988) including such bodies as community policing forums, anti-crime campaigns, School Governing Bodies, domestic violence or HIV/AIDS support groups and actions.

At the same time, there is a further dimension to social citizenship: in order to participate, citizens need time to attend meetings and the confidence to speak up as equal participants (McEwan 2005, Stromquist 2006). For women, this temporal and emotional freedom is ultimately dependent on the nature of the intimate relationships in which they are involved. As Walby (1997: 178) argues, 'social citizenship for women is unobtainable under woman's confinement of the household and dependency on a private patriarch'. In South Africa 'despite

significant advances in legal rights and state restructuring, cultural barriers and localised patriarchies remained largely untouched by sweeping political changes' (McEwan 2005: 182; see also Manicom 2005). This results in a 'covert and unacknowledged asymmetry in citizenship' (McEwan 2005: 181) exacerbated by exploitative gendered care relationships. Similar constraints on social citizenship are likely to be experienced by those living with AIDS and by orphan-headed households – the resulting social dislocations create a need for very different forms of participation in order to enable agency and well-being.

The contested and culturally-specific nature of the public-private distinction is one reason why it cannot be treated as a fixed given (Lister 1997b). It is thus central that public-private dynamics be seen as 'dialectically inter-related' rather than 'dualistically counterposed' (Pateman 1989: 110) and that 'future possibilities for transforming private patriarchies and constructing substantive citizenship [should] look to localized resistances in homes, communities, and neighbourhoods' (McEwan 2005: 182).

Economic citizenship

Social citizenship rights interact with a second dimension of citizenship: the economic or material. Those seeking to realise socio-economic rights are caught in a double bind. Lack of involvement in local governance structures means that they are not able to access resources or influence decisions that affect the material well-being of their households. Yet the need to create some form of livelihood, often involving seasonal work or migrant labour, prevents sustained involvement in community structures. For many women this is often a triple bind where material dependence on partners or extended families, what Sen (1999) terms economic 'unfreedom', can entail increased vulnerability to both physical and material risk.

Livelihoods in poor rural and peri-urban communities are thus associated with insecurity and hardship: 80% of the informal sector is survivalist and most of those in it live below the poverty line, lack job security and benefits, and work long hours in poor conditions (Marais 2001: 178). Institutions shaping local commodity markets or controlling access to land and other resources often continue to sustain stark inequalities of power (Francis 2000). In addition, increasing casualisation of the labour market (Bhorat et al. 2002; Mngxitama 2001) means that those in the formal sector are increasingly vulnerable. Outside this sector, unemployment rates are extremely high, especially amongst those in the 15 to 24 age group in rural areas (male 75%, female 84%) (Bhorat 2003). Searching for employment or working in difficult conditions reduces the time and energy available for citizenship participation, especially as there are few structures or agencies to provide either employment or rights information.

Global citizenship

The level of socioeconomic development in a community thus has a direct bearing on access to information and opportunities for community participation, particularly for women (McEwan 2005: 188, Egbo 2004). However, the shift by government from the RDP to GEAR (Growth and Redistribution Policy) in response to greater globalisation and its impact on South Africa's markets, has had detrimental effects on the state's ability to secure a basic level of development. Although GEAR is an attempt to generate growth to enable redistribution, neo-liberal mechanisms such as deficit reduction, budget discipline, labour market regulation, and privatisation have limited the state's ability to deliver socio-economic rights (Christie 2004, Gouws 2005) and consequently eroded the potential for active citizenship by at least half of all South African citizens. Despite some measure of 'horizontal inter-penetration' (Mazrui 2002) in urban and border communities, the benefits of globalisation as in new forms of transnational citizenship or markets are rarely felt by citizens living in poverty.

Symbolic citizenship

The combined effects of the three intersecting dimensions outlined above is to constrain the ability of people living in poverty to make choices about how, when and where to act as citizens. While symbolic narratives of national and pan-African citizenship such as *ubuntu* and the 'African Renaissance' hold the potential for revitalised understandings of citizenship and equality, there is a danger that, without critical interrogation, they may revert to a cultural essentialism (Marx 2002), legitimise systems of patriarchy as 'tradition' (Walker 1994) and reinscribe naturalised social roles and static identities. It would appear, for example, that *ubuntu* has always been premised on the labour and caring of women.

The repoliticisation of participation as a right could help to counteract some of these asymmetries in three ways. First, it could promote locally rooted and participatory democracy. This in turn would require innovative strategies by local government to create spaces in which equal participation is possible, that is, through a retheorisation of the boundaries between formal and informal, public and private, together with the degendering of care. However, simply providing spaces will not be enough to transform power relations; attention will have to be paid to the insertion of these spaces within a broader political project of structural change (Williams et al. 2003, Hickey & Mohan 2004). Second, it would enable a reframing of participation as multi-scaled citizenship (Hickey & Mohan 2004: 13), in other words, reconceptualising the practices of citizenship as 'a constant process of contestation at different scales' from the transnational to the local and taking account of the 'multiple spaces of women's engagement (neighbourhoods, workplaces, homes and 'official' or 'formal' politics)' (McEwan 2005: 192-3). Finally, it could create more fluidity in political identities where difference is not seen as 'affixed to certain social identities but varying across different sets of power relations' (Manicom 2005: 24). For example, women or minority groups

could form alliances with other constituencies such as the homeless, landless, poor, or unemployed in order to secure citizenship rights.

