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**THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE  
PROGRAMME FOR LOW-PROFICIENCY  
TERTIARY LEARNERS**

*by*

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*A thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree*

**Philosophiae Doctor**

**in the**

**FACULTY OF THE HUMANITIES  
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**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE**

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CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF H.R. HAY**

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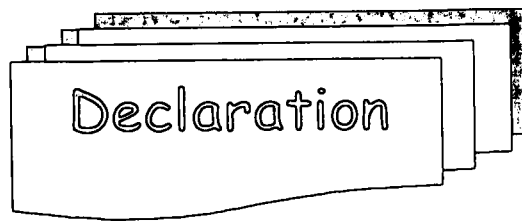
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This study is dedicated to

my father, Howard Jones, who would have been so proud;  
my husband Johan;  
my children Erika, Wouter and Susan;  
and my son-in-law Helmut.



(iii)



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I declare that this doctoral thesis, *The development and implementation of an English language and literature programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners*, is my own work and that all the sources used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references and that this thesis was not previously submitted by me for any other degree at any other university.

.....  
A.L. VAN WYK



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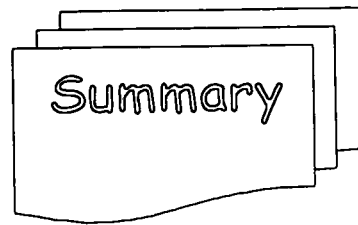
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**List of abbreviations**

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AAT	Academic Aptitude Test
AD	Academic Development
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency
CBI	Content-based Instruction
CI	Comprehensible Input
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CPP	Career Preparation Programme
DET	Department of Education and Training
EAP	English for Academic Purposes
EFL	English Foreign Language
EGAP	English for General Academic Purposes
ESB	English-speaking Background
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
ESL	English Second Language
FI/D	Field Independence Dependence
GSAT	General Scholastic Aptitude Test
IELTS	International English Language Testing Service
IL	Interlanguage
IM	Input Modification
L2	Second Language
NESB	Non-English-speaking Background
RBL	Resource-based Learning
ROC	Real Operating Conditions
SAIDE	South African Institute of Distance Education
SL	Second Language
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SLL	Second Language Learning
TBLT	Task-based Language Learning
TL	Target Language
TOEFL	Test of English as a Second Language
URHE	Unit for Research into Higher Education



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The University of the Free State, like most other tertiary institutions in South Africa, is faced with the challenge of establishing a framework within the university for redressing inequalities in education: inequalities such as unequal access and opportunities for both students and staff along racial, gender and class lines. This research attempts to find ways of making tertiary learning accessible to a group of underprepared students who would, traditionally, have been excluded from tertiary learning in the previous apartheid dispensation. The study focuses on the language needs of learners who, for multiple reasons, have low English language proficiency. The problem is compounded for these students in that English is their chosen language of instruction. Thus, without English language proficiency, tertiary learning is inaccessible or, at best, extremely difficult for these students.

The main aim of this study is to develop and implement a programme of language learning which will meet the requirements of the Department of English and, simultaneously, improve the English academic literacy skills of this group of SL learners so as to provide them with much-needed support to achieve academic success.

The methodology selected to achieve the aim, is emancipatory action research with its reflective cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The action research cycles involve planning to improve the process; acting to implement that plan; observing the effects of the plan and finally, reflecting on the effects which, in turn, become the framework for the next cycle of action research. Two processes are central to action research, viz. data-gathering and an action component. Data-gathering occurred over a period of

four years and various techniques were used, viz. interviews, classroom observations, samples of students' written work, a journal of facilitator meetings, various monitoring techniques, questionnaires to learners and facilitators, test and examination results.

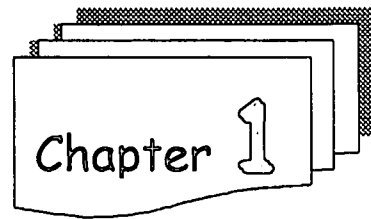
The study describes three action research cycles over a period of four years. Initially, it was intended that the course should include a literature component which, as a result of this research, was abandoned in the second cycle of the action research. The reasons for this decision are documented in the study. The findings of the research have led to the development of an academic literacy course with the following broad goals, viz. to develop the ability to read academic texts with good comprehension and critical attention; to develop thinking and study skills and to develop the ability to express information and ideas clearly, relevantly and logically in expository writing.

Several useful guidelines, for the development of an English language course for low-proficiency tertiary learners, have emerged from the study. These guidelines encompass the following key issues, viz. prior learning, learner proficiency, learner motivation and interest, comprehensible input, learning context, learning strategies, extensive and intensive reading, teaching approach, language and literature teaching, materials design and research methodology. This study has led to the development and implementation of an academic literacy course founded on the following salient guidelines:

- A teaching approach based on a combination of communicative language learning and input processing instruction;
- Proficiency should be developed within the context in which students find themselves, viz. the academic context. Thus, academic literacy skills are systematically developed;
- Comprehensible input is axiomatic to language learning at tertiary level, thus, reading and writing fluency should be developed through a programme which provides plenty of meaning-bearing input;



- Classroom instruction should be based on a combination of content-based instruction and task-based language teaching;
- Reading and writing skills should be taught through a process of systematic strategy training; and
- Contextual support, which facilitates SLA, should be provided in the form of strategy training, continuous evaluation, thorough feedback and activities that replicate real-world tasks.



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## ORIENTATION

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

**T**he challenges facing institutions of higher education in South Africa to transform, according to the internal demands for a democratized education system, are complex and require innovative strategies. In the previous apartheid dispensation, tertiary institutions were organized along racial and language lines.

The University of the Free State was, traditionally, a university for white Afrikaans-speaking students. Not only did the institution need to respond to a changing local socio-political situation, but at the same time, it had to meet the challenges dictated by global educational change. Globally, the challenge is to provide education to more students with shrinking resources and also to be accountable for learning outcomes (Angelil-Carter & Moore 1998:1). Institutions of higher learning are faced with the need for innovative thinking, critical reflection and strategizing in a climate of unprecedented competition for resources. The process of critical evaluation of each response to transformation brings with it the rare opportunity to question entrenched assumptions about education.

Kells (1992:12) states that in the "800-year history of universities, as they have existed in the western world, there have been relatively few times when the entire fabric of the system of higher education in a country or a region can be re-examined with the possibility of raising truly fundamental questions about basic purposes and the means to pursue them". This study hopes to make some contribution towards re-examining the realities of access at a university in the throes of educational transformation. The University of the Free State, like most other tertiary institutions in South Africa, is faced with the challenge of establishing a framework within the university for redressing inequalities in education, inequalities such as unequal access and opportunities for both students and staff along racial, gender and class lines.

This research attempts to find ways of making tertiary learning accessible to a group of underprepared students who would, for several reasons, have been excluded from tertiary learning in the previous apartheid dispensation. The study focuses on the language needs of learners who, for reasons outlined in Chapter 2, have low proficiency in their chosen language of instruction. While focusing on the language needs of one particular group, the researcher was aiming for a broader insight into the language needs of 50% of the students who are currently enrolled at the University of the Free State and who are studying in English which is not their mother tongue. To contextualize this research, it is necessary to look briefly at government policy for higher education institutions.

## **1.1 TRANSFORMATION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY**

A White Paper on the transformation of Higher Education was published by government in July 1997 to serve as a framework for the transforming of Higher Education and to establish guidelines for the redress of educational

inequalities. In Chapter Two of this paper, the policy for *Equity and Redress* is outlined as follows:

*2.29 Ensuring equity of access must be complemented by a concern for equity of outcomes. Increased access must not lead to a 'revolving door' syndrome for students, with high failure and drop-out rates. In this respect, the Ministry is committed to ensuring that public funds earmarked for achieving redress and equity must be linked to measurable progress towards improving quality and reducing the high drop-out and repetition rates.*

*2.30 This highlights the need to attend to the articulation gap between the demands of higher education programmes and the preparedness of school leavers for academic study. The effects of Bantu education, the chronic underfunding of black education during the apartheid era, and the effects of repression and resistance on the culture of learning and teaching, have seriously undermined the preparedness of talented black students for higher education (White Paper 1997).*

The above framework serves as a guideline for individual institutions to initiate their own response to this policy. The paper acknowledges that school-leavers from the old Department of Education and Training (DET) are underprepared for tertiary studies and that these learners should be provided with a fair opportunity to access tertiary studies and gain the opportunity to realize their potential. Not only should learners be provided with fair opportunity and access, but the teaching and learning provided should be geared to their needs so as to ensure that learners do actually achieve success and do not fall prey to the 'revolving door syndrome'. In fact, the nature of the teaching and learning for these learners is clearly spelled out as follows:

*2.32 In the short to medium term, in order to improve equity of outcomes, the higher education system is required to respond comprehensively to the articulation gap between learners' school attainment and the intellectual demands of higher education programmes. It will be necessary to accelerate the provision of bridging and access programmes within further education, but the learning deficits are so widespread that systematic changes in higher education programmes (pedagogy, curriculum and the structure of degrees and diplomas) will continue to be needed. The development and provision of student support services, including career guidance, counselling and financial aid services, are other essential requirements. In addition, an enabling environment must be created throughout the system to uproot deep-seated racist and sexist ideologies and practices that inflame relationships, inflict emotional scars and create barriers to successful participation in learning and campus life...(White Paper 1997).*

The call of the White Paper is for universities (and other institutions of higher learning) to respond with meaningful bridging programmes and support to assist learners to overcome the deficiencies incurred by a sub-standard schooling system. This transformation rests on key features such as consultation with community leaders and other local stakeholders in education to ensure that the needs of all concerned are accommodated as far as possible. Another key feature required by the White Paper is that a new system will emphasize co-operation and partnerships between tertiary institutions at local and national level. The University of the Free State responded to the issues raised by the White Paper through the establishment of a bridging programme, viz. the Career Preparation Programme (CPP), a programme based on a partnership between the university and further education institutions in the province.

## 1.2 THE CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAMME AND WHITE PAPER REQUIREMENTS

The Career Preparation Programme (CPP) was conceptualized by the Unit for Strategic Services in Higher Education at the University of the Free State in answer to a broader societal need to remove barriers which prevent access to further education. The programme provides an alternative access route to educational opportunities and a better chance of employment for out-of-school and out-of-work young adults who possess a matriculation certificate, but fail to meet the requirements to access tertiary education (Strydom 1996:5).

The planning phases of the programme involved lengthy negotiations with local community leaders and leaders in education in the Free State region. These negotiations aimed at discovering the educational needs of the regional community so as to ensure that the university addressed these needs. The process was recorded in a working document compiled by the head of the Interim Management Committee of the University of the Free State (Strydom 1996:11). This process of consultation in the Free State region proved so successful that it led to the formation of a representative board who would determine policy and take management decisions regarding co-operative initiatives and resultant courses.

Subsequently, a regional consortium was established by initiators at the university: a consortium of higher and further education institutions in the Free State. This was done to ensure collaboration between the different higher education institutions in the region. The consortium would make decisions concerning logistic collaboration, resource sharing and administrative issues would also be collaboratively decided (Strydom 1996:11). The driving force behind the effort was to provide learners with open access to tertiary institutions of their choice, whether it be university,

technikon or technical college. It was envisaged that the programme would be launched in Bloemfontein in 1996 and gradually expand to include other sub-regions such as Bethlehem, Welkom, Kimberley, Sasolburg, Aliwal North, Qwa-Qwa and Oudtshoorn. After a feasibility study (*vide* 1.4), the programme started in 1997 with 185 students and only four subjects were presented in the first year of implementation, viz. English, Sociology, Mathematics and a Foundation Course in Lifelong Learning which was presented by the Department of Psychology. The subject choice would be extended later to include a range of several other disciplines as the programme expanded. The content of the above subjects would be determined by the requirements of the academic departments concerned. It was, however, important to the researcher that the needs of the learners become a fundamental consideration for course development. This implied that a needs analysis would have to be done to ensure that learners would receive the kind of academic support they needed. This study became a means of researching learner needs as well as a means of planning ways of making content and materials accessible to the learners. The aims and objectives of the course are detailed in 1.6 below. Although the researcher had a general idea of the language proficiency of the target group, it was necessary to research the needs of the group more accurately so as to be able to provide a course that would adequately meet their needs.

### 1.3 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

An understanding of language proficiency within the tertiary context is axiomatic to the development (unfolding) and implementation of a course that would facilitate language development of learners whose proficiency is lacking in English which is their chosen language of academic learning (Eskey 1997:135). The term *proficiency* has to be seen within the context for which the learners require the proficiency, viz. the academic context (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:34, Ellis 1994:198, Blanton 1993:237). A programme of

language learning for low-proficiency tertiary learners should be organized around the communicative tasks needed in the academic context so that the development of language proficiency is relevant and contextualized (*vide* 2.1.2). The term *second language* needs to be described so as to guide an exploration of the proficiency needed in a second language.

As English is a recognized language of instruction at the Free State University and 50% of the students on campus study in English, the language plays an important role in the institution as well as an important social role to many speakers who have other mother tongues (*vide* 2.2). Thus, English, in these circumstances is regarded as a second language (Ellis 1994:12).

