



## Change, continuity and cultural studies

### The development of an alternative humanities curriculum for Vista University, Soweto

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**ABSTRACT** ● This article on a proposed undergraduate cultural studies curriculum at Vista University (Soweto, South Africa) reflects also on the potential of the subject to analyse and transform its social and educational contexts. Special attention is paid here to outlining the specific economic, political, social and cultural conditions of the national and institutional contexts for this proposed course. Then the aims and shape of the course itself is outlined. Course-planners hope that the course will provide a crucial and critical space for reflection upon and engagement both by teachers and students with the social and educational transformation of post-apartheid South Africa. The multi-generic epistemologies of cultural studies will, it is proposed, help counter discrete disciplinary teaching hardened under apartheid conditions and enable students to rethink culture and cultural policy. ●

**KEYWORDS** ● black universities ● cultural studies ● curriculum transformation ● higher education ● outcomes-based education ● South Africa

#### Introduction: Microcosms

This article discusses the implications of Vista University's proposed undergraduate cultural studies curriculum, reflecting on cultural studies' potential to transform humanities degrees. Vista University's Soweto branch (near Johannesburg city, South Africa) currently possesses a cultural studies

research project involving academics and local communities, but has no undergraduate cultural studies curriculum.<sup>1</sup> In proposing such a course we hope that cultural studies' multi-generic epistemologies will counter discrete humanities teaching and apartheid constructions of culture (ethnic stereotyping, anti-theoretical pedagogies that implicitly maintain students' subaltern socioeconomic status) still lingering at Vista, by interrogating the ideology, culture, knowledge and their burgeoning technologies. Course-planners (including the author) envisage strong local content and foresee enabling students to rethink culture generally and cultural policy specifically. As well as outlining the creation of a cultural studies undergraduate course, this article also deconstructs the emphasis in the new 'outcomes-based education' (OBE) on skills (tangible products) over knowledge (more ephemeral). The course designers view cultural studies as an alternative to traditional teaching conventions in South Africa, and as potentially able to transform the social and academic context of Vista University and South Africa. The course will introduce students to interdisciplinary understandings of cultural conventions, subjectivity and alterity, time and space, representation in the media and in politics, and the implications of globalization for local cultural initiatives, nationalism and its alternatives, and the space that textuality occupies in post-1994 South Africa.

Before 1994 South Africa was a country of separation at every level. Not only were the country's four main racial groups compelled to occupy separate and unequal spaces in the country's economic and cultural geography, but each group was further divided into 11 ethnolinguistic communities in town and countryside. Trying now to forge a common education system from primary to tertiary level, educators battle to overcome the legacy of this partitioned country. Notions of domination and inherent difference were both medium and content of apartheid education. This article argues that a historically disadvantaged institution (HDI) like Vista needs to provide spaces on the academic curriculum to engage students in discussing concepts of culture – indigenous, colonial, global and synthetic – including the professional and business cultures into which students across all faculties hope to insert themselves.

Cultural studies is a relatively new area of study and research in South Africa and very new at Vista Soweto. As Grossberg (1992: 6) states, cultural studies 'is always partly driven by the political demands of its context and the experiences of its institutional situation'. This article seeks to explore some of this context and experience. Currently, Vista University is repositioning itself in the higher education market. This involves the complex process of self-assessment *within* this large, countrywide university; simultaneously, Vista faces Thabo Mbeki government's complete restructuring of higher education, which seeks to relocate ethnically and racially discrete campuses within larger regional institutions. Although Minister of Education Professor Kader Asmal declares that "no institution will be left untouched", academics at the HDIs take issue with his plan to preserve the

10 Historically White (and privileged) Institutions (HWIs) as 'Oxbridge'-style centres of excellence in which the HDIs (perceived as inferior in teaching and student ability) will become subaltern partners (Macfarlane, 2002: 5). Apartheid pincer HDIs between the competing demands of the state and the needs of their local communities. Whereas many HDI-trained intellectuals reviled the apartheid culture of domination imposed on these institutions, they defend the cultures of learning and of student resistance to apartheid established on their campuses. The nature of conflict emerging over intellectual capital in the post-apartheid era indicates an overwhelming need for intellectual space in which to analyse the role that culture is to play in the transition from white domination to majority democracy.

While politicians and senior Education Department officials toy with higher education's future, on the ground several Vista lecturers are using cultural studies both to transform the humanities curriculum *and* to offer transformational inputs to the education, law, business management and science curricula. The 'political demands of the context' of higher education suggest that Vista (an institution 'on the move') needs a forum in which students and staff may study key aspects of cultural theory and cultural policy. The cultural studies programme seeks to create a discursive space in Vista's more traditional curriculum for reflection and reassessment of intellectual issues, educational praxis and the concerns of daily life. As the programme's structure and content (outlined below) illustrate, it will maintain cultural studies' long-established links between academe and community. After foundation-level courses, students will be introduced to qualitative and quantitative research methods and the use of primary and secondary research materials. Such skills are vital for students in cultural studies, and across all fields, to enable them to read, interpret and engage critically with the manner and pace of transformation in South African society.