Constructing the 'demand' side of participatory development and governance thus involves a conceptualisation of citizenship which includes but goes beyond rights-based approaches and focuses on the agency of citizens as 'makers and shapers' rather than 'users and choosers' of interventions or services designed by others (Cornwall & Gaventa 2000).

The discussion of participatory development and agency above implies a view of literacy and language as social practices inextricably tied to identity and broader social, economic and political conditions. However, as Allan Luke (2004a) points out in relation to literacy,

the issue on the table is not simply whether literacy has autonomous or ideological effects, but how those ideological effects actually are used and deployed to shape capital, social relations and forms of identity, access to material and discourse resources [...]. (Luke 2004a: 333)

He indicates further the danger of 'a kind of new autonomous model – one that presumes that "social meanings" have specific effects and values for the literate, or that all local "social practices" have an intrinsic validity and value' (2004a: 333). This critique of the New Literacy Studies adds a further dimension to Luke's earlier (1996: 309) argument that socially based models of literacy pedagogy at the time – among them 'genre-based' and Freirean 'critical pedagogy' approaches – 'stop[ped] short of coming to grips with their assumptions about the relationship between literacy and social power'.

Our work by the end of 1996 as described in Studies 1 and 2 used elements of the NLS, critical pedagogy and genre-based approaches, along with what might be considered a critical applied linguistic approach to language learning and pedagogy. However, having reached this tentative synthesis, it became clear that we had no framework for understanding the variable ways in which individuals and groups were able to use new literacy and language practices to achieve their own ends.

In order to explore this question in depth we needed both microethnographic analyses that examined local sites and power mosaics and 'macro-sociological analys[e]s, tracing globalised flows of language, discourse, texts and power' (Luke 2003: 134). Such analyses were scarce. After four years of working on curriculum and materials development, I was offered the chance to research the 'impact' of the ABET capacity-building partnership between CACE and the Northern Cape Department of Education. This research offered an unusual opportunity to study the effects of the two tertiary level educator development programmes offered, both in the Public Adult Learning Centres and in the communities they served. The final two studies grew out of this research project and focus on the Certificate for

Educators of Adults, as a high proportion of participants in this programme²⁴ were found to be active in development initiatives of various kinds (Kerfoot et al. 2001).

Study III offers an analysis of the broader structural factors influencing the agency of programme participants as they moved into new fields of action; Study IV attempts a more microethnographic analysis of the semiotic shifts that accompanied these moves and their implications for literacy and language provision in Adult Basic Education.

Study III: Transforming identities and enacting agency: the discourses of participatory development in training South African adult educators

This paper explores the conditions under which a group of adult educators working with marginalised communities were able to implement development initiatives. It draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1977a, 1977b, 1986, 1991, 1998) to explore the conditions that enabled or constrained agency in different sites, as well as on feminist postmodern conceptions of identities as multiple and overlapping. More particularly, it employs recent perspectives on reflexivity to probe issues of freedom and constraint in relation to changing social structures.

During the years after 1994 patterns of control over resources began to shift along with some entrenched structures of race, class, and gender. Fieldwork for the initial research project took place over six months from 2000 to 2001: this timing was particularly valuable in that it followed five years of rapid social change and encompassed local government elections which, for the first time, offered the prospect of real shifts in power at local level. Blommaert (2005a) has pointed out that certain discourse forms are only observable and accessible at particular times and under particular conditions: in this case it was possible to glimpse some of the effects of 'education for participatory democracy' and its accompanying discourses as they played themselves out in real terms.

In searching for a wider explanatory framework for the differential effects of this programme, I turned to Bourdieu. His concepts of field, capital, habitus and legitimate language provided a powerful and non-determinist framework for exploring the impacts of the Certificate programme and the uneven ways in which aspects of agency and self-formation were realised in participants' practices. In this paper I argued that a key enabling factor in these practices was the acquisition of the discourses of participatory development on the programme. These discourses and associated language and literacy practices seemed to have been decisive in imbuing many participants with the confidence and skills to occupy new discursive positions, to create or enter new spaces of agency, and to begin to

²⁴ Purposive sampling was used to identify groups of participants according to geographical location, year of study, gender, language, and completion of the course. Altogether 74 Certificate participants or 30% of past participants were interviewed. Overall 84% of the interview sample were involved in community projects; many (21%) played multiple roles, either as development activists or within local government structures.

challenge or transform social ‘givens’. In this way, cultural capital was converted into symbolic capital, or ‘recognized authority’ (Bourdieu 1991: 72, 75), and used to set in motion or revitalize participatory development processes.

Such an argument is consistent with Butler’s (1997) poststructuralist notion of performativity in which ‘discourse is seen as a practice in which both discourse and subject are performatively realised’ (Price 1999: 582). Here the acquisition of these discourses, along with the ‘pedagogy of possibility’ which underpinned the programme, enabled some participants to assume desired but not previously dared identities, a complement to the three categories of identity proposed by Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) (namely, imposed, assumed, or negotiated). However, Ahmed (2004: para. 51) has drawn attention to the potential ‘banalisation’ of the performative when it is used ‘in a way that “forgets” how performativity depends upon the repetition of conventions and prior acts of authorization’.