*Tertiary* learners are learners enrolled at an institution of higher education such as the university. These are learners who have successfully completed their schooling and have matriculated. The last key concept to be briefly described is *second language acquisition*. Chapter three of this study is devoted to this concept and its relevance to the target group.

Any exploration of the needs of second language learners should start with establishing an understanding of what is meant by second language acquisition. Acquisition can mean different things to different researchers. Krashen (1985: 1) sees acquisition as a subconscious process of acquiring language in the same way that children do. Second language learning, on the other hand, is seen as a conscious process where learning occurs in classroom or instructional settings (McLaughlin 1987:20). Several researchers (Ellis 1994:14, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:6) use the terms acquisition and learning interchangeably. It is difficult to distinguish clearly between acquisition and learning and therefore the researcher has opted for the view held by Van Lier (1996:43) who states that "language learning is the cumulative result of sustained effort and engagement over time, with continuity being central". This position would include conscious and



subconscious acquisition of language (*vide* 3.1). The above section on concept clarification has served, also, to demarcate the field of study and it is now necessary to look more closely at the specific research problem for this study.

#### 1.4 PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The University of the Free State is faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of those South Africans who were deprived of educational opportunities in the past. The Career Preparation Programme (CPP) was implemented as a means of redress. An English language and literature course was to form part of the CPP programme and it was to be an equivalent qualification to the first-year English course presented on campus. These requirements were established as part of the negotiation process between community leaders and the university. These requirements are discussed fully in 6.1.3.2.

A preliminary study (*vide* phase 1 in Chapter 6) of the language proficiency of the group soon revealed the extent of their scholastic deprivation and their low English language proficiency. Their matriculation results for English Second Language, coupled with the results of psychometric tests collated by Strydom (1997b), revealed that the average mark obtained for English in the matriculation exam was an E symbol. The results of the Academic Aptitude Test taken by students suggested a below average English reading comprehension ability (Strydom 1997b:152). This evidence, together with findings of a literature review and the researcher's own classroom observations (*vide* Chapter 2, 3 and 6.1.2.2), pointed to a serious lack of English language proficiency. English was the students' chosen medium of instruction; thus their low language proficiency would have a wider impact than simply that of failing to achieve the requirements of the English course, and would jeopardize their chances of success at tertiary learning. The above

preliminary observations are discussed in more detail in the chapters that follow.

The proposed English course would include a full literature component and learners would take the same examinations as the full-time students on campus. This was required, initially, to ensure that students could articulate into mainstream courses in their second year on campus. Thus, the fact that they were part of a bridging programme would not be an obstacle to accessing other academic courses. The reasons for these requirements are fully discussed in Chapter 6.

The immediate problem for the English course designer was to devise a programme which would pace students through the required prescribed literature and at the same time focus on the development of their academic communication skills to ensure that their needs for lifelong learning skills were met. The CPP was preceded by a pilot study by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) to establish the feasibility of the Resource-based learning CPP project (Strydom 1997a :5). The results of this study revealed (among other things) that the proposed learners on the programme would need help with their chosen medium of instruction, viz. English. Thus, the SAIDE feasibility project was initiated before the actual implementation of the CPP programme described in this study. The results of the feasibility study led to the launching (1996) and eventual establishing (1997) of the CPP programme of which the English course formed a part.

The programme was, and still is intended to run on the lines of a resource-based learning programme with facilitators appointed in each sub-region who present the content to learners of that region. For this reason, the South African Institute for Distance Education was asked to assist with the establishment of the programme and to do the feasibility study.

## 1.5 SAIDE PILOT PROJECT AND FEASIBILITY STUDY

The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) was asked to do a feasibility study on increasing access to higher education using a distance learning approach. This meant the use of resources such as structured study guides, workbooks, texts, electronic media and methods of delivery other than the traditional lecture mode (Bitzer & Pretorius 1996). Class sessions would be organized with a qualified facilitator who would assist students in the learning process, but not lecture on the content in a traditional lecturer-dominated mode. This would enable students to remain in their home environment, earning credits, which would allow them to access educational opportunities at proposed community colleges and universities or technikons of their choice. Thus, Resource-based learning, as proposed for the CPP, was a combination approach of contact and traditional distance education (Strydom 1997a: 7).

The feasibility study investigated the presentation of Mathematics, English, Accounting and Science. The evaluation of this feasibility study was done by academics and specialists from SAIDE, the British Open University and participating universities (Natal and UFS) (SAIDE 1995). The courses were implemented over a period of six weeks at the UFS and the University of Natal, using imported materials from the British Open University, the Open College in the UK and the Open Learning Institute of Hong Kong. Facilitators were appointed to facilitate the learning in each area.

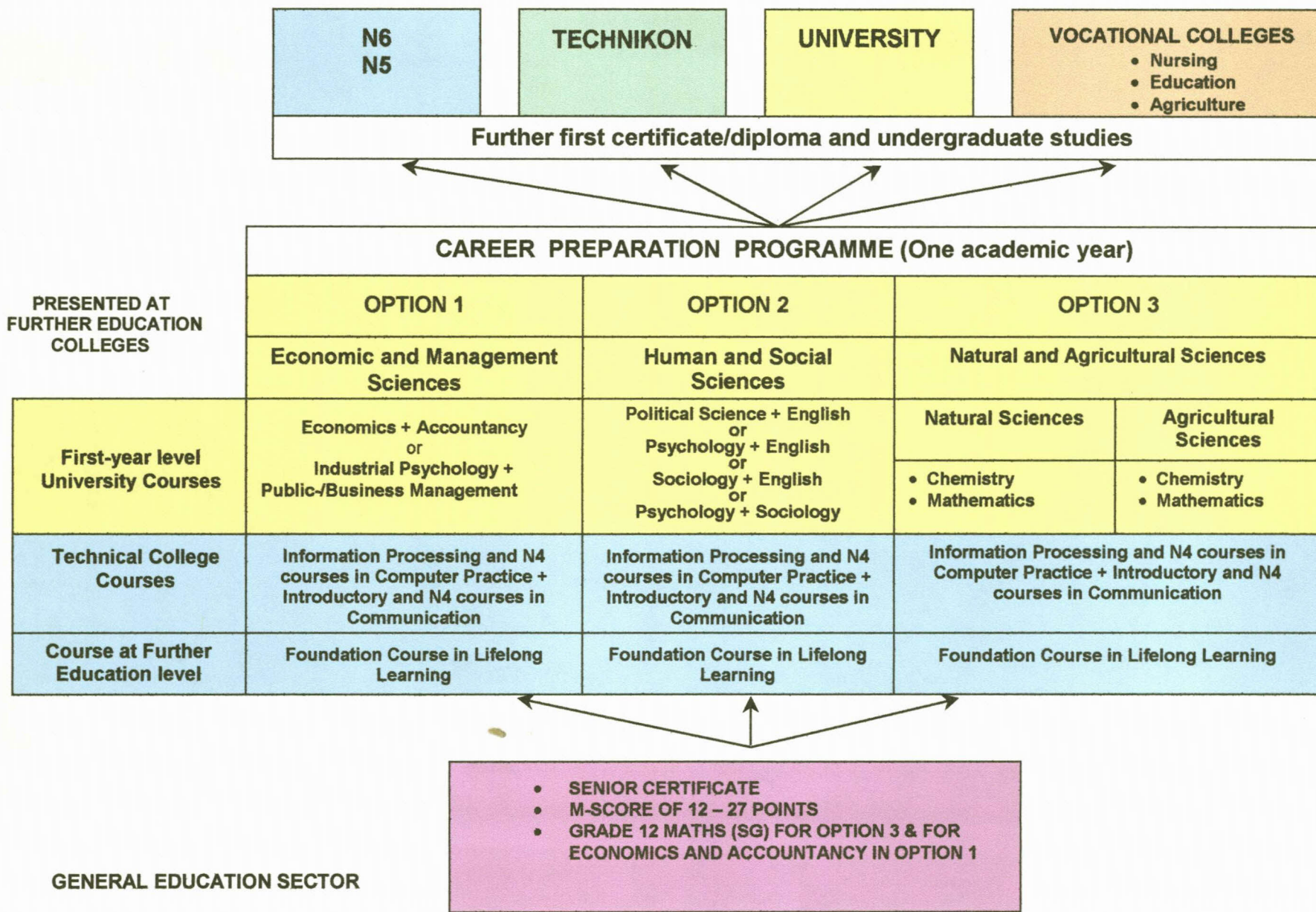
The SAIDE findings of this study revealed that resource-based learning could be successful in South Africa, but success would depend on the extent to which students received general counselling and support in the transition to independent learning (SAIDE 1995:33). Students would need guidance to develop appropriate study skills (these include reading and writing skills) and close monitoring of their progress to ensure success.

The feasibility study led to the launching of the CPP programme in 1996. The programme started with only six students in 1996 and was only really established in 1997 with 185 students. The university appointed qualified co-ordinators in each of the four subjects presented that year. The researcher was appointed as co-ordinator of the English course of the CPP programme. The brief was to design and implement an English course that would meet the requirements of the Department of English and the Unit for Strategic Services at the UFS. The course was intended, like the other courses on the CPP, to bridge the students into tertiary study which would imply a study of their needs in order to plan the teaching and learning. The rest of this study is a description and investigation of the students, their needs, how meaningfully to address these and the insights gained since 1996.

As a means of quality control, SAIDE was contracted by the university (The Unit for Strategic Services) to monitor the implementation of the four subjects presented in 1997. SAIDE was briefed to monitor quality and progress; and to provide in-service training where required (*vide* Appendix C). Co-ordinators for each of the subjects were required to provide frequent reporting on progress of both students' learning and materials development for the course.

Figure 1.1 is an outline of the programme as it currently exists.

**Figure 1.1: Academic Development Programme in Post-Secondary Education  
(Resource-Based Learning Career Preparation Programme)**



Students come from the general education sector with a senior certificate and select Option 1 (Economic and Management Sciences) or Option 2 (Human and Social Sciences) or Option 3 (Natural and Agricultural Sciences). Their course consists of a combination of university courses and Technical College courses. This decision was taken after much negotiation with all tertiary institutions and represents the results of a collaboration process in the region (Strydom 1996:12). The courses are presented at the Technical Colleges in the Free State region and not on the university campus. This made classes more accessible to the learners as the Technical Colleges are closer to the students' homes than the University and sharing facilities was part of the negotiated agreement reached in the planning phases of the bridging programme.

Once students have completed the CPP year, they are free to choose one of the options illustrated at the top of the page (Fig 1.1), viz. Technical Colleges, Technikon, University or Vocational Colleges (Strydom 1996:13). The courses they complete are accredited by the institutions in the region. Students may choose one of three options, Economic and Management Sciences, Human and Social Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences. The English course forms part of option 2.

## 1.6 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

Although the SAIDE pilot project assessed and monitored the initial project, they did not spell out details on the kind of support that students from this learner group would need to achieve success on the CPP. Their findings pointed to the students' need for sustained academic support (including language support) to achieve independent learning.

Another study (Strydom 1997b) done on the counselling needs of students on the CPP, illuminated the lack of language proficiency and concludes that

"students had a below average English reading comprehension ability which has an adverse effect on students' chances of academic success and suggests that the counselling system should develop initiatives to address students' reading ability" (Strydom 1997b:222).

The findings of the two studies cited above, viz. the SAIDE feasibility study and the study on the counselling needs of the students on the CPP programme, provided the rationale for this study. The fact that the language proficiency issue at tertiary level has become a crucial focus of late at institutions throughout the country, gave further impetus to a study of this nature.