Space, geophysical and cultural, was the basis of South Africa's segregation. Vista's eight historically disadvantaged campuses, sited in black urban townships around the country, battle daily with the apartheid past. Their struggle for pedagogical innovation is hampered by material constraints like falling student numbers, student debt to the university and the retrenchment of lecturing staff. In addition, student poverty restricts access to reading prescribed and secondary material. Soweto, a massive agglomeration of 29 interlinked townships, has a population of more than 2 million people. Unemployment runs at nearly 50 percent among 20–29 year olds (Morris, 1999: 8–10). It is imperative to understand that the history of such constraints is long, and is time-capsuled in the university's foundations.

### Foundations/histories

*So(uth) We(stern) To(wnships)*, the daily context of Vista's educational operations, is South Africa's largest black urban area, where most Vista students

live either permanently or during term. Vista's internal context is its own institutional structure and history. As an HDI, Vista was the final manifestation of apartheid tertiary education. Planted in Soweto in 1983 by the penultimate apartheid government, Vista was an urban alternative to the troubled rural universities to which black students were relegated (*EPU Report*, nd: 1–4). Vista's seven scattered contact-teaching campuses plus a correspondence campus in Pretoria were a partial *volte-face* in educational segregation. They represented government recognition that apartheid's urban–rural cleavage was disintegrating. Before the 1976 Soweto Uprising, government policy ordained black people's domicile in urban areas as temporary; their permanent abodes were the puppet ethnic homeland-states. In establishing township campuses, the regime accepted a permanent black urban population needing education for posts in the teaching, legal, administrative and scientific professions (Morris, 1999: 18–25). That acknowledgement transmuted the hard-core apartheid vision that had predestined blacks to being 'hewers of wood . . . drawers of water' and certainly not members of the thinking, much less governing, classes. This decision was hardly liberal but sought to co-opt the nascent black middle class to the support of state structures and ideologies. Senior apartheid education ideologue, Gerhard Viljoen, Rector of RAU, was the architect of



**Figure 1** Entering Soweto at Diepkloof Township (seen from Old Potchefstroom Road): the legacy of apartheid housing remains with most houses still 2–4 room 'matchbox' houses

this single urban university for blacks with branches in townships throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

On 1 January 1982 Vista's largest branch opened in Soweto, with smaller campuses in Mamelodi (a Pretoria township), Zwide (a Port Elizabeth township), Welkom and Bloemfontein (in the Free State), Daveyton (serving mining towns east of Johannesburg) and Sebokeng (serving the Vaal River's industrial agglomeration, south of Johannesburg). All are areas requiring skilled workforces to operate increasingly technologized forms of industry and thus increasingly complex forms of workplace communication. Vista's Distance Education Campus (Vudec) was aimed at students who were in outlying areas or who were unable to attend full-time study (*EPU Report*, nd: 1). Initially, educational staff were primarily white conservative and Afrikaans-speaking; by 1992, white staff still comprised 76 percent of the total body of staff (*EPU Report*, nd: 4–5, Appendix).

One reason for introducing a cultural studies programme would be to challenge some of the conservative pedagogical concepts on which Vista was founded. Many such syllabi are still offered, and depend heavily on 'Fundamental Pedagogics', and greatly resemble those of Afrikaans universities such as Pretoria University, Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom, RAU and the Afrikaner-dominated University of South Africa (Unisa). Fundamental Pedagogics insists that, in the given framework of Christian National Education (CNE), education is a scientific and non-ideological pursuit. Educationists are thus all 'scientists' examining the phenomena ('facts') of given situations 'objectively'. As Enslin (1986: 145) argues, Fundamental Pedagogics was less 'a means of breaking away from ideology' than 'in Althusserian terms, ideological practice masquerading as theoretical practice'. In practical terms, at Vista the student's main source of learning – as at Afrikaans-oriented RAU and Unisa – was an authoritative 'Study Manual' advancing potted, 'non-ideological' versions of the syllabus (paradoxically brimming with unchallenged ideological assumptions) which students had to regurgitate in examinations. This lack of critique at tertiary level per-petuated the Department of Education and Training (for blacks) school system's 'education for domestication' approach (Kallaway, 1986: 20).

Vista was founded in an epoch of scholar-student rebellion. This turbulence, part of a wider crisis in capitalist transformation (1970–1983/6), spurred the ruling party to reform the education system. Professor J.P. de Lange succeeded Viljoen as RAU's principal and delivered a crucial report to the Human Sciences Research Council (the state's central scientific research and research-funding body) on the refurbishment of the black education system (Christie and Collins, 1986: *passim*). Ostensibly, De Lange aimed to contain student rebellion by constructing a skills- and career-based curriculum for all schools. However, the state continued to finance four racially separate education departments, with 'white' schools the best resourced and black schools the least. Like Viljoen, De Lange's

reforms aimed to co-opt educated, middle-class blacks to buttress the white elite.

The climate of resistance and reform coincided with great labour upheaval, reflected in industrialists' complaints that the number of local skilled workers was insufficient for their reorganization of capitalist production. As far greater technical content was introduced into production, the large armies of unskilled and semi-skilled workers that had formed South Africa's 'cheap' labour force and facilitated massive capitalist accumulation were replaced. Structural unemployment rose, aided by unskilled workers' replacement with machinery; employers increased the number of supervisory positions and called for workers with technical skills. Greater management control over the workforce was also part of this 'new deal'. The De Lange report's technicist educational strategies sought to resolve these educational and economic tensions by proposing a parallel system of formal academic education and informal vocational education (see Buckland, 1986: *passim*). The formal structure was to be composed of three tiers: pre-basic, basic and post-basic education. The non-formal and formal education structures were recommended to fall within a single education department as opposed to the existing racially divided departments (Chisholm, 1986: 389).