This danger raises an issue which I would have liked to explore in more detail: the nature of the habitus in situations of rapid social change. Under apartheid the livelihoods of most South Africans depended on white economic capital: this entailed presenting two or more contradictory faces to the world, depending on each person’s specific location within webs of gender, class and race. As Bourdieu (2000b: 160) has pointed out, such contradictory positions ‘exert structural “double binds” on their occupants’ and can be associated with ‘destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering’. Bourdieu first drew attention to this in his work in Algeria and Béarn, both contexts characterised by clashes of civilisation and their multiple impacts on social structure and subjectivity, including the ‘dedoubling of consciousness and conduct’ (Wacquant 2004: 393 discussing Bourdieu 1962a, 1962b)²⁵. The workings of such double habitus are similarly evident in South Africa today, and continue to exert unseen tensions in the clash between traditional and late modern roles and authorities based on gender, age, and ethnicity.

As McNay (1999a: 103) has argued, the habitus is a generative rather than determining structure: while it may predispose individuals to act in certain ways, ‘the potentiality for innovation or creative action is never foreclosed’. In this study, I illustrated this creative aspect of the habitus but did not devote enough attention to the constraints exerted on it either by the lack of ‘prior acts of authorisation’ within individuals’ experience or the destructive effects of lengthy periods of existence under structural ‘double binds’. I did, however, argue for the generative role of the imagination as a complement to Bourdieu’s theory of practice, and drew attention to an ‘economy of emotion’ (Bell 1990) that seemed to play a part in some of the more successful initiatives by participants: both emotional and imaginative resources appeared necessary for reflexive agency in these contexts of participatory development.

²⁵ It is interesting to note that William Du Bois (1907) used the term ‘double-consciousness’ in much the same way in his treatise on the highly racialised society of the American Deep South.

For Bourdieu (1977b), the potential for agency arises when there is a lack of fit between the habitus and one or more fields: these fissures allow the development of a critical *reflexivity*. For him, this is most likely to occur in times of ‘crisis’ such as radical changes in the field or increased individual mobility (McNay 1999a: 106-7). However, those revisiting this under-explored aspect of Bourdieu’s work have argued that crises emanating from movement between fields are more routine in present-day societies than Bourdieu allows (McNay 1999a, 2000) and that in contexts of almost permanent disruption between habitus and field, reflexivity itself may become habitual (Sweetman 2003: 541). The findings in this study supported views of reflexivity as contextual, embedded in power relations and therefore, contrary to prevailing post-modern accounts, not necessarily transformative.

Overall, I argued that the ability to bring about new identities and increased reflexive agency depended on the interaction of five framing factors: firstly, the discourses acquired, their underpinning values and the pedagogy of possibility through which they were mediated, secondly, the location of participants as ‘insiders’ within communities, thirdly, qualities of determination and imagination, fourthly, compatible orders of discourse in other fields such as Health and Social Services (but, significantly, not Education), and lastly, the prevailing sociopolitical context. The intersection of these five factors appeared to determine both the potentialities and the limits of reflexivity.

Notwithstanding the above, a large number of participants demonstrated substantial levels of citizenship agency, involving multi-scaled strategies that included engaging with local, regional, and national institutions and structures, while also taking account of informal spaces of engagement. In all cases the ‘locus of transformation’ went beyond the individual and in some cases beyond the local. As Lister (1997) contends, citizenship agency is integrally related to consciousness:

to act as a citizen requires first a sense of agency, the belief that one can act; acting as a citizen, especially collectively, in turn fosters that sense of agency. This agency is not simply about the capacity to choose and act but also about a conscious capacity which is important to the individual self-identity. (Lister 1997a: 38)

While illustrating the ambiguous and often contradictory nature of reflexive action, this study gave an account of an adult education initiative which nevertheless managed to instil in most participants a belief in their own capacity to act. This in turn enabled many participants to influence the well-being and enhance the agency of others. The study attempted to make sense of some of the macro-factors that permeated and shaped participation in a variety of spaces. The next study is a detailed analysis of two of these spaces and explore the ways in which participants used the semiotic resources at their disposal to reconfigure power relations and promote participatory decision-making.

Study IV: Making and shaping participatory spaces: resemiotisation and citizenship agency

Along with post-liberation shifts in power and the opportunities for participation created by, among other things, Local Development Forums, came greater contact among formerly separated linguistic groups and new patterns of state-society interaction. Despite this, development at local level has been constrained by severe lack of capacity, centralised decision-making processes, inadequate funding, and high levels of corruption. The voices of the poor and dispossessed had developed in the ‘interstices of discourses and rules’ under apartheid (Foucault 1972) and previously resonated globally as part of anti-apartheid discourses. However, since the change of macro-economic policy soon after liberation these voices have carried little symbolic capital for the speakers. The last few years have seen a resurgence of popular protests but at the time of this research this was not the case.