### 1.7 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research was to develop, implement and evaluate a programme of language which would meet the requirements of the Department of English and, simultaneously, improve the English academic literacy skills of this group of SL learners so as to provide them with much-needed support to achieve success at tertiary level. To achieve this aim, the researcher formulated the following objectives:

- To design a course which would enable learners to acquire academic communicative skills;
- To establish a course that would meet the requirements of the Department of English and Classical Culture;
- To reflect critically on every step of the development and implementation process so as to improve the teaching and learning (*vide* Chapter 6);
- To implement the changes and developments brought about by the process of critical reflection;

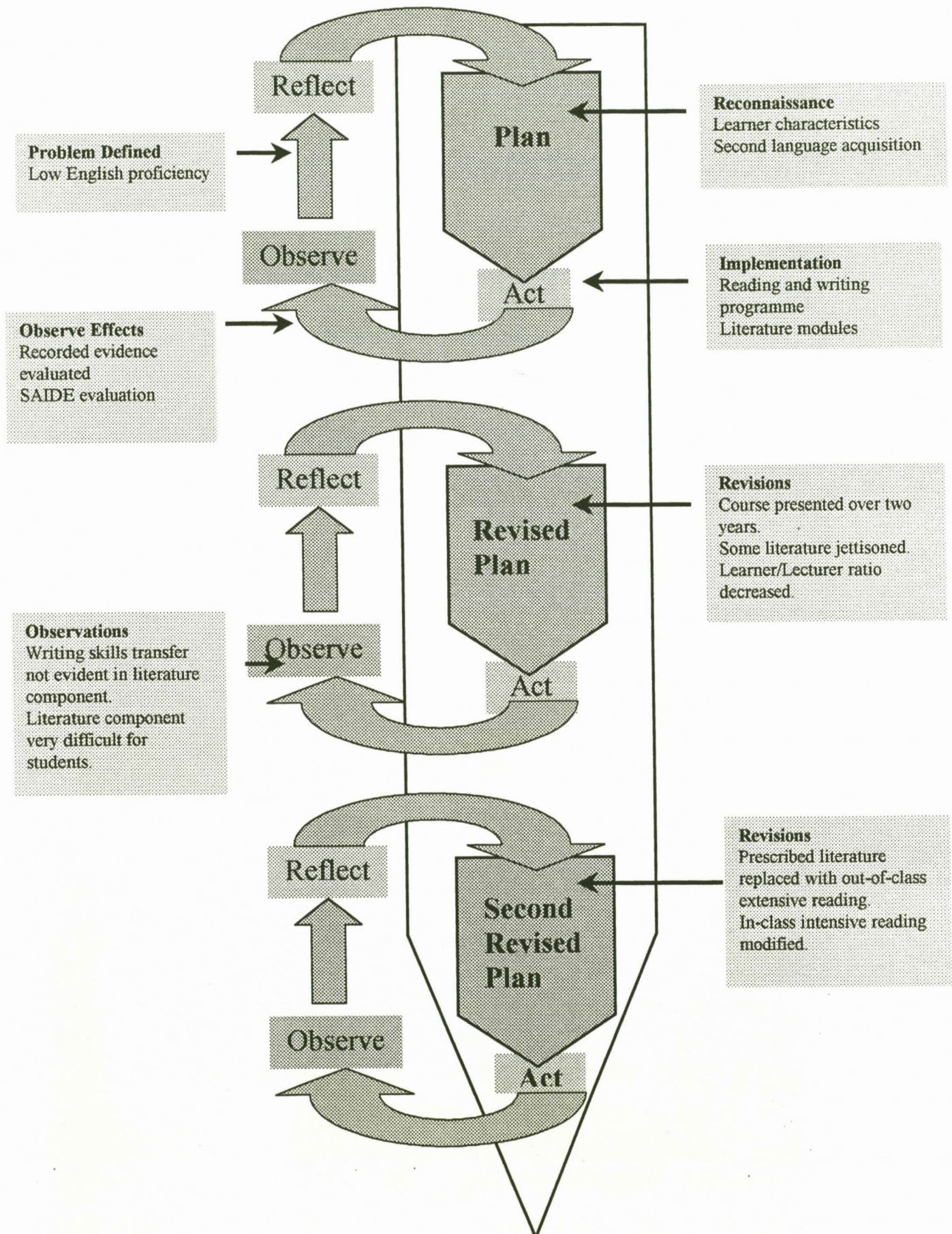
- To ensure quality enhancement through improvement of teaching and learning within existing constraints of time and cost (*vide* 5.2 for the goals of action research);
- To facilitate professional growth of the researcher and facilitators involved in the teaching through a process of emancipatory action research (*vide* 5.6 for a description);
- To enable the learners themselves to participate in the learning process;
- To design or select appropriate classroom materials based on insights gained from a literature review of second language acquisition (SLA), second language learner characteristics and needs, and finally, to review international instructional trends; and
- To select appropriate teaching methods based on a literature review of SLA, international instructional trends and second language learner characteristics and needs.

## 1.8 RESEARCH METHOD

The task of developing and implementing an appropriate language programme for this group of learners was both daunting and challenging. The researcher needed a useful means of achieving the goal, but at the same time a means of evaluating and reflecting on the process so as to improve teaching and learning ( Van Lier 1996:33, Wallace 1998:12). Action research with its reflective cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting presented itself as a useful vehicle for this particular study (Zuberr-Skerritt 1991:11). Fig 1.2 represents the action research cycles of this study. The action research cycles involve planning to improve the process; acting to implement that plan; observing the effects of the plan and finally, reflecting on the effects which, in turn, become the framework for the next phase or cycle of action research. The planning of phase 1 of the action research included a reconnaissance of the problem of which the literature review was an integral part.



**Figure 1.2: Action research cycles of programme development**



Two processes are central to action research, viz. data-gathering and an action component. Both these processes were main features of this research. The goals of action research proved a further incentive to use this type of methodology, viz. organizational learning, quality enhancement and professional development (*vide* 5.2). The University of the Free State is in a process of educational transition and any means of developing professional skills to deal with the transition, while simultaneously enhancing quality as well as facilitating institutional learning, seemed an appealing option.

As is so often experienced in action research studies, a wealth of data was collected. Data-gathering occurred over a period of four years and various qualitative and quantitative techniques were used, viz. interviews, classroom observations, samples of students' written work, a journal of facilitator meetings, various monitoring techniques, questionnaires to learners and facilitators, test and examination results. In addition, input was received from SAIDE in the form of a summative evaluation and this was incorporated into the planning of phase 2 of the action research. The Unit for Higher Education monitored the implementation and their findings were included in the action research phase 2. The emphasis of the data-gathering was on collaboration where all parties involved were consulted and became participants in this study. The wealth of evidence and data gathered facilitated triangulation of data, justification of the findings and adaptations made in the development of the English programme of learning.

## 1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter two provides a framework for the problem, viz. low-proficiency tertiary learners. The term *proficiency* is discussed and how it pertains to the context and is then followed by an outline of second language (SL) learner characteristics. These learner characteristics enabled the researcher to come

to grips with the characteristics of the particular learner group and facilitated the implementation of a programme that would meet their specific needs.

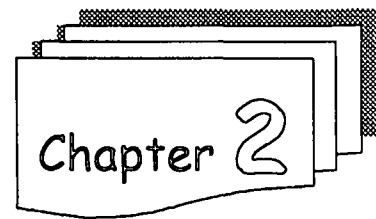
Chapter three explores second language acquisition (SLA) and learning and this literature review provides the essential insights into factors conducive to SLA and, in particular, classroom language acquisition.

Chapter four takes cognizance of international trends in the development of academic literacy so as to draw on this experience for implementation. The chapter explores the meaning of academic literacy, academic reading and academic writing. Finally, the issue of literature and language in one programme is investigated and the conclusion documented and implemented in the action research cycles.

In Chapter five the action research method is defined, described and its particular application in this study is demonstrated.

Chapter six represents the actual implementation of the action research cycles. Each cycle is described and illustrated with examples in detailed appendices.

Chapter seven contains the conclusion with findings and recommendations for future research.



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## LOW-PROFICIENCY TERTIARY LEARNERS AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

As the main aim of this study is to establish a language programme that will develop the language skills needed by a group of low-proficiency learners, it is important that the term *proficiency* is clarified, and more importantly, that an understanding is gained of this concept within the context of the communicative tasks that the target learners need to master in the tertiary context (Nunan 1988:35). Effective pedagogical interaction should be founded on an understanding of the learners and their needs (Van Lier 1996:4). An understanding of *proficiency* and how this relates to the target learners becomes important if the planned programme is intended for low-proficiency learners who wish to use the target language (English in this case) as a vehicle of learning at tertiary level. This means that their academic success is partly dependent on the level of their communication skills in English (Grabe & Kaplan 1996:29 Saville-Troike 1984:199).

This chapter is devoted to describing what is meant by language *proficiency* and then to contextualizing this concept so as to shape the goals and teaching approach for a programme of language learning for low-proficiency tertiary learners. The second section of this chapter focuses on the second language (SL) learner, in particular, those characteristics which influence language acquisition. An awareness of second language learner characteristics facilitates a knowledge of the learner and this insight, in turn, helps to guide teaching practice to accommodate learner differences, as well as heighten teacher awareness of possible constraints or potential resources (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:201; Skehan 1989:136). As this study deals with second language learning and language proficiency, it is important to establish a working definition of these concepts.

## 2.1 LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

A second language is a language, other than the speaker's mother tongue, which functions as an important means of communication in a society where the members of that society speak other languages (Ellis 1994:12). Thus, the learner studying in a language, which is an accepted medium of instruction at an educational institution and which is recognized as a means of communication in society, may be referred to as a second language learner (SLL). The concept of proficiency needs clarification as it is fundamental to an understanding of low proficiency.

Language proficiency has been described in different ways and couched in different terms by a variety of theorists resulting in lack of clarity in terminology and definition (Chomsky 1965 Hymes 1971; Stern 1983; Brown 1994). Early definitions of the term displayed a leaning towards a view where syntax was the focus and language proficiency was defined in terms of lexical items, phonemes and morphemes coupled with knowledge of such

components as vocabulary, phonology and grammar. *Proficiency* has been expressed in terms of tests which measure proficiency levels, such as the standardized TOEFL (Testing of English as a Foreign Language) which is designed to measure different components of proficiency (Ellis 1994:198). There were also the proponents of the view that language proficiency could be described in terms of the four language skills, viz. reading, writing, listening and speaking (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:38). Oller (1983:64) has challenged this view stating that language proficiency cannot be divided into distinct components.

Defining *proficiency* has been obscured further by a variety of terms used to describe the concept, for example, competence-performance (Chomsky 1965) where grammars are seen as models of competence with competence being the knowledge of an idealized form of the language, and where performance relates to the use of this knowledge in comprehending and producing language (Ellis 1994:13). Chomsky (1965:3) separates linguistic knowledge from sociocultural features in his competence/performance model. Hymes (1971:32) claims that knowledge of linguistic form is not enough to make a learner a communicatively competent user. Canale and Swain (1980:4) state that the most important ability is that of being able to use language appropriate to the context in which it is used. This view is supported by Ellis (1994:156) who views *proficiency* as the "ability to use knowledge in specific contexts". Pragmatic ability (Levinson 1983) is yet another term that has been used in which to couch *proficiency*. Pragmatic ability refers to the study of linguistic features and the speaker's ability to deal with these features (Levinson 1983:32). Nunan (1988:33) poses the question, "Does knowing the rules of language mean being able to recite them?" This would mean that many native speakers would be termed incompetent. The fact remains that knowledge and skill underpin actual communication and are therefore included in the term communicative competence (Canale 1983:6). This term describes another model of proficiency and is discussed in 2.1.2 below.

*Competence* is "a speaker's largely unconscious knowledge of the grammar of any language he or she can speak" (Eskey 1997:135). This view demonstrates a leaning towards Krashen's (1985) idea that language acquisition is a largely unconscious process (*vide* chapter 2). Performance refers to the speaker's language behaviour and is based on competence (Eskey 1997:135). Knowledge of language rules, however, is not enough. The learner should demonstrate the capability of applying these rules in language use.

According to Widdowson (1990:40), the idea of communicative competence arose from an uneasiness with the fact that certain aspects of language behaviour were indiscriminately organized into the performance category in the Chomskyan distinction of competence/performance. Widdowson (1990:40) endorses the idea of competence representing the knowledge of the language to be acquired and performance being the behavioural realization of that knowledge. In other words, the ability of getting to know something and then being able to do something. The competence/performance definition includes many different contexts because competence and performance are manifested in linguistic behaviour in various contexts-of-talk. Each member of a speech community has "a repertoire of social identities" (Saville-Troike 1982:22). Each identity is associated with its own appropriate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression (Saville-Troike 1982:22). Firth and Wagner (1998:92) point out that competence and performance cannot simply be separated or contrasted because language use develops cognition; that is, social activity is typically associated with linguistic interaction, which presupposes cognitive activity. In other words, knowledge and the realization of that knowledge cannot be so easily distinguished or contrasted. Language proficiency is better viewed "in contingent, situated, and interactional experiences of the individual as a social being" (Firth & Wagner 1998:92). Thus, proficiency should be viewed within a situated, interactive discourse community. Meaning is created and emerges between

participants in a particular discourse community and does not necessarily prescribe to a set of language rules or acknowledged conventions. The concern here, however, is with a specific community, viz. the academic discourse community. A useful definition has been posited by Cummins (1980).

A description of L2 *proficiency* which has featured prominently in SLA research is that of Cummins (1980). Cummins distinguishes two types of *proficiency*, viz. Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) and Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). This description broadens our understanding of *proficiency* and is discussed in more detail below.

### 2.1.1 Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency

One socially-oriented description of proficiency which has had an influence on SL teaching (Ellis 1994:198) is that of Cummins (1980) who makes a distinction among proficiencies. He (1980:175-187) refers to "cognitive/academic language proficiency" (CALP) which is necessary in a school or academic setting where academic discourse is used and "basic interpersonal and communicative skills" (BICS) which are not accommodated in academic settings and which Stern (1983:352) refers to as "communicative capacity and creativity". These skills (BICS) are regarded as basic because they develop naturally through exposure to communication.