As Linda Chisholm showed, these reforms implied that black parents would now be able to select to educate their children at private schools, could they afford to do so. This article focuses on the De Lange's report underlying cultural implications. His proposals embodied a distinctive form of collaboration between state and capital. The reforms did not envisage a unified system of mass education. Instead, small numbers of black people were to be incorporated or co-opted into the lower-middle and middle classes, to service the needs of the increasingly technologized industrial sector. Controlling worker radicalism and culling worker numbers were not the state and managements' only concerns; successful co-optation required the commitment of the black bourgeoisie to the culture and ethics of capitalism. These twin transformations were essential to maintaining increased capitalist production.

De Lange's proposals, the ideological arm of this socioeconomic engineering initiative, viewed the new educational dispensation as the main vehicle driving the 'moral and ideological preparation' of this nascent class (Chisholm, 1986: 392). As the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies Education Group (1981: 228) noted, '“good” worker attitudes are more important to employers than particular skill competencies, even though the latter may be in short supply'. Government and industry used educational change to support South Africa's growing reliance on the local workforce's skills in order to modernize both production *and* the apartheid system and thus remain locally and internationally competitive. Better academic education freely for blacks would rally them to the state's support, allowing

it to rely less on its traditional support base – the ‘expensive’ white working class. These reforms also became a subtle apparatus for dilating emergent divisions between black petit bourgeoisie and black working classes.

Tinkering with education, the government’s central ‘instrument’ of socio-economic, cultural and political metamorphosis, generally treats all students as objects who will consume ‘new dispensations’. Despite claims to promote ‘critical thinking’, these projects screen the state’s ideological and administrative intent, and become embedded in the ideological and cultural relations of dominance. Therefore, they require equally powerful regimes of explication to rejoin them to the state’s overall purpose and – in a country simultaneously democratizing and rejoining a globalized world after 40 years of isolation – to expose the nature of the state’s links to local and global capital.

With the ANC government’s electoral victory in 1994, complete reinterrogation of racially segregated education commenced. In sum, the Education Department proposed rewriting all curricula along controversial Outcomes Based Education (OBE) lines.<sup>3</sup> The new programme, ‘Curriculum 2005’, proposed OBE for all primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Correspondingly, all Vista courses have been rewritten as modules containing the ‘specific outcomes’, at different learning levels, that the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) formulations for higher learning competencies require (Bellis, 1997: 2). The English Department initially proposed an elaborate three-stream strategy (which has since been simplified) in which students could choose modular courses earning a specific number of credits towards their degrees. The arts faculty hinted that departmental structures might soon dissolve (as at some HWIs) to accommodate interdisciplinary learning.

### **OBE: a ‘place’ for cultural studies?**

A group of Vista academics decided that cultural studies options would be vital to new, more interdisciplinary degrees. Briefly, the new curriculum (revised June 2000) conceived OBE as its major apparatus for deconstructing the apartheid emphasis on content rather than ideas and critique. Yet, even at university level, the inherent flexibility of the OBE approach, which depends on course designers’ individual inputs and access to materials, may be both advantageous and disadvantageous. One of the new curriculum’s architects, Emilia Potenza (2000), criticized its implementation, arguing that educators have neither the time nor the skills to develop their own materials, and are unsure of the basic aims and objectives of each educational level. The possibility of introducing a ‘transformational’ OBE-based cultural studies course at tertiary level seems appropriate because tertiary institutions retain relative autonomy over assessment and (mostly) have more capacity to generate resources than do schools.

On the possible interpretation of 'transformational', OBE floundered, as apartheid education's long-term inequities refused to yield in such a short time. Thus, universities and schools in urban centres, where educators and learners have access to comparatively well-stocked libraries, ties to major commercial institutions and where staff are highly trained, are better able to develop their own materials, whereas the rural and township universities, colleges and schools (mainly involving 'formerly disadvantaged', namely black and coloured schools) struggle to generate such material (Mecoamere, 2000: 4). After the June 1999 cabinet reshuffle, Minister Asmal launched a review of the OBE system (February 2000) under Professor Chisholm of Natal University (see Garson, 2000a). By June 2000 Chisholm announced the simplification of 'Curriculum 2005' as 'Curriculum 21' (Garson, 2000b).

Joe Muller of Curriculum 2005's review team commented that the overemphasis on concepts and outputs was extreme and needed revision to reintroduce a more 'content-based approach', as educators in New Zealand (and elsewhere) have discovered. Learning materials distributed by the Education Department were often 'superficial, because course content was under-specified', noted Potenza (2000), and had led many educators to believe that 'anything' could be included. The fact that materials were written only in English had also not assisted their assimilation (Garson, 2000b: 11). However, Asmal reaffirmed his commitment to OBE principles *and* to Chisholm's amendments:

Curriculum 2005 was an attempt to transform education to 'the human rights-inspired, lively, activity-based, colourful, learner-centred and entrepreneurial activity that it should be for all learners. And, with the new outcomes-based curriculum, we are combining rather than separating the acquisition by all learners of the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that reflect more closely life outside and after school'. (Garson, 2000b)

This necessarily brief outline of national educational policy highlights the context in which Vista's cultural studies course is evolving. Given that OBE proposes the sociopolitical contextualization of all courses, it seems appropriate to introduce a cultural studies programme in which to engage ideological, cultural and material issues to which the traditional curriculum has been blind.