This study picks up the issue of voice, raised in Study II, in relation to democratisation and the need for participatory governance. It describes two community workshops run by CACE students as part of the requirements for the *Facilitating adult learning* module. It found that a major factor in some students’ success was their ability to recontextualise the discourses of participatory development, acquired on the programme, in different spaces and to shape them to different interactants and local conditions. The spaces of possibility thus created are then briefly contrasted with two less successful ones in which interactions with different histories, cultures, and forms of power produced radically different outcomes.

The focus of the study is on the nature of the processes and practices that enabled increased participation and put in place the beginnings of a ‘demand’ side for participatory governance. It uses the concept of resemiotisation (Iedema 1999, 2001) to trace the ways in which participants used different languages, language varieties, registers and modes of representation to engage community members. Its focus is on the meaning-makers’ choices of material realisations in the service of social goals, on ‘how semiotics are translated from one into the other as social processes unfold’ (Iedema 2003: 30). This focus illuminates the specific ways in which multilingual discursive practices mediated participation and action for development, and offers insights into some principles that could inform the provision of basic education for adults.

Resemiotisation as a conceptual tool allows an analysis of ‘semiotic mobility’, the ‘capacity to accomplish functions of linguistic resources translocally, across different physical and social spaces’ which for Blommaert constitutes voice in the era of globalisation (2005: 69). From this study, semiotic mobility can be seen as the strategic capacity to recontextualise and resemiotise discourses in a range of participatory spaces: in the community workshops participants become ‘remakers, the transformers, the re-shapers of the representational resources available to them’ (Kress 2000: 155). In the same vein, Pennycook (2007: 43-44) argues for a move

from *multimodality* to *transmodality* ‘as a way of thinking about language use as located within multiple modes of semiotic diffusion’ (2007: 44) and within a framework of ‘transgressive theory’. This theory

demands a reflexive stance about what and why it crosses; it is thought in movement rather than thought looking over its shoulder at what it is ‘post’; it is about desire, alterity and freedom [...] a continuous questioning of how we come to be as we are, how such limits have been imposed historically, and how we can start to think and act beyond them. (Pennycook 2007: 42-3)

Participants’ ability to use a set of multilingual, multimodal discursive strategies to promote participation in the interests of the community concerned, whether constituted geographically, by interest, or by identification, can be seen as an expanded notion of ‘strategic competence’. Their ability to recontextualise these strategies appropriately illustrates the three aspects of strategic competence highlighted earlier in this document: conscious choice, critical reflexivity, and collective potential. This understanding of strategic competence can be seen as a form of ‘linguistic citizenship’ (Stroud 2001; Stroud & Heugh 2003) in which individuals re-shaped the multilingual representational resources available to them to validate the authority of participants and mobilise collective agency.

This study points to the potential of such workshops as vehicles for citizenship where ‘democracy is born in conversations’ (Warren 1998). Lister (1998: 77-8), building on the ideas of Habermas and Benhabib, advocates a commitment to dialogue and communication as central to the production of a politics of solidarity in difference (1998: 77-8): such workshops can begin this process, especially necessary in contexts characterised by highly complex and stratified relations. While South Africa today can be seen to display the ‘distinctive postcolonial realities of multiple arenas, fluid identities and positional relations of power’ (Werbner 1996: 8), many of the old barriers and tensions remain. Wacquant (2004: 407, n. 19) draws attention to the new ‘grand narrative of multiple identities, continual dispersion, and ubiquitous hybridity’ which takes little account of the fact that social reality may be a human product but ‘faces humans like a coercive force’ (Berger & Luckman 1967 cited in Cameron et al. 1992: 10). For this reason, I prefer the term ‘strategic competence’ to Claire Kramsch’s ‘symbolic competence’ (2008). The abilities she lists under this ‘performed’ notion of competence include awareness of the symbolic value of words, the ability to find the most appropriate subject-position, the ability to grasp larger social and historical significance of events, the ability to understand the cultural memories evoked by symbolic systems, and the ability to perform and create alternative realities by reframing issues. All of these are essential. However, from the vantage point of the South, this is open to the same critique as ‘communicative competence’ and ‘negotiation for meaning’: the assumption that all subject-positions are open to everyone and that alternative realities can be created simply by reframing issues. ‘Strategic’ has a harder edge; it indexes an awareness of the

long-term and the broader structural factors that shape citizenship agency beyond particular interventions.

In analysing participatory spaces in this paper, I drew on three fields of study, Development Studies, Sociolinguistic Ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis. This '*transdisciplinary*' approach (Rajagopalan 2004 cited in Pennycook 2007: 37) enabled a focus on the flows of power across and within each space and their impact on the facilitators' choices of material realisations, as well as on the ways in which each 'resemiotising move' (Iedema 2003: 43) helped to redefine roles and expectations and re-order communicative organisation. These materialisations were entwined with shifts in and amongst languages, language varieties or registers which served to legitimise speakers, restructure the linguistic hierarchies historically associated with public forums, and validate the 'linguistic and epistemic authority' of subaltern actors (Chandoke 2003: 186).