CALP is "the proficiency required to perform the conceptual, linguistic, and academic operations expected of college students" (Blanton 1993:237) and is therefore a relevant conceptualization to explore before planning a language intervention for a group of low-proficiency tertiary learners. Cummins (1980:176) explains that language proficiency is a component that "can be assessed by a variety of reading, writing, listening and speaking tests and which is strongly related to general cognitive skill and to academic



achievement". Language *proficiency* is seen by Cummins and Swain (1986) as developing along two interacting continua, viz. one continuum refers to the contextual support available for receiving or producing meaning and the other continuum refers to the extent to which a task makes cognitive demands on the learner (Ellis 1994:198, Cummins & Swain 1986:153). The two interactive continua relate to:

- context-embedded language where communication involves a shared reality (such as the academic context);
- other contexts where no shared reality exists;
- the amount of information that has to be processed simultaneously; and
- the extent to which information needed to complete the task has to become automatized by the learner.

For Cummins (1980:176) BICS refers to basic interpersonal skills which are accent, oral fluency and sociolinguistic competence. Yet another dimension is added to the term *proficiency* by Canale (1983), who perceives it as communicative competence.

### 2.1.2 Communicative competence

Canale (1983:5) refers to proficiency as "communicative competence" which includes the underlying systems of knowledge such as vocabulary and skills in using sociolinguistic conventions for any given language and it is a description that has gained currency. Knowledge refers to "what one knows (consciously and unconsciously) about the language and about other aspects of communicative language use; [and] skill refers to how well one can perform this knowledge in actual communication" (Canale 1983:50). Thus,

communicative competence refers to both knowledge and skills in how to use this knowledge when interacting in an actual communicative situation (Sato & Kleinsassar 1999:495). This includes the ability to use the appropriate language in a given social context (Larsen-Freeman 1986:131) such as the academic context.

Canale (1983) identifies four components of communicative competence, viz. *grammatical competence* (mastery of the language code which includes rules of the language such as vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics); *sociolinguistic competence* (appropriateness of meaning and form such as rules of politeness, etc. pertaining to the production and understanding of utterances in different sociolinguistic contexts); *discourse competence* (the ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text, in other words, the ability to achieve cohesion and coherence in written or spoken communication) and *strategic competence* (the ability to compensate for lapses or breakdowns in communication, in other words, the strategies employed by the SL learner to overcome the inadequacies of their interlanguage) (Ellis 1994:396). As mentioned before, the above language competencies are underpinned by knowledge whether that knowledge be acquired consciously or unconsciously. Thus, language learning entails two components, viz. knowing and doing. It is up to the language programmer to decide how to emphasize these two facets of proficiency in her attempt to facilitate language acquisition. Thus, how to facilitate learners' knowledge and application of that knowledge is determined by the needs of the learners and the context in which they use the language (Widdowson 1990:158). The language programmer has to decide what competencies are needed by the learners in their context of learning before setting goals for a programme of learning. Here Nunan's definition of competence may be useful. Nunan (1988:34) sees competence as a "task-oriented goal written in terms of

behavioral objectives". Competencies may be developed through the setting of goals which focus on certain behavioural outcomes.

It is therefore important for the language programme developer to determine what tasks or skills are needed by the learners and then to decide which teaching approach to use to facilitate the achieving of these goals (Eskey 1997:135, Richards 1985:5). Based on the components of communicative competence, there are five principles which must shape a programme of communicative language learning (Canale & Swain 1980:27-28). These are:

- language learning should take an integrated approach to the teaching of the four components;
- communicative language learning must be based on the kind of communication skills that learners need in a genuine communicative situation;
- opportunities must be created for meaningful communicative interaction;
- use must be made of aspects of communicative competence which the learner has already acquired in his/her L1 and which are common to communication skills in the L2; and
- a teaching approach based on communicative competence should provide learners with practice, experience and knowledge to meet their communicative needs (Canale & Swain 1980:28).

Thus, a communicative teaching approach should focus on the learners' situation or context. A programme of language learning should be organized "around the particular kinds of communicative tasks the learners need to master and the skills and behaviours needed to accomplish them" (Richards 1985:5). Thus, a programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners should be organized around the communicative tasks needed in the academic context. The concept *low proficiency* is, therefore, viewed in terms of the

communicative tasks that learners have to be able to accomplish in an academic context.

A teaching approach should be selected to support the development of (in this case) academic reading and writing skills which are the primary communication tools of tertiary learning (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:34).

The four components of communicative competence as outlined by Canale (1983:5) or any other description of proficiency cannot, however, be the sole arbitrator for a language teaching approach as whatever "the relative importance of the various components at any given level of overall proficiency, one must keep in mind the interactive nature of their relationships. This warning against oversimplification of language competence echoes the views of Firth and Wagner (1998) mentioned above. The whole of communicative competence is always something other than the simple sum of its parts" (Savignon 1997:50). It is necessary to look more closely at the programme goals and teaching approach so as to plan a language intervention in the light of the above description of proficiency.

## 2.2 TEACHING APPROACH AND PROGRAMME GOALS

*Teaching approach* refers to the process of taking cognizance of the nature of language and learning, course design (objectives and classroom activities), learner and teacher roles and classroom techniques and procedures (Nunan 1988:77, Richards and Rodgers 1986:161). The teaching approach is, as outlined above in the discussion on proficiency, determined by the context and the communicative tasks needed by the learner. Another vital consideration is what Nunan (1988:77) terms "data about and from the learner". Learner needs and the context should determine and inform the teaching approach. If the overall process is regarded as the teaching approach, then it is necessary to distinguish between an overall approach and

the procedure used for classroom presentation. Richards and Rodgers (1986:15) refer to a *method* as the overall plan or procedure selected for classroom presentation. Therefore, once the teaching approach has been determined, then the method may be selected which best facilitates the teaching approach. There are several methods from which to select and the choice of method has to follow the selection of a teaching approach.

A myriad teaching methods are at the disposal of the teacher, such as the traditional form-focused direct method and audiolingualism, based on drilling speech patterns. Then there are other methods, such as the Total Physical Response method where the learners listen to the teacher, and respond to the spoken target language commands of the teacher; as well as communicative language teaching where all the components of communicative competence are taught integratively and learners use the language productively and receptively. A method such as content-based instruction where the focus is on the language skills and academic conventions of a particular subject area, is currently regarded as a useful method to teach SL learners. The task-based language instruction method which focuses on tasks and activities aimed at improving language skills is yet another useful approach, and there are many others (Carson, Taylor & Fredella 1997:367, Brown 1994:29, Larsen-Freeman 1986:109). Many scholars (Larsen-Freeman 1983, Johnson & Morrow 1981, Brumfit 1979), however, believe that the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach is the most effective way of developing successful L2 competence. The CLT approach, where the learner is given ample opportunity for activities and language use in authentic tasks, is a meaning-based approach with little attention to form (Ellis 1994; Krashen 1982). This approach with its focus on the use of language without attention to form, is known as the strong view of CLT. The weak view of CLT, on the other hand, is that attention is given to form through meaning-based activities (Canale & Swain 1980:31). Canale and Swain refer to this latter model as a "functionally organized

communicative approach" (Breen & Littlejohn 2000:26; Canale & Swain 1980:33). Breen and Littlejohn (2000:26) maintain that the weak view of CLT accommodates the diverse learning agendas within a class in that it provides opportunity for negotiation of meaning as well as a focus on form.

The concept of communicative competence was described by Canale and Swain (1980), who also recognized the importance of communication strategies as key aspects to achieving communicative competence. They considered (as described above) communicative competence and its implications for teaching. Communicative language teaching (CLT) gained prominence as a result of their research (Sato & Kleinsasser 1999:494; Savignon 1991:261). This approach to teaching includes and integrates the four components of proficiency identified by Canale (1983). If we accept the claim of Savignon (1997) cited above that the interactive nature of language skills has to be kept in mind when selecting a teaching approach, then an interactive, integrated one should be taken for a group of low-proficiency tertiary learners. Such a teaching approach would include communicative activities such as (among others) collaborative learning opportunities where students work in pairs to produce and receive input. Ellis (1994:602) cautions that the failure of many communicative classrooms is the lack of comprehensible input (among other factors). Weyers (1999:341) emphasizes this fact that it "is widely accepted that target language input, specifically comprehensible input, is the first vital component to the language acquisition process". Thus, communicative teaching should be combined with comprehensible input to facilitate second language acquisition (SLA).

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:142) support the above argument and state that all "cases of successful first and second language acquisition are characterized by the availability of comprehensible input". (This concept is more thoroughly covered in Chapter 3.). It is, however, true that comprehensible input alone is not enough to ensure second language

acquisition (Van Lier 1996:35, VanPatten 1996:5). Learners should actually notice new linguistic forms before intake occurs, thus a distinction is made between input and intake.

VanPatten (1996:5) clarifies the concept *comprehensible input* and intake when he states that "learners must be exposed to samples of language (and great amounts) that are used to communicate information". Classroom input and activities should therefore be carefully selected so that learners can hear or see language that expresses some meaning (i.e. meaning-bearing input). These activities, which include input processing, push the learner to attend to particular features of language while they are reading or writing, listening or speaking (VanPatten 1996:6). This is achieved through various classroom techniques such as, for example, collaborative learning in the form of group work or pair work. Comprehensible input alone does not ensure SLA, but initiates a process in which the learner's attention is focused on form through the use of genuine communicative activities. VanPatten (1996:6) refers to this process as input processing.

Another teaching approach which could be selected for a group of low proficiency learners (*vide* 2.1.2) is the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. Brown (1994:29) sees the CLT classroom as one characterized by the following:

- all components of communicative competence are taught integratively;
- classroom techniques engage learners in functional, authentic and meaningful language use;
- fluency and accuracy are seen as complimentary and underpin the communicative techniques used; and
- students actually have to use the language productively and receptively.

In the light of the low language proficiency of the target group (*vide* 2.3.5), a teaching approach which provides plenty of opportunity to produce and receive language input, should be axiomatic. A CLT approach not only ensures that language skills are taught integratively, but learners are encouraged to engage in meaningful, functional language use. This approach on its own, without the fundamentals of comprehensible input and input processing, will not ensure maximum language learning for a group of low proficiency tertiary learners. This does, however, need to be combined with a CLT approach to provide learners with the communicative opportunities to develop automaticity. The proposed teaching approach can, however, only be given substance once the course objectives have been determined (Nunan 1988:61).

The course objectives for a language programme cannot simply be the acquisition of the target language, but should focus on enabling learners "to develop the skills needed to use language for specific purposes" (Richards 1985:5). The skills needed by the learners included in this study (as already mentioned) are academic communicative skills. Thus, the teaching of academic literacy should involve explicit teaching of the kind of writing and reading tasks that learners are required to perform in the academic context and not more general language instruction (Eskey 1993:224; Cumming 1989:64).

The programme developer was (initially) obliged to include the specific goals of literature teaching in addition to the goals of teaching academic communicative skills, as this was a requirement of the Department of English. Thus, programme goals included the specific competencies needed for literature study as well as goals for the teaching of academic reading and writing. These goals are discussed in Chapter 4. The goals for a programme of language learning at tertiary level are determined not only by learner needs, but also academic communicative tasks. Therefore, it is necessary to



look more closely at what is meant by the communicative tasks of the academic community in order to ensure that content and objectives are organized around the kinds of tasks the learners are expected to perform in their tertiary (higher education) setting.

### 2.2.1 Academic communicative tasks

As the learners in this study are all enrolled for a tertiary study programme, it is relevant here to look at the academic, communicative tasks which they will be expected to perform at tertiary level. As already suggested above, communicative competence does not occur in a vacuum and the development of academic communicative tasks occurs in an academic setting. Thus, academic SL instruction should enable learners to acquire the language skills needed while the students are involved in the attainment of academic goals (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:36). The question now arises: What are the major academic tasks expected of the students in an academic environment? In Fig. 2.1 Blue (1993:6) identifies the major study activities and skills required in an academic setting.

Figure 2.1: Major study activities and skills

Study activities	Skills required
Lectures	Listening so as to understand content, coping with different accents and varying speeds of delivery, listening for key words and phrases, recognising discourse markers, assessing the importance of different parts of each lecture, making notes, asking questions.
Seminars, tutorials, supervisions	Asking and answering questions, understanding and expressing different points of view, comparing different approaches, ideas, reporting on work done, making notes.

Practicals	Understanding instructions, asking questions, requesting help, securing access to relevant equipment, etc., coping with informal language and jargon, recording results.
Reading text books, articles, etc.	Understanding the overall content, distinguishing main points from supporting detail, skimming, scanning, evaluating, coping with constraints of time, making notes.
Writing essays, reports, etc.	Construction of reasonably accurate sentences and paragraphs, coherent structuring of ideas, referring to other authors.
Writing thesis/dissertation	As for writing essays, but with more importance possibly being attached to a thorough discussion of the literature, an adequate introduction, discussion, conclusion, reporting on the research project undertaken, knowledge of conventions for quoting and referring to other authors, etc.
Examinations	As for writing essays, reports, etc., but with the added pressure of having to read and understand the questions, exercise one's memory, plan relevant answers on the basis of present knowledge, and write coherently, all under severe time constraints.