### The need to (re)read society: cultural studies at Vista

Briefly, course development has taken place under three heads:

- language and communication
- literature
- cultural studies

The first two learning areas are currently being implemented: in the first instance, three communication courses are offered to the law, management and arts faculties respectively. The literature stream continues to offer courses graded at first-, second-, and third-year levels. After much lobbying, the cultural studies option was adopted by the arts faculty as a whole, and possibly as a service course to other faculties. Although Minister Asmal's restructuring of Vista has halted all course development, the team working on cultural studies courses have continued the development process, and believe that this course can create the 'critical space' that all students and staff need.

Indeed, the ramifications of OBE only emphasize the need for a cultural studies course. The similarities between the implications of De Lange's report nearly 20 years ago, and those of Curriculum 2005/Curriculum 21 need to be identified. Both have been major attempts to transform South African society by redistributing educational design and resources. In De Lange, reform was a thinly veiled attempt to shore up the power bloc by creating an alliance between the decidedly middle-class white ruling elite and the nascent black middle class. In Curriculum 2000, redistribution envisaged the incorporation of all learners into a unitary 'mass' non-racial education system, ideally empowering the previously disadvantaged.

The main text of this inclusive system is the disestablishment of racially segregated education in a society still riven by racial forms of thinking and regimes of explication and identification. Yet, the system's subtext is hard to discern among the ANC government's often-contradictory public pronouncements. Initially, government embarked on several social and class strategies. While dependent for political support on its alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the ANC also aimed to create a black capitalist class and encouraged all citizens to participate in the global economy and culture. By late 1999, this strategy was a 'mainstay of Thabo Mbeki's plans to restructure and deracialise the economy and society' (Kindra, 2000). However, by mid-2000, the relatively small numbers of the black capitalist class were being seen as potential 'fronts' for the still-dominant interests of white capital (Kindra, 2000).

Although there are many reasons for this, one remains continuing inequity in the education system. Those who elude impoverished township or rural schools by attending formerly white schools and universities have better options available to them (Ngobeni, 2000). For those constrained to education at HDIs, even a good tertiary degree does not ensure employment.<sup>4</sup> In many cases, employers believe (rightly or wrongly) that HDI students are underexposed to the skills and content that modern global culture requires, and which local entrepreneurial culture particularly needs. These are among the proposed learning areas of the cultural studies curriculum.

The cultural studies courses also aim to address the controversial issue of economic and social 'transformation'. Eight years after the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa's poverty still has a decidedly racial and gender profile. Structural unemployment has risen, with the retrenchment of more than 500,000 workers since that date; skilled black workers are the majority of casualties. The poverty rate is 45 percent or 3,126,000 households living below the poverty line, on an average monthly income of R301 (approx. £19). In rural areas, where many Vista students' families live, the poverty rate is often 50 percent (Morris, 1999: 9–10). While some managements claim to attend to black workers' needs, only 40 percent of the national wage bill reaches black workers. The Johannesburg Stock Exchange estimated that black company listings fell to under 1 percent by December 2000; although 70 percent of all enterprises may be black-owned, they represent only 20 percent of the country's wealth (Ray, 1999). The slow pace of socioeconomic transformation and the equalizing of basic service delivery are major topics of debate in households and organizations across the country.

In the face of such economic crisis, the common education system, no matter how 'transformed', has limited ability to level inequalities. Economic downturn is markedly affecting the numbers of matriculants and university entrants. Recent matriculation results show a deterioration in pass rates by 1999 (Matisonn, 2000). More alarming yet is the falling number of matric exemptions: only 63,725 students in 1999 obtained university entrance passes, 24,777 down on the figures for 1994. Even from 1998 to 1999, matriculant numbers fell from 552,862 to 511,474. Jonathan Jansen, Professor of Education at the University of Durban-Westville, commented: 'The system is producing less people available for the universities and for economic employment' (in Matisonn, 2000). The need for higher education in Soweto itself is illustrated by these figures: of the 37.2 percent employed persons, 55.4 percent have a post-matriculation qualification. In contrast, just over a fifth of the unemployed possess such a qualification, most having a standard 1–4 education usually incorporating junior school learners aged 8–11 (41.2 percent) (Morris, 1999: 7–9).

None of these arguments includes the devastating toll HIV/AIDS is taking on Soweto's population, both in human mortality and the culture of fear and silence that exists around *phamokate* (one of the disease's many names). At Vista, the numbers of students and staff living with and dying from HIV/AIDS is unknown and one broaches the subject with caution. Indeed, like poverty and globalization, HIV/AIDS is one of the most pressing cultural and socioeconomic issues that 21st-century South Africans face. Thus far, the formal curriculum makes little space for discussing any of these three phenomena, and it can only be hoped that the cultural studies programme will facilitate a greater engagement.

