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STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE INSERTION OF POPULAR CULTURE INTO AN ENGLISH LITERATURE CURRICULUM: A RWANDAN CASE STUDY

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A Research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Education.

Supervisor: Denise Newfield

Johannesburg, March 2005

Declaration

I declare that this research is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Education in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree at this university or any other university.

Bella Nyirahuku

Signed ----------

29 March, 2005

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family in appreciation of their support.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people who contributed to the completion of this research report.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor, **Denise Newfield,** for her sustained guidance and encouragement and the intellectual impetus she provided to this study.

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On a personal note, I would like to express my gratitude to friends and colleagues in South Africa. My thanks go to **Esperance**, **Solange**, **Monique**, Christian, **Kabinga**, **Jolie, Ritha** and **Moipone.**

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Abstract

The research report explores a pedagogic and curricular intervention in the English curriculum of third year pre-service education students at the National University of Rwanda. It uses as an implementation instance the Bana Molokai subculture as a means of relating the teaching of English literature to cultural practices found in the students' living space which are semiotically more diverse than the traditional literary-linguistic forms. My research attempts to establish whether and how the pedagogical intervention of teaching cultural artefacts produced by the Bana Molokai can enrich the learning/teaching of literature in this context. At a secondary level, the introduction of the Bana Molokai youth culture phenomenon into a literature classroom calls attention to the presence of the youth culture phenomenon on the continent as an emerging site for the articulation of the contemporary interests and needs of African youth. Therefore, although the pedagogical intervention forms the major component of this Research project, it incorporates a preliminary phase: an overview of the Bana Molokai subculture as an illustration of the vitality of texts from the field of popular culture on the African continent.

The study uses an analysis of students' responses before and after the pedagogical intervention as a means of providing comparative evidence of students' perceptions of existing literary practices in their context in the light of the expansion. In effect, it uses in the first instance emerging thematic points in the students' responses in order to understand their perception of literary practices as a preliminary justification of an interventionist expansion in Rwanda. In the second instance, it uses emerging thematic points in the students' responses to the pedagogical intervention to unravel how the lesson of teaching Bana Molokai has related them to the exercise of learning/teaching literature in their context. The analysis furthermore attempts to indicate the comparative benefits of teaching Bana Molokai texts in Rwanda in regards to the established literary canon.

The pedagogical intervention established that the Bana Molokai artefacts are teachable and readable through a literature paradigm at tertiary level in the context of Rwanda. It also established that the texts could engage the learners in a valuable cognitive experience of the same depth and breadth as written materials. It furthermore demonstrated that the pedagogical intervention of teaching texts produced by the Bana Molokai texts was gratifying because it enabled the students to feel proud of who they were. Finally, it opened for them a horizon of literature practices in their context that took into account available local materials. Students attested that the analysis made them reconsider previously held opinions about culture and identity. An important finding was that culture and identity are continuously being reshaped by different encounters, and that there cannot be absolute pure forms that will account for one's identity or culture. It also indicated that the students' relationship to texts, whether from their living space or produced in other parts of the world was ambivalent, made of different levels of recognition and rejection.

The pedagogical intervention was thought-provoking both for me and my students. Some of the students' responses to the intervention came as a surprise to me, and opened up new ways for reaching out to the students.

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