(Adapted from Blue 1993:6)

The list above indicates a formidable number of language and study skills needed by the student at tertiary level and provides a valuable framework for determining which language skills are relevant for academic success. The above representation of the communicative tasks, required by the academic community, may not be uniform and universal as there is no such thing as a "stable academic discourse community" (Raimes 1998:149). The emphasis of a programme should fall on the local situation, the needs of the student population and factors such as their prior learning experience.

At most higher education institutions testing and assessment are done in writing and most work is based on reading tasks as indicated in Fig. 2.1 above. Thus, not only must students acquire the language skills to cope with the reading and writing tasks in English, but as pointed out by Blue (1993:11), students need to be made aware of their language needs in

relation to the tasks that they are required to perform. It is relevant to look at the specific academic tasks that the target population is required to perform on the CPP as this will shape the choice of content for a language programme for this target group.

Learners on the CPP are required to perform some of the academic communicative tasks as set out in Figure 2.1. These are:

#### **2.2.1.1 Classroom activities**

Classroom activities involve the ability to understand instructions, perform discipline-related tasks in small groups and make notes. Other required activities are the ability to read passages from the prescribed text and answering comprehension questions, writing summaries and composing sentences in class.

#### **2.2.1.2 Reading textbooks and study guides**

In 1997, the prescribed literary texts for the English course were the same texts prescribed for full-time students on campus. Thus, the CPP students were required to study a full complement of prose fiction, poetry and drama in their bridging year. A full list of the texts is given in Chapter 6. During the second cycle of the English programme, some of the texts were abandoned because the reflection phase of action research revealed that learners were not transferring the reading and writing skills from the language component to the literature writing. The students were not coping with the literature component as it did not constitute comprehensible input. These reasons are detailed more fully in Chapter 6.

Each of the other subjects, which students took, has a prescribed textbook. Students are required to cope with understanding the overall content,

distinguishing main points from supporting detail, skimming, scanning, evaluating content, coping with constraints of time, making notes and summarizing for study purposes. Each student receives a study guide which paces the learner through the required content of each subject. In the case of the English course (the course which existed initially), each literary work was accompanied by a study guide which paced the student through the themes and focused on the relevant elements of fiction or poetry or drama as the case may be. These guides contained activities and tasks which model the tasks required in examinations. An example of such a guide is included in Appendix B no 2.

### **2.2.1.3 Writing assignments and tests**

Learners are evaluated on a continuous basis throughout the year and they are required to write two tests per subject every term. The English course, as it existed in the first cycle, required one written assignment on each of the literary works and one language test. Thus, several written responses to literary prompts/assignments and four language tests were required per year. Samples of class work were also evaluated, at least two per student per term. These marks were cumulative and were combined with the examination mark at the end of the year. The final cycle of the programme as it currently exists, differs considerably from the initial one described above. The present course concentrates solely on academic reading and writing using a content-based instruction (CBI) approach for the teaching of academic reading and writing and evaluation is continuous. Content-based instruction is a teaching approach based on academic texts as the basis for language teaching and is a method currently favoured internationally. CBI is described in Chapter 4.

#### 2.2.1.4 Examinations

Learners write only one examination per subject at the end of the year and are assessed on written responses. These responses required an adequate ability to formulate an introduction to the essay, a discussion, a conclusion, and knowledge of conventions. Learners were then assessed on their mastery of content. Learners were required to plan relevant answers on the basis of present knowledge, and write coherently, all this under the pressure of severe time constraints.

It became evident, however, from the above that the academic communication skills most needed by the target population if they were to be successful within the CPP context, were academic reading and writing skills. All their assessment is written and is usually produced after an amount of required reading has been done. The reading they needed for their other subjects would be academic reading from a prescribed academic text. The reading required for the English course was, initially (Cycle 1), the reading of prose fiction, drama and poetry networks as well as the reading of their study guides. Thus, without proficiency in English academic reading and writing skills, these learners had - and still have - very little chance of success in an academic context.

In a study done on the prediction of academic achievement of students on the CPP (UFS) bridging programme of 1998, Van Rooyen (2000:4) comes to the conclusion that their low English proficiency is a major obstacle to academic success. Her findings suggest that low language proficiency leads to the inability to handle the conceptual content essential for academic success. This idea is supported by Kroll (1998:219) who suggests that satisfactory "progress towards a university degree in an English-language setting presupposes at least a threshold level of competence in all four language skills".

A study done by Grundy (1993:30), in which he sought to find out from foreign students studying at British tertiary institutions, how they felt about their English language competence and academic success, confirms the relationship between academic success and language proficiency. The study revealed that students "...are generally less confident about reading and writing than about listening and speaking" and above all, that students felt that their lack of English language proficiency does impact negatively on their academic success" (Grundy 1993:30). All of the above seems to point to the inclusion of a reading and writing skills training component, in a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. Before planning a language programme for low-proficiency learners, the programme developer has to establish their proficiency levels. The entry-level proficiency of the target group requires some clarification.

The results gained from the following data gave some indication of the low proficiency level of the learners on the CPP.

#### 2.2.1.5 Data collected

- Matriculation results for English indicated an average score of E symbol (*vide* 6.1.2.3).
- Results obtained from the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT) which indicated a below average reading ability (*vide* 2.3.5.1 and 6.1.2.4).
- Sampling of student writing (*vide* sections 6.1.2.6 for samples and discussion of learner errors).
- Results of a Language Placement Test (*vide* 6.1.2.5 for results and discussion of test items).
- Classroom observations (*vide* section 6.1.2.2).

The data revealed that their reading comprehension levels were low, their vocabulary knowledge was sketchy and their writing was incoherent and

lacked organization. This implied that learners needed a full academic reading and writing component where the language skills, they lacked, could be specifically taught.

Not only is it important to take cognizance of learners' proficiency levels, but second language learner characteristics play a role in second language acquisition. Knowledge of these characteristics and how they pertain to the target group provide valuable insights when preparing a programme of language intervention.

### 2.3 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS

An understanding of the language learner is essential to improve teaching and learning (Naiman, Fröhlich, Stern & Todesco 1996:1; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:188; Stern 1983:360). The main focus of this section is to acquire more insight into learner characteristics, and hence the needs of the language learner.

Much research has been devoted to investigating the influence of learner characteristics on second language learning: characteristics such as gender (Burstall, Jamieson, Cohen & Hargreaves 1974); age (Moyer 1999:83, Littlewood 1984:65; Stern & Weinrib 1977); cognitive characteristics such as language learning aptitude (Littlewood 1984:62); learning styles; intelligence, personality characteristics such as extroversion-introversion (Ellis 1994:499; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991) and factors such as educational background and previous learning experience (Naiman *et al.* 1996:7). All these characteristics have bearing on the learning process (Lightbown & Spada 1993:96-98; Entwistle 1987:56-75; Stern 1983:361).

Various characteristics are highlighted by different researchers, for example, Lightbown and Spada (1993:35) select five main categories of characteristics,

viz. motivation, aptitude, personality, intelligence and learning styles which impact on language learning. Lightbown and Spada (1993:34) note that these categories of learner characteristics are most likely to be associated with success in second language learning. Yet other researchers (Brundage & Mac Keracher 1980:21-31) contend that adult learners are deeply influenced by their past learning experiences, as well as their present concerns and future prospects. The learner group under investigation fall into the adult category which justifies a brief look at age and prior learning as variables.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:153) include attitude, personality, interest and brain hemisphere specialization/dominance and cognitive styles such as field independence/dependence in their list of learner characteristics which influence language learning. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:205) contend that all these factors in combination explain differential success in SLA.

The identification of learner factors is problematic as qualities such as aptitude, motivation or anxiety are labels for "clusters of behaviour" (Ellis 1986:100; Skehan 1989:4) and different researchers have used these labels to define differing sets of behaviour. Ellis (1986) distinguishes between personal and general factors: personal factors such as group dynamics, attitudes to teacher, material and individual learning techniques, and under general factors he discusses age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation and personality. Skehan (1989:4), too, points to the difficulty of isolating learner variables from one another.

In an adult interview study of the characteristics of good language learners, Naiman *et al.* (1996:39) conclude that each language learner is unique, but that common characteristics can be identified. They add that accidental circumstances are also important to differential success. Such factors are a combination of personality, learning environment and factors already mentioned such as attitude and learning strategies. Naiman *et al.* (1996:8)



maintain that besides age and prior learning, the learner characteristics most likely to impact on language learning are intelligence, aptitude, cognitive style, attitudes and motivation.

The following learner characteristics, drawn from research findings, are discussed briefly in an attempt to achieve some understanding of learners in a second language learning programme: aptitude; motivation; cognitive style (field dependence/independence); learning strategies; prior learning; age; gender and intelligence. These factors may influence SL learners and also influence the way they choose to go about their learning (Ellis 1994:484; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:188).

### 2.3.1 Aptitude

Ellis (1994:494) defines aptitude as "a special propensity for learning an L2". It pertains to the individual's capability of learning a task. As a cognitive variable, aptitude has raised much controversy. Neufeld (1978: 164) posits that prior learning experience largely influences aptitude and can be changed, whereas Carroll (1990:86) maintains that aptitude is fixed over a long period and cannot be influenced or changed. Aptitude is difficult to define and is usually measured in terms of tests, such as Carroll and Sapon's Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) (1959) and Pimsleur's Language Aptitude Battery (1966) (Ellis 1986:112). Oxford and Ehrman (1993:190) hold the view that aptitude measures, as currently in use, assume two main influences on L2 aptitude, viz. socio-economic factors and parental education, and secondly, general capacity to process syntax. Thus, aptitude is not simply something the child has inherently, but refers to the influences he/she has experienced in societal and family life.

The complex nature of aptitude complicates testing. Stern (1983:369) highlights this and states that the "view of language aptitude reflected in tests

such as these is that aptitude is not a single entity, but a composite of different characteristics which come into play in second language learning". Both the MLAT and the Pimsleur Test Battery are based on the analyses of test items such as the learners' ability to discern and memorize new sounds, recognizing grammatical functions in their context, to discern similarities and differences in form and meaning and other items (Ellis 1994:36; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:188). Findings based on the results of tests such as the MLAT are "good predictors of FL learning skills because they tap relevant linguistic skills and knowledge and draw on skills in using decontextualized language" (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:92).

These tests (MLAT and Pimsleur) are analytical in nature and do not, however, account for all the variations of language learning success, such as, for example, those language learning abilities necessary for spontaneous communication outside the classroom (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:189). In addition, these tests rely on a good knowledge of English and may not be seen as valid for SL speakers. In spite of well-founded criticism, Skehan (1989:44) states that at least we know what is being measured and we are able to make judgements based on this knowledge.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:207) maintain that high-quality language instruction may nullify differing learner aptitudes. Thus, where instruction is not good, the learner may compensate with aptitude. This view is supported by Ellis (1994:495) who agrees that all learners, regardless of their aptitude, are able to achieve a fair level of proficiency and it is not to be regarded as a prerequisite for L2 acquisition. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:207) report on studies with Public Service Commission employees studying French in Canada. Students' aptitude test results were utilized to match them with one of three methodological approaches, viz. an audio-visual method; an analytic approach and a functional approach. The findings were positive in that if students were matched to the methodological approach best suited to their

aptitude profiles, then achievement was enhanced. Although this is a positive result, it does not provide clarity on the practical implications concerned with meeting the needs of a heterogeneous learner-group because of the difficulties of testing aptitude.

Aptitude is difficult to test, as already indicated, mainly because the exact nature of this characteristic is not known. Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:167) suggest that aptitude is multidimensional and consists of four independent abilities, viz. phonetic coding ability, grammatical sensitivity, rote-learning ability for foreign language materials and inductive learning ability which implies the ability to induce the rules governing a set of language materials. The main aims of this type of research are to determine to what extent it is possible to predict learning outcomes (Ellis 1994:496). He states further that an additional consideration is to match methods of instruction to the differing aptitudes of the learner group. It does, however, seem clear that a strong relationship has been found between aptitude and language learning (Ellis 1994:496; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:167).

It should be noted, however, that interest in aptitude research has undergone a shift in focus since the early models of aptitude were developed. Aptitude models created in the 1960s and in the 1970s were based on structuralist views of language, behaviourist views of language learning and audiolingual language teaching. The focus in the 1990s is dominated by two main themes, viz the consideration that aptitude is affected by affective variables and, secondly, the examination of aptitude as a cognitive construct which is influenced by individuals' facility with language and, more particularly, with the phonological/orthographic rule system of language (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:92). An important result of this research is that language learners "can modify some personality factors, such as motivation to learn the FL and/or anxiety about learning a FL, through external strategies devised by the student or the instructor" (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95). Thus, although the

target group may have varying aptitudes, this can be accommodated with high quality language instruction which includes strategy training.

As will be demonstrated in the next section, the students under investigation displayed strong motivation for learning English. This learner characteristic is discussed with a view to drawing on this knowledge as a possible resource for planning the teaching and learning programme.