Just as De Lange's recommendations were part of a broader economic

and sociocultural package, OBE has been represented as the backbone of a reborn body politic. In January 2000, Professor Asmal produced 'Tirisano – Working together to build a South African education and training system for the 21st Century', which tabulated his remedies for education and hence society. This eight-point plan aimed to:

- end adult illiteracy by 2005, and increase the 'effectiveness of the adult basic education and training system';
- make schools into 'centres of thriving community and cultural life';
- rehabilitate downgraded school facilities;
- ensure the 'success of active learning through OBE';
- enhance the teaching force's professionalism;
- create 'a vibrant further education and training system to equip the youth and adults to meet the social and economic needs of the 21st century';
- 'implement rational and seamless higher education'; and
- use the education system to combat the HIV-AIDS crisis in South Africa (Mecoamere, 2000).

To date, the cultural context in which education at Vista occurs is an invisible, sealed envelope surrounding the learning-teaching process from beginning to end. In 1997/1998, when the English department first mooted a taught cultural studies programme, the ideology and practice of the apartheid education was still sufficiently dominant to exclude critical dialogue from lectures and tutorials. This perception still prevails in a large measure; students and many lecturers seem to conceive of knowledge as:

- the privilege of instructors, rather than learners, and thus not the basis of action, interaction or reflection;
- discipline-bound: this applies to English as much as it does to scientific subjects. There is little acknowledgement that each discipline exists in a specific historical, cultural and discursive context, institutionalized within the academy and serving particular interests;
- not to be questioned: in the case of secondary sources or 'critical articles', few students realize the possibilities of taking issue with authors' opinions. Indeed, some students feel overawed by the critical literature, and they resort to copying it out verbatim in the belief that these opinions, not their own, are 'what the lecturer wants'. A 'knee-jerk' lecturer response is often to accuse the student of plagiarism, and return the work with a mark of 0 percent. However, the implications of students' responses to post-apartheid expectations of their performance require deeper reflection on the part of those attempting to create the new courses.

Many of the above responses emerge from an educational culture that enacts considerable ambiguity towards the process of learning. The educational system continues to silence students as potential knowing

subjects. This silencing encourages student scepticism about the importance of what they are being taught. Indeed, this belief emerges from a long history of education which has not been student- or community-based but designed to exclude and disempower the learner. For those who may doubt the 'hangover' from apartheid education at HDIs, it is worth mentioning that many Vista students are older than HWI students and were educated under the apartheid system which remained in place until the mid-1990s.

There are other factors holding back the transformation process in higher education. One is 'group dynamics', which play a large role in participation or non-participation in class discussion. Many students have told me (1995–2002) that they do not answer questions in class because they fear the jealousy of their peers – perhaps comparable to Australia's 'tall poppy' syndrome. Second, the relationship between lecturers and students is historically problematic, and until one deconstructs this in the students' company the lecturer's word remain hegemonic, and the rest is silence. Individual questions often only come outside the lecture theatre. Third, the 'knowledge' imparted in lectures is often felt to have little relevance to local lives. Students are not encouraged to make the links between, say, the cultures of colonial India and neo-colonial South Africa. Conversely, the standpoint knowledge that students may bring to the lecture theatre is often discounted, both by lecturers and by students themselves.

The cultural studies programme aims to place the culture of educational communication very firmly on its first-year agenda (Starfield and Gardiner, 2000). Overall, the cultural studies courses are conceived as discursive spaces in the circumstances of daily life, educational praxis and critical theory are debated.

### Cultural studies as discursive space

Vista still struggles to engage with and transform the 'context' of its history as an HDI, a university in an impoverished township. Academically, many courses still maintain anti-theoretical pedagogies (those cornerstones of apartheid education) which in turn maintain students' subaltern socio-economic status and feed the fears of future employers. As David Robbins (2000) writes,

[t]he former system's elitism has left its imprint on South African society. As recently as 1996, nearly 20% of the population over the age of 19 had received no formal education at all, and a further 24% had been exposed only to primary schooling. Clearly, with millions of illiterate and unemployable young people, South Africa's hope of entering the global economy as a reasonably successful player must be seriously impaired.

Vista University is also predominantly a 'liberal arts college', although recently registrations for the law, management and science faculties has

increased. The curriculum will doubtless change further once Asmal's planned unification of Vista Soweto with RAU and the Technikon Witwatersrand occurs, both of which offer a far wider range of courses in the scientific, commercial and humanities fields. Presently, however, Vista still equips graduates for a limited number of careers. On opening in 1982, Vista had 300 students; enrolment reached a peak (35,611) in 1995, declining to 25,525 by 1999 (VUS, 2000). These numbers are still sufficient to indicate a high level of interest in tertiary education in African townships. In 1999, 15,532 registered for Bachelors degrees, mostly in the education (8,577) and arts (8,208) faculties.<sup>5</sup> Until 2000, these faculties constituted almost two-thirds of the university's undergraduates, whereas the management (5,214), law (2,105) and science (886) faculties accounted for the other third (VUS).<sup>6</sup> Since 2000, Vista's traditional preponderance of arts and education students has diverged into science, law and management degrees (VUS, 2000).

This statistical exercise shows that, however much the management, law and science faculties have grown, Vista University has not diverted from the end for which it was established 18 years ago: to fill the ranks of the African *petit bourgeoisie* with relatively poorly paid professionals.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, women are, for the most part, filling these positions. Added to this, Vista has evolved into a set of predominantly female campuses. Since 1996, the gender ratio of 37 percent male to 63 percent female has remained unchanged (VUS, 2000). These statistics reveal that the very composition of the context in which students study and the ends for which they study have important cultural, racial and gender implications for their future employment and scale of remuneration.