Conclusion

This discussion has traced a process of theory-building at grassroots level which extended to national policy development and then to an attempt at policy implementation. Studies III and IV have illustrated what an enabling policy can achieve, given the political will and adequate resources. The fact that there has been no comparable intervention since this one seems to support Allan Luke's point (2003):

Policy interventions are, by definition, synergistic and potentially counter synergistic in local effects, both across government silos (e.g., education, health, social welfare, urban planning, policing) and within a particular department or ministry such as education. That is, educational policies are never stand-alone phenomena. In order to be effective they must orchestrate a series of intertextual "embeddings" in relation to other extant educational and social policies. (Luke 2003: 136)

In the absence of such 'embeddings', for the reasons outlined under Phase 3, an integrated vision of education and development has been hard to achieve. Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan (2004: 15) citing Diana Mitlin, Glauco Florisbelo and Irene Gujit in this edited collection indicate the importance of 'catalytic moments in starting participatory processes on the road to transformation'; at the same time they note the importance of allowing such processes to mature. Laurence Whitehead and George Gray-Molina (1999: 3) argue that the 'long-term construction of political capabilities²⁶ explicitly requires constituencies of the poor [...] involved in interaction with a responsive [...] state'. They suggest that this is possible in a sub-section of 'developing' countries where there are 'reasonably stable boundaries, and relatively coherent systems of public policy-making and

²⁶ Defined as 'self confidence, capacity for community organisation, recognition of dignity, and the collective ideas available to support effective political action'. Crucially, political capabilities involve the ability to 'create new rules, transform social preferences, as well as secure new resources as they become available' (Whitehead & Gray Molina 1999: 5).

implementation' (1999: 3). South Africa is one such country. The degree to which the South African state creates opportunities for and develops the capabilities of the poor to access rights and resources can be seen as an indicator of their commitment to socio-economic and other basic rights.

Implications for ABET

The four papers in this thesis lead to a view of language as symbolic capital and a site of identity construction (Bourdieu 1991, Weedon 1987), of text as 'a *social strategy* historically located in a network of power relations in particular *institutional sites* and *cultural fields*' (Luke 1996: 333, original emphasis), and of voice as 'the capacity for semiotic mobility', that is, the ability 'to create favourable conditions for a desired uptake' across social spaces (Blommaert 2005: 68, 69). Heightened awareness of language and new ways of interacting that involve the continual negotiation of languages, language varieties and registers are a feature of contexts of socio-political change (Heller 1982). Study IV has illustrated how this awareness can also be extended to other forms of semiosis. What is important about these insights is what they reveal about the nature of literacy within processes of participatory development and governance: most significantly, that it is one of many semiotic resources on which people can draw, that it is inextricably bound up with these other forms of semiosis, and that written texts may be produced in two or more language varieties within the same discourse 'event'.

The challenge for those concerned with conceptualising ABET provision for development is to investigate which kind of semiotic resources might be important for whom, in what contexts, and in which languages or combinations of languages, and to use these findings to reshape policy and pedagogical practices. If the goal of adult basic education is to expand capabilities and enable increased citizenship agency, then really useful knowledge will include language, literacies and other semiotic resources that allow learners to traverse multiple spaces and to engage with the discourses and processes engendered by new forms of governance and state/society/economy relations.

As argued in Study IV, aligning ABET more strongly with development goals could be achieved by taking the spotlight off 'literacy': contextualising literacy, language and other modes of semiosis as resources within the broader discourses necessary for bringing about social, economic and political change. Key to this would be a recognition that different purposes will be accomplished in different languages and through different modes at different times: languages do not need to be taught as rigidly bounded systems at arbitrary stages in the curriculum.

The goal of literacy and language teaching in ABET would thus be an expanded notion of strategic competence – 'a crucial tool' in Pennycook's (2001) sense – that is able to bring about forms of social action²⁷. The content of language

²⁷ This is similar to the kinds of capabilities promoted by REFLECT programmes but would require a more explicit pedagogical theorisation of the development of semiotic repertoires within

and literacy learning would thus be framed by the discourses of participatory development, driven by learners' expressed development needs, contextualised by collective learner research, and focused on promoting learners' ability to create and recontextualise meanings in a range of languages, language varieties, registers, and semiotic modes to their own ends. Promoting this form of *linguistic citizenship* through adult basic education appears to have a greater chance of equipping people with the capabilities to engage in participatory development, access socio-economic rights and hold government to account.

In concrete terms, this would entail breaking down binary thinking on a number of levels. In provision, it would mean offering a set of tools for inquiry rather than fixed learner materials. At its simplest, given our resource-poor contexts, this could consist of bilingual materials guiding sample processes of research and illustrating the kinds of multilingual, multimodal genre chains that could be worked through by learners as they investigate or address local issues. Systemically, it would mean re-imagining forms of provision: no longer seeing oral, written and visual modes as separate, languages as separate, language learning and literacy teaching as separate, literacy and livelihoods and/or citizenship agency as separate or as one necessarily preceding the other. More integrated forms of provision could contribute to reducing the private /public dichotomy in spheres of citizenship and learning, and promoting recognition of both formal and informal spaces of political activity. A curriculum developed in this way would allow greater attention to literacy and languages as embodied capital (McNay 1999b, 2004), desire (Weiler 1994), and investment (Norton 2000). Recent studies within the NLS, for example, illuminate the complex and often ambiguous consequences of 'literacy' provision and its intersections with existing ideologies and epistemologies of literacy as well as local power relations (Maddox 2005, Millican 2004, Papen 2005, Robinson-Pant 2001).