### 2.3.2 Motivation

A brief look at motivation is important as this characteristic determines the extent to which the learner is actively and personally engaged in learning. Much has been written about motivation as an influence in language learning (Moyer 1999; Ellis 1994; Gardner & MacIntyre 1991; Skehan 1989; Ellis 1985; Stern 1983; Krashen 1982). As early as the 1950s Gardner and Lambert (1959) studied the relationship between second language (SL) learning and motivation. Their work greatly influenced later studies (Schumann 1978; Krashen 1982). Ellis (1986:117) observes that there is no agreement on a general definition of motivation, or of attitude or of their relationship to one another. For this reason, in this study, these characteristics have not been grouped under a domain nor categorized, and are treated individually.

Crookes and Schmidt (1991:481) define motivation as "the choices people make as to what experiences or goals they will approach or avoid and the degree of effort they will exert in that respect". Another definition of motivation that broadens the concept is that of Oxford and Ehrman (1993:191) who see motivation as composed of four internal factors of attitude and three external factors related to behaviour. The internal factors are interest, relevance, expectancy and outcomes. **Expectancy** has to do with the belief that the learners' involvement will result in success or failure. **Interest** pertains to learners' attitudes, experiences and background

knowledge. **Relevance** has to do with learners' perception that their needs, such as achievement, power and affiliation with other people, are being met. **Outcomes** involve the rewards felt by the learner while learning. The external factors of motivation include decision-making, persistence and level of activity. Learners decide to attend to and engage in certain activities and not in others, persist in activities in spite of interruptions and maintain a high activity level. It appears, then, that attitudes and beliefs play an important role in this view of motivation (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191). Van Lier (1996:99) defines motivation in terms of intrinsic (innate) and extrinsic (environmental) factors. It is generally acknowledged that motivation consists of a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Van Lier 1996:99).

Motivation has been used as "a general cover term - a dustbin - to include a number of possibly distinct concepts, each of which may have different origins and different effects and require different classroom treatment" (McDonough 1981:143). Crookes and Schmidt (1991:470) state that in "second-language acquisition (SLA) theory, motivation is typically grouped together with various aspects of personality and emotion as miscellaneous 'affective' factors that may play a role in acquisition". This idea is supported by Gardner and MacIntyre (1991:58) who contend that attitudes influence motivation in language learning which seems to echo the views of Oxford and Ehrman (1993:191) mentioned above. Motivation is commonly grouped into two main categories, which extend the applicability of the term in different settings, viz. integrative or instrumental motivation.

Gardner and Lambert (1959:268) first distinguished between what they termed integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation exists when the learner wishes to identify with another ethnolinguistic group and instrumental motivation occurs when the learner is goal-oriented and wants to learn a language for utilitarian purposes, such as improvement of social status, career or for educational purposes (Ellis

1994:513; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:173). Integrative motivation has, largely as a result of the studies done by Gardner and Lambert (1959), been held to be superior support for language learning (Crookes & Schmidt 1991: 472).

Yet another type of distinction is made by Van Lier (1996:99) and Ellis (1994:515) who distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. They regard motivation as an interplay between intrinsic (innate) and extrinsic (environmental) factors. Ellis (1994:517) claims that the bulk of research done on motivation has focused on integrative and instrumental motivation and data for these studies have been derived from self-report questionnaires and correlational designs. He argues that intrinsic interest has not been studied, nor has the actual effect of motivation on the learning process. Motivation is associated with effort, choice and voluntary behaviour which indicates consciousness (Moyer 1999:82; Crookes & Schmidt 1991:483).

The micro-level attention / motivation interface is discussed by Crookes and Schmidt (1991:484) regarding input during second language learning. They point out that whatever learners notice or attend to, is what they eventually learn. VanPatten (1996:7) states that learners filter input and that only some of the input presented to learners is processed by learners. VanPatten (1996:7) refers to processed input as *intake* (*vide* 2.2) which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. This is a fundamental concept on which Van Lier (1996:11) bases his Awareness, Autonomy and Authenticity (AAA) curriculum, "to learn something new one must first notice it. Paying attention is focussing one's consciousness or pointing one's perceptual powers in the right direction and making mental 'energy' available for processing". VanPatten's (1996:14) input processing instruction is an instructional method which facilitates the process of awareness or consciousness-raising and is an instructional approach selected for the target group of learners (*vide* 2.2). Many factors are involved in SL acquisition and in spite of good teaching

methods, learning often does not occur for a variety of reasons (Sharwood Smith 1985:3). Factors involving sociolinguistic, attitudinal, motivational, contextual, cognitive and related factors are all relevant in SLA.

The link between attention and motivation is very close (Van Lier 1996:102; Crookes & Schmidt 1991:484). They point out that the cognitive tasks (processing) involved in SL learning are cognitive behaviours associated with motivational behaviour: tasks such as organizing, planning and completing tasks. Schmidt (1994:130) observes that not all attention is voluntary because of constraining factors such as frequency, perceptual salience, skill level, linguistic complexity and task demands. Attention may be involuntary when something captures our attention. Other determinants such as interest, goals, intentions and expectations may determine whether the learner pays attention or not. A significant amount of research has gone into motivation and its influence on language learning and we now know that motivation is "a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that is integral to L2 success" (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:192).

Regardless of the complex nature of motivation, in general, practitioners and researchers alike, agree that motivation is an important resource in the hands of the language teacher and that motivated learners do improve their language proficiency (Van Lier 1996:98; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:192; Carroll 1991:193; Corder 1981:8). Language transfer and motivation are mutually supportive and help to create an optimal learning environment. If learners see the relevance of what they are learning, they will find learning meaningful and their motivation to learn will increase (Ngeow 1998:1). According to Ngeow (1998:1), learners must first be able to recognize opportunities for language transfer and secondly, be motivated enough to take advantage of these opportunities. Thus, being motivated is not enough. A combination of factors such as "intensity of engagement, attention, effort and persistence", are needed for a learner to be motivated (Van Lier 1996:102).

As part of a questionnaire given to learners on the CPP at the start of each year, learners are required to state why they have elected to study English. The target group for this study, indicated that they were highly motivated to learn English for instrumental reasons as they saw the language as a means of personal empowerment and needed proficiency to further their studies successfully. They viewed the language in a wider context and many cited that English connected them to the rest of the world. The following are unedited accounts of the students' responses:

- "Because as we know that English is an international language I wanted to learn it more so that I can know to communicate with different People and so that I can improve my Standard of English."
- "Because English subject is going to help me because in our country most people take English as an official language."
- "I want to be a lawyer and I must know English."
- "I want to know English perfect because is international language."
- "I want English also that I wont get any difficulties when I went to university."
- "After completing my studies I must be marketable."
- "English is my ticket to achieve what I want in life."

Student responses such as these from the target group, seem to indicate that the learners are motivated and that this may certainly be a positive tool in the hands of the language practitioner.

The question now arises: "What is the relevance of motivation for a programme of language learning for low-proficiency tertiary learners?" There appear to be four main sources of motivation in an instructional setting, viz. "materials/teaching; the constraints and rewards involved; the amount of success achieved; and the goals of the student" (Skehan 1989:70). Those



influences on student motivation, which can be manipulated by external factors, should be utilized by the language course developer to ensure maximum positive influence on the learning situation. Such external influences are: classroom activities and materials which stimulate interest and are perceived as relevant by the learner, good stimulating teachers, frequent assessment and careful feedback which is a form of reward for learning (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191; Crookes & Schmidt 1991:488; Skehan 1989:50).

The instructional challenge for the language teacher is summarized by Oxford and Ehrman (1993:200) when they state that "teachers must do everything they can to heighten L2 learning motivation by ensuring that the material and the tasks are communicative, non-threatening, exciting, relevant, appropriately challenging, capable of stimulating successful performance, and presented according to students favoured learning styles whenever possible". The implications of the learner characteristic motivation on this particular programme is discussed in 2.4 below. In short, motivation is the "organismic energy-capital to be spent in the learning market" (Van Lier 1996:102).

As each learner comes to the learning situation with a different level of motivation, so too do their cognitive styles or learning styles differ. The concept of cognitive style is discussed in the next section.

### 2.3.3 Cognitive style

Learning/cognitive styles are the approaches learners use to learn a subject such as a second language (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:192) see cognitive style as "the preferred way in which individuals process information or approach a task". Ellis (1994:499) defines a learning style as "the characteristic ways in which individuals orientate to problem-solving". Cognitive styles should not be discussed as polarities as they occur on a continuum between poles and learners merely present a

predisposition/predilection for a certain cognitive style (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1996:192). Various researchers (Naiman *et al.* 1996:39; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:193; Skehan 1989:40) contend that it is difficult to predict success at second language learning, based on knowledge of a learner's cognitive style. There are other distinctions to be made concerning cognitive styles such as divergent or convergent thinkers, but the distinctions *Field Independence* (FI) and *Field Dependence* (FD) have attracted significant attention in the context of SLA research (Elliott 1995:357; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:193; Ellis 1994:500).

### 2.3.3.1 Field independence/dependence

FI/D entails the extent to which a person perceives analytically. Field independence (FI) is the ability to abstract an element or factor from an organized whole. (Dreyer 1992:25; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:193). FD learners tend to be dependent on the total field and often do not perceive the parts embedded in the field.

FI is also referred to as an analytic learning style and these learners tend to focus on grammatical details and avoid unstructured, spontaneous, communicative activities (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196). These learners may be referred to as 'focusers' who have the ability to focus on one aspect at a time in a sequential manner, whereas the FD learners are referred to as 'scanners' who are able to focus on several aspects at the same time and allow what they have learned to crystallize slowly (Ellis 1994:500). These 'global' learners enjoy social activities using communicative strategies where main ideas are emphasized instead of details (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196). As stated by Ellis (1994:500), many of these distinctions point as much to personality as to learning styles. It is, however, unwise to view a learning style as a direct measurement of personality traits (Elliott 1995:358).

It is proposed that the global (FI) thinkers are not concerned with accuracy and this sometimes results in early 'fossilization' (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196; Skehan 1989:111). In contrast, the analytic (FI) learners who aim for precision and accuracy are prevented from achieving sufficient language practice (Ellis 1994:501; Skehan 1989:111). Oxford and Ehrman (1993:196) refer to FI and FD as the "analytic vs. global parameter". The analytic learners focus on details of grammar and tend to avoid free-flowing activities of communication whereas the global learners use social, communicative strategies that favour main ideas over details.

Some studies (Elliott 1995 Carter 1990; Chapelle & Roberts 1986) have positively related L2 achievement with FI especially with learning tasks which focus on the mastery of grammar structures, linguistic detail and written tasks. On the other hand, the global tendency (FD) which is predisposed to spontaneous, natural conversation and involves sociolinguistic skills leads to effective communication skills in the target language (Elliott 1995:358; Ellis 1994:506; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196).

Besides the global and analytic differences in FI and FD, Oxford and Ehrman (1993) add three more dimensions to differences in learning styles, viz. sensory preferences, intuitive/random learning vs sensing/sequential learning and orientation to closure (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:19).

- Sensory preferences refer to the physical perceptual learning preference of the student. Some students need visual input like reading, pictures or drawings. Other students need auditory input and have difficulty with written work. Yet other students need hands-on input, viz. flashcards, objects, etc.
- Intuitive/random learning vs sensing/sequential learning. These students think abstractly and in nonsequential ways. They draw out the main

principles of how a language works and through this conceive the underlying language system. They are often bored by step-by-step, sequential learning. The sensing/sequential students learn in a step-by-step, organized fashion.

- Orientation to closure. These learners are oriented toward closure and are often "hardworking, organized and planful and have a strong need for clarity" (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:198). These learners avoid spontaneous games or activities without using metacognitive strategies such as vocabulary lists and reviewing of rules. Learners less oriented to closure tend to avoid too much planning and preparation because of a relaxed open approach to learning. These learners do not function well in a structured, traditional (teacher-centred) classroom.

It should, however, be noted that FI/D are not in "complementary distribution and that students are able to exercise both FI/D cognitive styles depending on the task in which they are engaged" (Elliott 1995:358). Learners do tend to demonstrate preference for one style over another, therefore, it is incumbent on the teacher to create activities which allow students to take advantage of both FI/D styles and apply them at will.

The instructional implications of the above learning style differences imply that the teacher should take cognizance of them and accommodate them through multi-sensory, varied lessons that will appeal to a variety of learning styles. The implications for programme development are described in 2.4.

The next section deals with learning strategies and the implications of these on SLA.

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### 2.3.4 Learning strategies

A number of definitions of learning strategies have been used by researchers in the field (Lessard-Clouston 1997:1). An early definition by Tarone (1983:151) referred to learning strategies (LS) as "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language: to incorporate these into one's interlanguage competence". In her seminal study, Oxford (1993:18) describes the function of learning strategies and states that strategies "can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of the new language. Strategies are tools for the self-directed involvement necessary for developing communicative ability". O'Malley and Chamot (1990:1) see second language learning strategies as those behaviours, steps and thoughts that learners use to help them learn and retain new information. O'Malley and Chamot (1990:1) add another dimension to the concept when they state that learning strategies are "special ways of processing information that enhance comprehension, learning, or retention of the information".