Declining registrations in arts and education reflect the State's massive retrenchment of teachers over the past five years, and the relative paucity of career-specific degrees in the arts faculty – apart from those the psychology department offers. This registration turn-about has led the cultural studies planning team to make its courses more career-oriented and to target the needs of law, management and science students. Conversely, an increasing concentration of students in these career-oriented faculties is all the more reason to provide a discursive space for reflection on the transformation of society, education and the careers for which students are preparing themselves. The ideologies immanent in curriculum and workplace may be exposed to question in such a 'space', along with the prevailing government ideologies of nationalism, Africa's regeneration (the 'African Renaissance') and the redistribution of resources in the country.<sup>8</sup>

### Getting with the cultural studies programme: an outline

By interrogating ideology, culture, knowledge and their burgeoning technologies, cultural studies' multi-generic epistemologies have the potential to counter discrete, discipline-based humanities teaching and apartheid

constructions of culture (ethnic stereotyping, anti-theoretical pedagogies that implicitly maintain students' subaltern socioeconomic status) that still linger at Vista. This 'space' will not be one in which lecturers' points of view, as prescribed in pre-packaged study manuals, are hegemonic. Rather, the course envisages lecturers and students all playing proactive roles in teaching and learning and bringing their own experiences and materials into the lecture theatre. This approach may be subject to criticisms that dog Curriculum 2005 and OBE itself: that historically disadvantaged students may not have access to such materials. However, Vista libraries are stocked with a wide range of literature on South Africa and on cultural, linguistic, media, literary, psychological and sociological theory. Several local newspapers are always available, and students have open access to the internet. In addition, local knowledge obtained by Vista's ongoing research initiative, the 'Pimville: Township Futures Project', will filter into cultural studies courses.

In broad brush-strokes, it is hoped that the cultural studies programme will enable students to demystify the cultural content of the world in which they live and work. Edward Said articulates the need for such analysis, pointing also to the vital role universities play in the relationship between citizen and state:

culture works very effectively to make invisible and even 'impossible' the actual *affiliations* that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship, on the one hand, and the world of brute politics, corporate and state-power, and military force, on the other. The cult of expertise and professionalism . . . has so restricted our scope of vision that a positive (as opposed to an implicit or passive) doctrine of non-interference among fields has set in. This doctrine has it that the general public is best left ignorant, and the most crucial policy questions affecting human existence are best left to 'experts', specialists who talk about their speciality only, – and to use the word first given wide social approbation by Walter Lippmann in *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom Public* – 'insiders', people (usually men) who are endowed with the special privilege of knowing how things really work and, more important, of being close to power. (Said, 1983: 136)

Said's argument provides insight into the mesh of relations that surrounds the institutions of government on the one hand, and those of scholarship on the other. His negative analyses of the cult of expertise hint at the danger of idolizing the 'outcome' of a course in any narrow or mechanistic sense. Cultural studies works against the tendency to specialization and an elitism of knowledge by breaking down disciplinary barriers and allowing students across all faculties access to understanding and demystifying the multi-faceted contents and contexts of power and ideological domination in the academy, in the education system as a whole, in their communities and in the workplace.

An initial collaboration between local community and Vista through the 'Pimville: Township Futures Project' was based on the idea that our own students, both in the arts and education faculties and in management, law and science, stand to benefit from an involvement in some sort of 'applied cultural studies' work, whether as the main focus of their degrees or as a single module. The motivation of this decision is intended as an intervention in the relationship between the university and the Soweto community, and between students and the communities they inhabit. Apart from addressing itself to educational and career issues, an *applied* cultural studies programme intends to draw links between education, career and community needs to promote student reflection on the large set of issues confronting township dwellers, what may perhaps be best summarized under the rubric 'Township Futures'. For example, what is to become of the areas that previous South African governments set aside for their low-paid workers? Populations formerly thought to 'oscillate' between town and countryside under the apartheid system of influx control are now permanent townships-dwellers. Underemployment, especially among people in the 18–30 age group, is rife and the public perception of local government's ability to change their living conditions is very low (Morris, 1999: 7). These are the kinds of economic, political and cultural issues with which the cultural studies programme encourages students to engage.

Could such focus on 'township futures' incur the criticism that the cultural studies course may be limiting students' horizons to the township, as apartheid did in the past? We believe not for two reasons. First, 'township futures' is not the only item on the cultural studies agenda. Second, it seems to be a necessary item, as it is so often brushed under the carpet by administrators and academics alike; for example, at a recent international and interdisciplinary conference in Johannesburg on 'Urban Futures' (July 2000), exceedingly few papers dealt with the futures of the townships and their residents. If mainstream intellectuals are overlooking the research needs of Soweto, then Soweto-based scholars and communities need to address them.

The object of the cultural studies programme is to introduce students to both cultural discourse and cultural policy. Such a programme will assist in preparing students for the world of work, whether in government, commerce, NGOs or the professions. Behind these courses lies not only a yearning for greater social 'relevance', for, as Liz Bird (1999) argues, this tends to be 'intimidating and limiting'. Rather, the idea is to design courses that give students the opportunity to explore ideology, power and culture in their creation of subject and society. 'Cultural studies scholars', states Bird (1999), 'have often had an interest in sub-cultures and marginalized groups'. One of South Africa's anomalies, and the direct heritage of colonization, is that its *largest* population group has been, and to a large extent remains, marginalized. In studying at Vista University itself, students have

either chosen or (more probably) been compelled through financial circumstances to select a marginalized institution. As such, Vista was a product of and perpetrator of the apartheid system before 1990. For this university, change can come only when students gain, through the knowledge and credentials that they obtain here, an understanding of the powerful social, economic and political institutions that govern their lives, and of the cultures of representation through which they are mediated. I now turn to provide an overview of the proposed course itself (see Table 1).