A more integrated form of ABET as outlined above would require a substantially greater investment in the professional development of adult educators. To have a chance of stimulating meaningful initiatives, educators would need an understanding of development similar to that offered by the CACE Certificate programme and, to ensure sustainability, participants such as these would need to be supported with increasingly sophisticated planning and management skills, along with more complex, critical understandings of the interplay between local social, educational, and economic possibilities and global capitalism. Under current conditions, this seems unlikely, but the potential benefits of increased citizenship participation and a strengthening of the state/civil society interface would amply repay such an investment.

Future research would need to provide more nuanced, complex and context-sensitive understandings of contemporary multilingual realities. It would need to

development initiatives (see evaluations by Birkett 2006; Riddell 2001; and also Rungo 2004 cited in Lind 2008).

investigate how particular literacies, languages and other semiotic and technological resources might be used productively to shape agency within local and wider structures of power, and the kinds of knowledge and skills which learners could use to secure material and symbolic aspects of citizenship for themselves and those they interact with. The focus would be people's ability to engage with the state: the sites where 'decisions are made, influence is held and authority located' (Williams 2004: 568).

Such a view has the following implications for research that can more usefully inform literacy-in-development and the training of its practitioners:

1. start from 'the assumption of structured domination and subordination, advantage and disadvantage' (Lankshear 1987: 71);
2. define 'context' not just as 'situational or institutional domain in the NLS sense, but also in broad geo-political terms' (Auerbach 2005: 367);
3. expand the focus of what is ethnographically 'in the picture' of research: Marcus (1995: 102) suggests 'juxtapositions in which the global is collapsed into and made an integral part of parallel, related local situations rather than something monolithic or external to them';
4. pay attention to the *absence* of practices as possible starting-points for taking on systems of power;
5. contextualise literacy and other semiotic practices as resources for participation across multiple spaces and at a range of scales.

Some methodological considerations: Speaking of, for, and with others

We know that while intellectuals wear themselves out with sterile rhetoric about how to understand "the other", indigenous people continue to live the most horrendous injustices which have been perpetuated across the centuries.
(Victor Montejo cited in Raditlhalo 2003: 1)

As the discussion above has illustrated, my working life has been lived in the 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992: 4), that is, 'social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'. As will have become evident, the work I have been able to do has been on the basis of a series of coincidences conditioned by my social position, what Blommaert (2005: 107) has called a 'structured accident'. While it has been a great privilege to have been involved in this way, it has also been a source of continuing disquiet.

In the years leading up to the change of government in 1994, social movements and NGOs were often the only channel for the voices of non-unionised citizens to reach beyond the hegemony of the apartheid state through mass meetings, conferences, or applications to international donors. Although I always had a specific mandate to 'speak for' others in different contexts, in a highly racialised

society it was nevertheless extremely problematic. In the negotiations among education and training 'stakeholders' leading up to the transition, lack of capacity made these dilemmas more acute – in my case, as mentioned earlier, within the same period I could be called on to represent COSATU (the major trade union federation), the National Literacy Coalition, or the African National Congress through its Education Policy Development Centre.

Depending on the context, I have at different times been perceived as representing the interests of the South or the North, the Third or the First World, the rich or the poor, white or black, middle class or working class, organised labour or the unemployed, donors or NGOs, state or civil society, researched or researcher. I have been called Communist, Stalinist, Trotskyite, and liberal. All this was while I was working for, or seconded from, the same NGO and articulating the same broad agenda. Through these various positioning, I became acutely conscious of imposed identities, the relative degrees of power ascribed along with them, and the central importance of discourses and symbolic power in renegotiating them.

Looking back, I can see that poststructural and feminist analysts would analyse this as an example of multiple, fragmented or hybrid identities which indeed would seem to be the case. However, my subjectivity in each context was strongly filtered through the consciousness that I was white and wholly under-prepared with, in Bourdieu's terms, an inadequate 'feel for the game' (Bourdieu 1990b: 66) especially as 'the game' in the last years of apartheid changed almost daily.

For Frankenberg (1993: 1) 'whiteness' is at once a location of structural advantage, a standpoint, and a reference to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. Where Helen (Charles) (1992 cited in Moodley 2007:12) and others have called for 'colouring in the white', in most of these contexts, my whiteness has felt highly coloured, a marker of difference which made sure that my presence was visible at times when I would have preferred otherwise. It has however also been a useful standpoint from which to examine 'the terrain of whiteness' during and after apartheid, a landscape starkly illuminating and often soul-destroying. It has of course afforded substantial advantages which intersected in various ways with other axes of language, class, gender, age, institutional affiliation, and geopolitical location. The difficulty with reflecting on the structural advantages accorded by race is that the ability to be reflexive is in itself as Skeggs (2002: 361) notes 'a privilege, a position of mobility and power, a mobilisation of cultural resources' which runs the risk of leaving others fixed in place. Some sort of symbolic violence is intrinsic in the structure of the situation (Rabinow 1977): without a 'double turn' back towards others, 'the transformation of whiteness into a colour can work to conceal the power and privilege of whiteness' Ahmed (2004: 10). However, not mentioning it at all has the same effect.