It can be seen from the above definitions that a shift in focus has occurred over time. A shift has occurred away from the focus on the product of LS to an emphasis on the processes and characteristics of LS (Lessard-Clouston 1997:2). The use of learning strategies serves to enhance comprehension and learning of a second language and, therefore, warrants inclusion as a learner characteristic which impacts on SLA. Oxford (1990:1) posits that LS "are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement, which is essential for developing communicative competence". Thus, if an important goal of language teaching is for the learner to develop communicative competence, then LS can help to achieve that goal.

In this section, the following aspects are briefly discussed, viz. the effectiveness of L2 strategies in L2 learning, factors that influence the choice of L2 learning strategies and types of L2 strategies.

#### **2.3.4.1 The effectiveness of L2 learning strategies**

One of the most general findings on L2 strategies is that the use of appropriate language learning strategies leads to improved proficiency (Oxford 1993:178, O'Malley & Chamot 1990:2). These findings were based on studies investigating the ways in which 'good' language learners acquired their L2 (Rubin 1975; Stern 1975). The underlying assumption was that these strategies could be identified and gainfully used by teachers and learners alike (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:2). The processes (the use of learning strategies and language proficiency) are mutually supportive and work in a two-directional way.

In the discussion on cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), in section 2.1.1, it was stated that proficiency develops along two continua and that one of the factors influencing this development was the contextual support given to the L2 learner. This fact is emphasized by Lessard-Clouston (1997:2) when he states that for all "L2 teachers who aim to help develop their students' communicative competence and language learning, then, an understanding of LS is crucial". The explicit teaching of learning strategies is one way of providing learners with the contextual support to facilitate their learning and in this way enhance the quality of the teaching. Language LS can be taught, and allow learners to become more self-directed as they acquire the strategies to complete learning tasks. The teaching of LS expands the role of the teacher in that process and not product alone becomes important (Lessard-Clouston 1997:2; Oxford 1990:9). The steps or procedures used in processing the tasks become important steps in the learning and teaching process.

Ellis (1994:555), however, warns against drawing conclusions about language learning strategies and L2 development for three main reasons, viz. studies have varied greatly in the type of learners who were investigated, secondly, a variety of procedures were used to gather data and, finally, the ways in which the outcomes or learning success was measured vary greatly. Another important finding is that good language learners are able to combine a variety of strategies effectively and tailor them for the task in hand (Oxford 1993:179; O'Malley & Chamot 1990:122).

There does appear to be sufficient evidence to validate the effectiveness of strategies in SL learning (Zimmerman & Pons 1986; Cohen & Aphek 1981; O'Malley & Chamot 1990). O'Malley and Chamot (1990:112) summarize these findings and state that some strategies which have "meaningful relationships with second language acquisition were the use of elaborative associations, monitoring (Bialystok 1981), asking questions for clarification, and self-monitoring" (Politzer & McGroarty 1985). The fact that learning strategies are used to perform various tasks implies that the learner makes a choice of what type of strategy to use for which task. There appears to be a connection between learners' individual differences and strategy choice and use (Ellis 1994:545; Oxford 1993:180).

Language learning in a formal context such as this proposed programme, is shaped by goals, plans and teaching strategies whereas developing proficiency is a complex process (*vide* 2.1). In other words, the "development of proficiency in a second language depends on the automatization of processes that are first mastered by conscious effort" (Little 1999:2). This "automatization" was referred to in the definition of proficiency by Cummins and Swain (1986) in section 2.1.1. Thus, the eclectic teaching approach (a communicative and processing-instruction approach based on raising the awareness of the learner to particular forms through meaning-bearing input)

selected for this course, may be conducive to facilitating proficiency as materials and classroom activities focus on explicit teaching of LS. This explicit teaching of LS encourages the raising of learner awareness.

Teaching materials and teaching approach for the proposed programme were selected for the LS training opportunities they afford. The *START* reading text pays specific attention to the explicit training of reading strategies and the *Think Write* text pays specific attention to writing strategies. Both these texts have since been abandoned in favour of *Making Connections: an interactive approach to academic reading* by Pakenham (1994). One of the reasons for the selection of this text was its explicit attention to academic reading strategies.

Schmidt (1994:13) identifies four types of awareness in second language learning, viz. intentionality, attention, awareness and finally, control. Second language learning, in a formal context, is an intentional process of which the success depends on the gradual automatization of tasks that are performed, at first, with a high degree of conscious control and intention. Little (1999:2) identifies the implications for pedagogy. Central to learning is the use of the target language, otherwise learners cannot be expected to develop a capacity for automatic processing of language forms. Secondly, an explicit reflective approach should be used in all classroom activities whether the focus is language learning or language use. The target learners were given (at regular intervals) questionnaires asking them to reflect on their learning (*vide* Appendix A no.6). The idea was to encourage learner reflection as well as provide information to the course designer. Reflective activities were included in the reading and writing components of the course, for example, learners were required to answer questions such as: "Which reading strategy helped you most in this lesson?" The reading strategies were identified and explicitly taught and reinforced through relevant activities.



### 2.3.4.2 Choice of learning strategies

As already mentioned, individual differences such as age, motivation, gender, learning style, learning experience, cultural background and learning task are some of the differences which influence choice and use of learning strategies (Little 1999:1; Oxford 1993:180; Ellis 1994:545).

Age does affect the way that strategies are used. Young learners use simple strategies, while more mature learners use more sophisticated and complex strategies (Oxford 1993:180; Ellis 1994:541). Ellis (1994) gives an example of the type of differences associated with age. Children regard 'rehearsal' as rote repetition whereas adults use more active, elaborate and systematic procedures. Motivation plays a part in the choice of LS as motivated learners tend to use more strategies than less motivated learners. In a study of students from foreign countries in the US, Oxford and Nyikos (1989:294) conclude that motivation is the most significant influence on the choice of language learning strategies (*vide* section 2.3.2). Oxford (1990:10) states that motivation and the acquisition of LS go hand in hand. Many students simply want a good final score and are not interested in acquiring useful skills in the learning process.

Gender seems to influence the use and choice of strategies in that women tend to use more strategies than men (Oxford 1993:180). Ellis (1994:203) reports that men are inclined to use translation strategies more than women in SLA whereas women tend to monitor their comprehension more. Ellis (1994:203) does warn that these gender distinctions are not clear-cut and that questionnaires used in such investigations may not accurately reflect the actual practices that learners follow nor the learners ideas about what constitutes "socially appropriate answers".

The choice of LS is also influenced by learning styles (Oxford 1993:180). Analytic/sequential learners use rule learning, contrastive analysis and the dissection of words and phrases. Learners who favour a global/random style enjoy using strategies, which give them the 'big picture', and include strategies such as guessing, scanning and predicting. These learners tend to risk conversation in the target language using paraphrasing and gestures (Oxford 1993:180; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:196). The choice of LS "involve[s] individuals' unique cognitive, social, and affective learning styles and strategies" (Lessard-Clouston 1997:8). Whatever learning strategies are taught, it is important for teachers "to model such strategies within their classroom teaching" (Lessard-Clouston 1997:7).

Factors such as learner background and learning experience impact on the choice of LS. For example, learners who have had successful language learning experiences tend to use strategies which they acquired in their previous learning experiences and are also able to utilize learning strategies automatically (Ellis 1994:543). Learners' cultural background impacts on choice of strategies, for example, certain cultures lean on rote memorization and other forms of memorization as a LS (Oxford 1993:180). This is discussed in the section 2.3.5 on **prior learning**. This fact does seem to suggest that the language programmer should have an understanding of the prior learning experiences to which the target learners have been exposed so as to assist learners to develop 'new' and more sophisticated learning strategies.

The learning strategies chosen by the learner are influenced by the nature of the language task, for example, ESL learners are reported to use a high frequency of strategies for vocabulary learning and oral drills, whereas the lowest frequency is reported for listening comprehension, inferencing, making oral presentations and operational communication (Ellis 1994:545; Oxford 1993:180). These findings should be treated with caution because a task

may have been represented with infrequent strategy use and "the infrequent occurrence of the task itself in the student's experience" may be the result of low frequency of use (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:122). However, it seems that high levels of strategy use are reported for isolated tasks whereas the lowest strategy use occurs for integrative tasks. Strategies such as compensation strategies (guessing, synonyms or gestures) assist learners to overcome knowledge gaps and help them to continue communicating in an authentic situation (Oxford 1990:9). Cognitive strategies, such as analyzing, memory strategies and the keyword technique, help learners to recall new information (Oxford 1990:9).

However, what seems important here is to remember that SL learning in formal contexts is an "intentional process whose success depends on the gradual automatization of tasks that, at first, [are] performed with a high degree of conscious intention and control" (Little 1999:2). Developing language learning strategies allows for teaching to take an explicitly reflective approach which, in turn, facilitates gradual automatization.

Current research on the selection of strategies by learners has led to, at least, some consensus. It does seem that across age levels "good language learners seem to be adept at monitoring and adapting strategies, whereas poor learners cling to ineffective strategies" (Chamot & El-Dinary 1999:332). In the classroom situation, the teacher is able to guide the choice of LS to suit the specific task, for example, if reading is being taught then specific reading strategies can be taught as part of the classroom teaching. Lessard-Clouston (1997:5) states that this is good educational practice and an approach frequently used by the language teacher in that "the basic L2/FL listening, speaking, reading, or writing course where LS training can enhance and complement the L2/FL teaching and learning" makes for good teaching practice. Lessard-Clouston (1997:5) then outlines a three-step approach to the teaching of LS, viz. the teaching context (learner needs, materials and

teaching approach), a focus on specific LS that are relevant to the learners, selection of materials and one's own teaching style. Lastly, Lessard-Couston (1997:6) encourages teacher reflection and the encouragement of learner reflection. The emancipatory action research nature of this research is aimed at reflecting critically on course implementation and development. This involves learners' reflecting on their own learning in the course and on their classroom learning activities. Although learners were not specifically asked about their LS, they were encouraged (through activities) to reflect on the learning strategies used for a specific task (*vide* 4.6). Learners are taught, for example, specific strategies for dealing with unknown vocabulary.

It is necessary to look briefly at types of strategies at the disposal of the SL learner so that these may be accounted for in the instructional setting.

#### **2.3.4.3 Types of strategies**

In education, learning strategies have become organized under various names and classified in various ways. Terms such as learning skills, thinking skills and problem-solving skills are terms/categories used in various educational settings (Oxford 1990:2). This is indicative of a lack of consensus pertaining to the definition and categorizing of learning strategies.

There is no agreement as to what constitutes a learning strategy and therefore the identification and classification of such strategies will vary (Ellis 1994:558). There is, however, acknowledgement for O'Malley and Chamot's (1990:119) distinction between cognitive, metacognitive, social/affective, compensation and memory strategies, which is now widely accepted (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:93; Oxford 1990:21).

Oxford (1990:71) outlines three main types of language LS. These are, firstly, memory strategies which "aid in entering information into long-term memory

and retrieving information when needed for communication". Secondly, Oxford identifies cognitive strategies and, thirdly, metacognitive strategies. These strategies are often used together in effective language learning (Oxford 1993:179; O'Malley & Chamot 1990:105).

Cognitive strategies entail procedures such as repetition and summarizing and translating (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:105). Ellis (1994:536) defines cognitive strategies as "the steps or operations used in problem-solving that require direct analysis, transformation or synthesis of learning materials". The use of cognitive strategies is linked to the performance of particular learning tasks (Ellis 1994:536). Cognitive language LS "are used for forming and revising internal mental models and receiving and producing messages in the target language" (Oxford 1990:71).

O'Malley and Chamot (1990:137) view metacognitive strategies as those which involve thinking about the learning process, planning for learning, monitoring the learning task and then assessing how well one has learned. These strategies include previewing, planning, self-management, self-monitoring, problem identification and others such as self-evaluation. Metacognitive strategies include three main categories, viz. centring one's learning, arranging and planning learning, and evaluating learning. Metacognitive strategies "help learners exercise 'executive control' through planning, arranging, focusing, and evaluating their own learning" (Oxford 1990:71). Ellis (1994:538) defines metacognitive strategies as strategies that "make use of knowledge about cognitive processes and constitute an attempt to regulate language learning by means of planning, monitoring, and evaluating". Examples of such metacognitive strategies are planning, organizing and self-evaluation (O'Malley & Chamot 1993:179).

Cognitive strategies are those which assist the learner in interacting with material to be learned, applying a specific technique to a learning task and

manipulating the material mentally or physically (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:138). These strategies include repetition, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, deduction/induction, substitution, elaboration, summarization, translation, transfer and inferencing. Cognitive strategies seem to share a common function, viz. that of manipulation or transformation of the target language by the learner and are typically the most popular with language learners (Oxford 1990:43).

Social and affective strategies involve social interaction with another person and assisting in a learning task using affective control. Such strategies include questioning for clarification, co-operation, self-talk and self-reinforcement (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:139). The term *affective* refers to emotions, motivation and attitudes which are a crucial component in language learning (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95, Oxford 1990:140). The affective domain is a complex one as it is like a net "encompassing such concepts as self-esteem, attitudes, motivation, anxiety, culture shock, inhibition, risk-taking and tolerance for ambiguity" (Oxford 1990:140).