### The course itself: discourse and content

The course's first module (Table 1) is introductory, and activity-based, introducing students to key concepts and debates in cultural studies (such as the problematization of subject-hood, space and time) using materials from a variety of media and other textual sources. Module 2 invites students to deal with representation: from an introduction to theories of representation, to representation in the areas of cultural practice and cultural policy. The course, broad in scope and entailing ethnographic theory and practice, asks students to undertake a research project, either individually or in groups. Some may want to observe women's self-help groups or to examine the needs of the huge soccer players support clubs; others may examine the growing number of theme parks, casinos, malls and 'sundomes' (all-purpose domed venues that stage major music tours, garden display, business 'expos'). The rise in cell-phone usage or the nature of films shown at cinemas accessible to township audiences may also interest students. Changing hairstyles may 'grab' some, and play into the vast literature on this topic. The rise of popular gospel churches and music may inspire others. Management students may also engage in first-hand observation, interviewing and background research, before analysing the prevailing culture in institutions such as local government, banks, mining houses, small businesses and the informal sector.

The third set of modules deals with media, in particular local and global forms of mediation. Some students may take this course as a grounding for further study in communications, journalism, advertising, the plastic arts and film-making. This module aims to introduce and develop theories of mass and mainstream cultural production; mediations of class, race and gender; the uses and depictions of modern and postmodern/technology and the cultural representation of Africa.

The need to study advertising is made clear by the way that commerce and industry target Sowetans as consumers. As one enters Soweto along the Old Potchefstroom Road, massive media messages bombard residents and daily workers on hoardings; the media element of the cultural studies course aims to take the message off the poster and put it into the students'

**Table 1** The Vista Soweto cultural studies programme (in progress)

<i>1st module (foundational)</i>	<i>2nd module</i>	<i>3rd module</i>
‘Subjects in space and time’	‘Representation and cultural policy’	‘Media/culture and communication’
<p>Cultural conventions: an introduction to cultural theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• what is cultural studies?</li> <li>• cultural theory, daily life</li> <li>• interdisciplinary approach</li> <li>• foundational for the humanities</li> </ul>	<p>An introduction to representation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• textual representation</li> <li>• how far does ‘I’ go?</li> <li>• politics, organization, community, policy</li> </ul>	<p>Signals and signifiers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tackles some of the vast range of signals we use to communicate with each other – from journalism and film studies to advertising and fashion</li> </ul>
<p>Genealogies of the self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• text and activity-based course on subject-formation, via ideology and discourse</li> <li>• includes creative writing folder, in which students keep a diary on their experience of the course</li> </ul>	<p>Culture, representation, imagination and policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• urban environments</li> <li>• cultures of post-apartheid South Africa</li> <li>• work environments</li> <li>• ecology (or what you will, per campus)</li> </ul>	<p>Popular culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• topics studied will be chosen from commercials, soap operas, children’s TV, documentaries, cartoons, film and television. However, more attention will be given to alternative arts</li> </ul>
<p>Situations of self I: time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• memory (autobiographical authority)</li> <li>• institutionalized (‘work’) time</li> <li>• textual ‘time’</li> <li>• colonial ‘time’</li> <li>• ‘everyday’ time</li> <li>• virtual time and cyberspace</li> </ul>	<p>Cultural policy research project</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with supervision and consultation, students prepare for 2–3 weeks to conduct research into a subject of their own choice</li> <li>• preparation of research instruments</li> <li>• pre-reading, e.g. Gold Reef city culture, popular musical performance styles (kwaito, hip-hop, jazz etc.), casinos, church groups, women’s groups, AIDS support groups, subcultures of all kinds, e.g. internet chat groups, and so on</li> </ul>	<p>Film and the question of the mainstream</p> <p>choice of films varies per campus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fire</i> (India)</li> <li>• <i>Destiny</i> (Egypt)</li> <li>• <i>A Reasonable Man</i> (South Africa)</li> <li>• <i>Xala</i> (Senegal)</li> <li>• <i>Wag the Dog</i> (USA)</li> </ul> <p>(some campuses want more ‘mainstream’ – US – films)</p>

Table 1 continued

<i>1st module (foundational)</i>	<i>2nd module</i>	<i>3rd module</i>
Situations of self II: space • landscape, ecology, environment • colonial space: segregation • urban and rural; migrancy, dispersal, diaspora • formal vs informal sectors • subject and the other	Representing the findings • a series of workshops and individual consultations around writing up the findings of research (time allotted to the two research modules is flexible)	'So what's news?' print media, television and the internet • TV commercials, magazine adverts, chosen articles from mainstream papers
<i>4th module*</i>		

‘Global/local; I/other: possibilities for the future’

Advanced course in cultural and literary theory, building on what has been done so far (run over 1st two blocks) including, for example, Marx, Renan, Gramsci, Lukacs, Frankfurt, structuralism, structuralist Marxism, the modernisms, Derrida, Foucault, Benjamin, Sartre, the posts (struc, mod, col), Fanon, Said, Africanisms, Négritude, BC, ‘African Renaissance’, Ndebele. . .