This power through positioning has been reflected in great caution with regard to representation in research papers, in policy fora, in learning materials and in

advocacy or social struggles. Postcolonial theorists as discussed by Skeggs (2002: 362) have pointed out the ethical problems associated with speaking of or for others: among them, ventriloquism (Visweswaran 1994), producing the 'native' as authentic and as truth (Spivak 1990, Narayan 1993), an inauthentic giving of voice, and issues of accountability and responsibility. In such situations of uneven exchange, how the research is done and how it is written up become closely interrogated.

Methodology: voice and representation

The first two studies reflect work done within an NGO context where it was possible to put in place ongoing long-term reflective practices; the second two emerged from a donor-sponsored research project with the inevitable accompaniments of competing agendas and contestations. In each study, the issue of voice is taken up through different lenses. In the first through issues of language of instruction and language teaching methodology, in the second through the process of constructing a curriculum proposal from the bottom-up, in the third in relation to structure/agency in participatory development and in the fourth through analysis of meaning-making in participatory spaces.

Issues of voice and ownership in relation to the development of a curriculum for Adult Basic Education are discussed in depth in the second study and I will not revisit them here. This study also details the processes through which the proposed curriculum was developed – this would have qualified as a form of participatory action research, although at the time we had no formal research training. As Frazer (1992: 97) notes, the purpose of action research is multi-faceted: it aims, among other things, to involve people in diagnosing and working to address their own needs and problems, to avoid treating persons as objects, and to recognise the 'transformability of social reality'. It is thus consistent with Freirean goals of seeking to promote change through dialogue and participation, bringing together knowing and doing, and recognising those without formal education as producers of knowledge.

Disadvantages of action research may include a lack of generalisability or a reduction in analytical clarity. However, if work over several years and with a variety of groups yields similar findings, then one can argue for a degree of generalisability. At the same time, some loss of clarity is inevitable in a negotiated and evolving process. Yet if such a process can make even small beginnings in shifting power relationships or working towards alternatives, then it is a small price to pay. The processes of action research undertaken here did result in a solid proposal which, despite its limitations, informed policy work on a future ABET system.

Where action research is not possible, and where 'subaltern groups have no access to the mechanisms for telling and distribution of their knowledge' (Skeggs 2002: 362), other ways have to be found. The DFIDSA sponsored research project which is the basis for the last two papers in the study was intended as a limited

critical ethnography. Its aims were to explore the impact of a tertiary level training programme in equipping participants to act as literacy educators in the Public Adult learning Centres and as agents of development more broadly. Street (2001: 9) has pointed out that the concept of 'impact' is 'not just a neutral developmental index, to be measured, but is already part of a power relationship'. The research design²⁸ incorporated three main elements to try and minimise this power relationship. The first was individual²⁹ and focus group interviews in three interlinked series of extended visits to allow for the incorporation of participants' agendas and for feedback and discussion of emerging findings. The second was a multiracial, multilingual research team consisting of past CACE students; this was intended to promote interaction with participants in a way that took account of power relations resulting from various intersections of language, race, class, gender and location and so to facilitate the co-construction of knowledge (and build research capacity). Finally, multiple coders were used for interview data to try and guard against potential bias.

The research team met twice to analyse emerging findings and plan the next stage; vast distances in the Northern Cape made more meetings impractical. After data collection was complete, findings were presented at a stakeholder symposium in February 2001 to seek alternative interpretations. Later in the year, a dissemination conference was held in Kimberley to present the report, take responses, and discuss how to take the findings of the report further. This conference was attended by research participants and representatives from ABET role players in the Northern Cape and resulted in a set of recommendations to the Provincial Government and Department of Education (ABET Unit). The report was written in such a way that it could be used as a tool for advocacy by educators and communities around the kind of ABET programmes that would suit their needs. It was also intended to assist in decision-making and planning within the Education Department. Overall, it was an attempt to do 'empowering research', that is, research not only 'on' subjects but also 'for' and 'with' them (Cameron et al. 1992).

Among the many issues that could be raised with regard to this research process is the question of the final authorial voice. The outcomes of a dialogical research process would logically include different interpretations leading to different, situated knowledges (Haraway 1990 in Schrijvers 1995: 23). Yet as the person commissioned to do the research, I had the responsibility of weaving these different knowledges into one coherent, linear text. As Frazer (1992) has indicated, research teams usually contain a 'hierarchy of knowers': in this case, the fact that I

²⁸ More detail can be found in Kerfoot et al. (2001). The design included a range of other methods.

²⁹ For the semi-structured interviews, purposive sampling was used to identify groups of students according to geographical location, course, gender, language, and whether or not they completed the courses.

was the only one who had worked through all the data and attended all the meetings and focus group discussions meant that I was in a position ‘to produce a recognisable voice, a voice that reduce[d] complexity’ (Blommaert 2008: 89). I could see similarities or contradictions, gaps and connections, and select whose voices to include and how, in other words, ‘archontic power’ (Derrida 1996). As Blommaert (2008: 86) points out, this power to construct an archive and to decide what belongs to it and what does not raises epistemological issues. Located as I am in a set of discourses on race, culture, and society that spans apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa as well the broader sweep of colonialism, to what extent can my representations be considered trustworthy? For Blommaert (2008: 89) the way through this dilemma is to make one’s own interpretive procedures explicit (like Fabian 1974) and to show one’s own subjectivity in these interpretive procedures (like Bourdieu 1990a).

Bourdieu (1989, 2000a) emphasises the importance of revisiting the object of study over and over. Wacquant (2004: 387-88) points out that Bourdieu pioneered multi-sited ethnography as a means of controlling the construction of the object and acknowledging the ‘social embeddedness and split subjectivity of the inquirer’. However, his conception of ‘multi-sitedness’ differs from the contemporary trend of following people and signs across spaces and scales (see for example Marcus 1995): the ‘principle of selection is not the connection *between the sites* inscribed in the object itself but the connection of *each site to the investigator*’ (Wacquant 2004: 397, original emphasis). In this way, the second or further site becomes a methodological necessity and a means of ‘epistemological vigilance’. The work that is discussed here falls somewhere between the two positions. It can be seen as a multi-sited ethnography, but in an historical rather than contemporaneous sense. Over two decades I have repeatedly revisited the question of which principles, practices and pedagogies might offer the greatest potential as tools for change. In the trajectory from grassroots practice to policy development and back, the connection between sites was determined by the demands of the political and educational tasks required rather than by methodological considerations. Nevertheless, the necessity of working in and at a variety of sites and scales provided a constantly shifting perspective on the object of study and on my own positioning in relation to it. It is this slowly expanding reflexive awareness along with the benefit of hindsight that has brought both greater epistemic caution and greater confidence in my assertions.

This study as a contribution to knowledge

What distinguishes this study from much other work in the field is that it documents a twenty year span of working in adult basic education and development over a period of intense social and political change: from repression and resistance under apartheid, to planning for a new educational era, and then the struggle for policy implementation. It charts a process of theorising from grassroots practice, mostly in isolation from international research, and identifies

the gaps and tensions in this process as well the intersections with wider developments in (critical) applied linguistics and literacy studies. It is, in this sense, a history of work that has developed through concrete engagement and collaboration with adult learners and local communities in the search for forms of literacy and language education that could contribute to social change. In this way, it perhaps reduces the danger identified by Sinfree Makoni (2003: 135) that Critical Applied Linguistics may be 'hegemonic to the very communities it seeks to serve'.

It has attempted to reflect on this history of research and practice in a way that raises questions to do with 'access, power, disparity, desire, difference, and resistance' (Pennycook 2001: 5) and to locate these questions within historical and social contexts. Overall it could be seen as contributing towards a 'socially constituted linguistics' (Hymes 1974) which involves putting linguistics at the service of social functions, in this case the struggle for democracy and citizenship rights in South Africa.

A second uncommon aspect of this study is its combination of work in multilingual community-based, trade union, and formal adult learning contexts and the opportunity to translate some of this experience into policy proposals. In the third and fourth papers, I revisit the issue of policy and curriculum for Adult Basic Education from an unusual perspective, presenting findings from a study of an educator development initiative designed to realise the potential of new national policies linking adult education to development. Such studies of educator development programmes in countries of the South are rare – in this case, it provides a lateral lens on the semiotic practices that could promote locally rooted and participatory democracy under a radically reoriented ABET system. I identify a set of framing factors which appeared to enable increased agency and participation, and then investigate in more detail the discursive and semiotic practices used by educators to negotiate new meanings and subject positions for themselves and others, to reconfigure power relations, and to construct new spaces of possibility.

In so doing, I assert the continuing relevance of Freire to a more 'complex and polysemous' universe (Luke 2004b: 22). Under apartheid, what Freire offered was the power of the radical imagination, the belief that things could be different, and a process which engaged learners as analytical adults capable of working towards their own 'social imaginary' (Castoriadis 1987 in McNay 1999b: 188). In a postcolonial context characterised by fluid and unstable identities, new forms of agency, and shifting locations of power, these attributes are more necessary than ever. I also demonstrate the explanatory power of Bourdieu's theory of practice in a context of rapid social change in illuminating the connections between local discursive practices (spoken, written, and visual), self-formation, and broader systemic relationships of power. Here I draw on feminist developments of Bourdieuan theory to illustrate the role of emotion and imagination in creative agency. I also develop recent understandings of reflexive agency as unevenly

distributed across social practices and constrained by persistent, if changing, patterns of stratification.

Building on this understanding, I use the notion of resemiotisation to consider the range of semiotic resources in play in different spaces of participation and the dynamics which govern their material forms. Resemiotisation as a conceptual tool allows an analysis of 'semiotic mobility' in which participants become the transformers of the representational resources available to them, in this case with the purpose of promoting participatory citizenship. There have been few studies of resemiotisation in multilingual contexts or those undergoing rapid democratisation: here Pennycook's (2007) term *transmodality* captures the greater fluidity of interactions across contexts and the forging of new paths of meaning-making. While I agree with Pennycook (2007: 43-4) that a move to look at 'trans' rather than 'post' theories is important for 'a move towards understanding globalisation, movement, flows and linkages', in South Africa the inequities of the past cast a long shadow and leave a large proportion of citizens straddling the post- and the trans-, the temporal and the spatial. In this situation, political capabilities become essential in creating, defending and expanding new democratic spaces while engaging with new forms of governance and state/society/economy relations. This then is the task of Adult Basic Education.

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