Cultural institutions; cultural policy

Culture and community(ies): investigating apartheid and post-1994 cultural policy and practice, locally and nationally. For example, SA montage and tableau: investigating SA water-fronts, malls, casinos, theme parks, hospitals, funerals, sports

Cultures of work: interpretations of policy and practice

Study areas of work in which students may become involved: the culture, communication practices and media; policies of business, working relationships, trade unions, education, unemployment and so on

*Note:* The university has yet to decide whether to add a fourth year. The fourth module is thus provisional and is intended to serve as either a final year to the junior degree or as part of a freestanding honours-level degree course.

discursive space (see, for example, Figure 1 on p. 412). The evidence that South Africa is an increasingly mediated society is widespread. While the prevalence of television, telephone (especially cellular telephones), newspapers and internet increases, their relative expense often makes them too costly for those beset by rising levels of poverty and low literacy levels. Thus, radio remains the most popular communication medium. By way of illustration, one can only note that local broadcasting stations used this as a major ‘plug’ during the recent hearings into Hansie Cronjé’s cricket ‘match-fixing’ scandal. Justice King, the commission’s leader, initially banned the recorded media from live broadcastings of the hearings. Both

radio and television stations re-mounted new High Court challenges every day to argue that they needed to broadcast directly from the court in order to fulfil their commitments to keeping the majority of the public (whose only news-outlet they are) informed (Smith and Doman, 2000).

Students may have discounted the importance of this legal plea on the grounds that they take no interest in cricket, but this defence misses the point – although it does bring home the need for the media studies modules in the cultural studies programme. A fourth module involving students in more in-depth and longer-term research projects is also under discussion.

## Conclusion

This article has attempted to set out for consideration the economic, political and social contexts (present and historical) in which Vista Soweto's educational transformation is taking place. A major lacuna in this ongoing process is the absence of a discursive space in which students and educators can engage with questions of culture and ideology at theoretical and practical levels. It is hoped that the proposed cultural studies programme will provide just such a space, and will empower students with analytical and pragmatic skills which they will be able to use in future workplace situations. Given the role that Vista played in the previous regime's racially segregated education system, it is hoped that this cultural studies programme will enable the institution – and whatever future institutional configuration it finds itself in – to emerge from a culture of cultural domination into one that empowers its students to become reflective, innovative citizens able to address the inequities of the past.

## Notes

- 1 Soweto is, in South African socioeconomic parlance, a 'township', technically meaning any area designated for urban development. Townships, historically, are areas of dangerously close settlement on (usually inferior) land in unfavourable climates, allocated to black, coloured or Indian people and at a considerable distance from wealthier white suburbs.
- 2 By way of background to apartheid's geography of higher education, Penny Enslin (1986: 140) has written:

'apartheid education' was first enunciated in 1948 (the first year of the National Party's 42 year rule) as the Christian National Education Policy. Under CNE, Black education was built around these principles: it should be in the mother tongue; it should not be funded at the expense of white

education; it should, by implication, not prepare Blacks for equal participation in the economic and social life; it should preserve the 'cultural identity' of the Black community (although it [would] nonetheless consist in leading 'the native\*' to acceptance of Christian and National principles); it must of necessity be organised and administered by whites.

- \* 'Native' was the government's official term for black person until 1953, when 'Bantu' replaced it. Given their discriminatory usage, they are regarded as derogatory.
- 3 In its key document on OBE, the Education Department produced broad, quite vague definitions of its usage of the term 'outcomes'. 'Outcome' itself is 'the results of learning processes [and] refer[s] to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values within particular contexts'. 'Critical cross-field outcomes' are taken as 'generic, cross-curricular, cross cultural outcomes'; 'learning area outcomes' are seen as 'outcomes related to specific learning areas'; 'specific outcomes' are 'contextually demonstrated knowledge, skills and values reflecting critical cross-field outcomes' (see Bellis, 1997: 6).
  - 4 Vista University's alumni organization has established a support network for the many promising graduates in this position. One enterprising Bachelor of Commerce graduate has established a thriving business at the university's gate, selling food to students and staff.
  - 5 (EPU Report, nd: 8) By 1992, 35 percent of staff were located in the arts faculty, and 32 percent in education. In contrast, the faculties of law and science had far smaller staff complements (7 percent and 9 percent of the total staff number respectively). Although this has altered appreciably over the past eight years, the law and science faculties remain smaller than arts and education.
  - 6 Professor Michael Kahn, of the University of Cape Town, part-time science and technology adviser to the Ministry of Education, states that South Africa is 'globally ranked among countries with the least skills' in mathematics and science (in Heard, 2000).
  - 7 Lickindorf (2000) indicates that scientific education for scholars in black schools does not prepare them adequately to study science at tertiary level: 'Only 19% of African students entering the field of natural sciences, for instance, scored a pass, compared with 38% of Coloured students, 62% of Indian students, 56% of white students'. These statistics are derived from an overall 45 percent pass rate. 'Approximately one in four technikon entrants (26%) and two in five university entrants (42%) were assessed as scientifically literate.'
  - 8 I am not here referring to the Vista's Local or National Transformation Fora, which have attempted to address the transformation of apartheid structures in the institution.

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