What emerges from research is that effective learners use a greater variety of strategies and use them in ways that help them complete a task successfully (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:140). Good learners effectively use their prior general knowledge and prior linguistic knowledge while working on a learning task (O'Malley & Chamot 1990:141). This is supported by Chamot and El-Dinary (1999:332) who state that effective language learners focus on using "background knowledge and inferencing to understand a text". It follows, then, that learners who have a limited general knowledge, schemata and linguistic knowledge could experience difficulties in the application of learning strategies. Programme developers should pay attention to assisting learners in the process of acquiring adequate learning strategies. This may be one of the instructional implications for a programme of language learning for low-proficiency learners, but there are others. What does appear evident from

current research (Sparks & Ganschow 2001; Chamot & El-Dinary 1999; Ehrman & Oxford 1995) is that SLA may be facilitated through instruction of language learning strategies.

No programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners can be planned without some insight into the prior learning experiences of the target group (Silva 1994:18). A knowledge of their prior learning assists the programmer in determining the needs of the learner group (*vide* section 4.2).

### **2.3.5 Prior learning**

*Prior learning* refers to all the learners' learning experience and includes their previous, formal language learning experience. The language needs of the target population have been shaped, in part, by their scholastic deprivation. It is therefore important to discuss (a) their scholastic background (b) their socio-economic background and (c) the impact that these factors have on L2 development of students on the Career Preparation Programme.

#### **2.3.5.1 Scholastic background of target group**

As the majority of learners on the CPP come from schools which previously fell under the Department of Education and Training (DET), it is necessary to discuss the educational implications resulting from being part of this particular schooling system. The Department of Education and Training was home for all schools attended by black learners in the previous political dispensation.

In South Africa we have a situation where English was chosen as the language of learning in all schools in the old Department of Education and Training (DET). Learners at school level are learning academic skills such as reading and writing, in a language which is foreign to them.

One of the most damaging legacies of the apartheid era stems from the obvious inequalities in South African education. For many black children, education is characterized by difficult learning conditions, inadequately qualified teachers, and a language of instruction other than their mother tongue (Miller, Bradybury & Pedley 1998:103). The reasons for under-preparedness for tertiary study are most likely a result of a combination of factors such as lack of language proficiency, background and scholastic deprivation.

In a study done on the counselling needs of the target learner group, Strydom (1997b:85-86) used quantitative, as well as qualitative methods to obtain data regarding the counselling needs of this group. The quantitative methods used were biographical questionnaires; and standardized tests such as the General Scholastic Aptitude (GSAT) and the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT). Standardized inventories were used such as the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI) and the Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI). The qualitative methods used were open-ended questionnaires and focus group interviews.

Strydom (1997b:103-105) does, however, carefully outline the dangers of drawing conclusions from data collected in this way and he states that, "psychometric measurement is not reliable in a context where the backgrounds, learning histories and educational opportunities differ both within and between the various student populations in South African higher institutions". He concludes, however, that, in spite of this, there is a significant correlation between data collected in this way and the prediction of academic success. Strydom's corpus of data (1997b:137) reveals that the group has a poor academic record which may have resulted in a lack of self-confidence. He found that 60,4% of the group had failed a school subject at some stage in their school career. The learner group themselves all felt that they lacked the necessary study skills which would ensure success at tertiary



level: this too may account for a lack of self-confidence. The results of Subtest 4: The English Reading Comprehension of the AAT indicated that learners had a below average English reading comprehension level (Strydom 1997b:152). The fact that students lacked self-confidence and admitted to low language proficiency must certainly impact on their performance on academic tasks. This perception is confirmed by Foster and Leibowitz (1998:90) in a case study on Second Language Acquisition and Academic Literacy: "We would like to argue that this limited proficiency and lack of confidence has an impact on students' essay writing at the tertiary level".

Strydom (1997b:139) found that 82,7% of the students felt that their matriculation results were not an adequate reflection of their potential. This perception is underscored in a wider context by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI Report 1993:136) whose research revealed that teacher qualifications, teacher/pupil and teacher/classroom ratios, as well as facility provision such as books and other instructional material varied greatly among the then education departments. Thus learners coming from the now defunct DET are clearly a disadvantaged group and matriculation results achieved by this group do not reflect the true potential of these learners. All the students on the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) come from the old DET education system: a system notorious for its dogged addiction to traditional teaching methods which continue to persist in many schools (Seligmann 1999:75). Learners come from an educational background where they were treated as passive recipients of knowledge. Paulo Freire (1972:52) refers to this traditional model of education as a "culture of silence". This is a culture that does not encourage learner enquiry nor active learner participation, and it is essentially teacher-centred.

In a study of the needs of black teachers enrolled for a distance education course at Promat College (a non-governmental organization in Gauteng),

Seligmann (1999:74) defines the role of the teacher in a traditional education model as follows:

The teacher's task is to 'fill' the students by making 'deposits' which he or she considers to constitute true knowledge. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. Education becomes an act of depositing in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. This presents a static view of consciousness as it transforms students into receiving objects.

The prior learning experience of these learners has led them to believe that their role in the learning process is a passive one where they are 'fed' all they need by the teacher. This conclusion is supported by Strydom (1997b:152) in that he found that the learners in this group relied on their lecturers to ensure their success and did not see their own role as active in the learning process. Thus, any language programme for this learner group will have to engage in building their self-confidence and changing their attitudes from that of passive receivers to active participants in the learning process.

As already indicated above, for many students deprivation is more complex than simple scholastic deprivation. It entails socio-economic deprivation as well, with resultant effects on preparedness for tertiary study. It is, therefore, important to look at the impact of their socio-economic situation so as to gauge its impact on their preparedness for tertiary study.

### **2.3.5.2 Socio-economic factors and preparedness**

It is important that, when discussing prior learning, the discussion should include informal education (in the home). Many parents of these learners are simply not able to afford the books and other materials needed to create a

culture of reading at home. Thus, learners from this background may have little experience of independent reading which, in turn, impacts on "specifying the levels of reading ability that constitute successful learning in a given curriculum" (Grabe & Stoller 2001:3). This is particularly so with the learner group involved in this study where many of their schools may not have had a library as a source of reading material.

Strydom's research (1997b:135) revealed that the majority of the learners on the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) at the UFS are from single-parent homes (usually mother) where the mother works all day to support the children. The learners indicated that they were all worried about finances. This may indicate that their informal education may have suffered as a result of these socio-economic conditions. Learners were probably not exposed to the kind of informal education which would prepare them for academic study. Kriegler (1990:420) points out that "it is not low socio-economic status as such which causes low achievement, but rather the lack of informal motivation and teaching to read which characterises the socio-economically deprived home". Morrow and Paratore (1993:195) confirm that a strong correlation has been found between poverty and illiteracy. Many children labelled 'dyslexic' might in fact simply be book deprived.

A problem-solving or focus group session was held (Nov. 1997) for all lecturers/co-ordinators who run the various subjects on the CPP to determine what the constraining factors were in the way of achieving our learning outcomes (results). All co-ordinators unanimously pinpointed the learners' lack of English proficiency and their lack of general knowledge as the two biggest constraints (*vide* Appendix B no. 1). The learners' lack of background knowledge impacted on their ability to achieve success across all fields of study. A language programme for this group of learners should address the language problem as well as the learners' lack of background knowledge or knowledge of the world.

### 2.3.5.3 Implications for tertiary learning

Nunan (1989:69) states that the learner's observed ability in language skills is an important learner characteristic to consider when planning content for a language programme. The following questions define what he means: "What is the learner's assessed level in the skills concerned? Does this assessment conform to his/her observed behaviour in class?" (1989:69).

These questions clearly point to the learner's previous or prior learning. Lightbown and Spada (1993:21) refer to the learner's metalinguistic awareness which implies an understanding of how languages work. Lightbown and Spada (1993:19) state that the learner's general knowledge of the world is vital to second language learning, because "this kind of knowledge makes it easier to understand language because one can sometimes make good guesses about what the interlocutor is probably saying even when the language carrying the message is very difficult". All of the above seem to indicate that the tertiary learner comes to the learning situation with a plethora of skills which have been established in school learning. Ideally, schooling has heightened metalinguistic awareness and established at least some knowledge of the world which is then utilized by the learner in the tertiary situation.

Learners have two bases of knowledge to draw on in the language acquisition process. These are their knowledge of their first language (L1) and the L2 input they receive (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:56; Carson *et al.* 1990:246). It follows then, that knowledge of the learners' English language proficiency and literacy levels provides guidelines for where to begin instruction and how to proceed (Carson *et al.* 1990:248). By literacy level is meant the comprehending and composing of texts. The text is where reader and writer interact (Eskey 1993:223).

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:205) contend that progress in SL learning is deeply affected by learners' command of their mother tongue and whether learners are literate or not. They cite the research of Cummins (1984) who examined age difference and the influence of L1 and L2 on academic language development. The development of L2 is partially dependent on the L1 academic language (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:205). There appears to be an underlying proficiency which enables the learner to transfer academic literacy skills across two languages. If this is true, then the level of development of the mother tongue as an academic language will impact directly on the learner's ability to acquire a second language of learning. Kapp (1994:27) bases her argument, of the difficulties which ex-DET learners experience, on the findings of Cummins and Swain (1986) and states that "transferring cognitive skills to a second language is made easier if literacy-related skills have been adequately developed in the first language through a gradual learning process conducted over a number of years". If, as noted above, learners are acquiring academic literacy in a language other than their mother tongue and this learning is inadequate, then this will have serious implications at tertiary level.

It is argued by Kapp (1994:27) that many South African students do not acquire sufficient language skills at school that equip them to cope with linguistic demands at university. Several researchers (Kapp 1998:65; Slabbert 1994:39; Blacquièrè 1989:76) argue that educational disadvantage is often attributed to lack of linguistic competence. They agree that cultural knowledge is taught and acquired through the medium of language and it is through language that we gain our knowledge of the world. If this cultural knowledge is not adequately acquired, it has devastating implications for reading and writing acquisition.

The problem for these learners is further compounded in that learners' medium of instruction at tertiary institutions (and school level) is English which is not their mother tongue. Du Toit (1997:159) aptly describes the complexities of the situation in that "unfamiliar content, originating in unfamiliar cultural tradition, must be acquired in an unfamiliar language".

Research done on the reading skills of first-year students at the University of Natal, revealed that students from schools previously administered by the DET showed a significantly slower reading speed and lower reading comprehension than students from a more privileged schooling background (Blacquière 1989:78). Blacquière deduces what the lecturers' expectations will be on campuses where the medium of instruction is English but where significant numbers of non-mother-tongue students attend: "Not only will they expect that the students sitting in their classes will understand what they are saying in lectures, but also that they will be able to cope with a 'normal' first-year reading load".

Blacquière (1989:79) contends that speakers of African vernaculars as a home language often require academic support because their "primary and secondary education has been so impoverished that they have missed out on the academic experiences which are necessary to develop some of the concepts and schema they need to deal with tertiary studies. Put another way, they are intellectually undernourished" (1989:78). This "undernourishment" of school leavers is borne out by other local studies such as that of Seligmann (1999) which was referred to earlier. Whether this undernourishment is simply due to a lack of linguistic competence or whether other factors are contributing, poses yet another problem for those of us involved in devising programmes of academic support.

Another view is expressed by Miller *et al.* (1998:103) who state that difficulties experienced by under-prepared students are that their 'African'

culture does not facilitate the interpretation and comprehension of texts created in a predominantly 'Western' culture. This ties up with the idea expressed by Seligmann (1999:76) that many countries which have an oral tradition have the common characteristic of being multilingual and have a spoken rather than a written language and culture. Culture is therefore transmitted through face-to-face transmission. Learning often occurs through storytelling in a natural setting where feedback is immediate. She goes on to point out that this contrasts sharply with print-oriented societies where libraries and book production play an important role. A culture of reading would be unfamiliar to learners from such a culture (Seligmann 1999:5).

A student coming from an oral culture will have difficulties with the written forms of assessment demanded at tertiary institutions. Seligmann (1999:77) explains: "Consequently our general practice of giving written formal tests and examinations suggests a serious cultural bias in favour of Western concepts of academic achievement. Furthermore, the dependence of students on printed materials alone may be pedagogically inadequate in so far as it limits the range of teaching or learning strategies". This is the same finding which was outlined by SAIDE in their report on the results of the feasibility study done prior to this study. Learners need classroom support in an environment where they are given explicit skills instruction with needed contextual support, such as LS, to cope with the demands of an academic context (*vide* 1.4). As pointed out in 2.1.1, *proficiency* is facilitated by contextual support.

According to Ong (1982:42), there are fundamental differences between the ways that primary oral cultures manage knowledge and verbalization and the ways that these are managed in cultures rooted in literacy. Seligmann (1999:76) makes the point that a relevant language programme would have to assist students to make the necessary transitions required for academic learning. Whatever the chosen viewpoint on the factors that contribute to the

deprivation of students, clearly the lack of proficiency in the language of learning is a serious one which has to be addressed. Academic discourse is largely based on the production and reception of texts and, as a result, the role of background knowledge or previously acquired knowledge becomes important.

If a learner lacks general knowledge of the world or if this knowledge is limited as a result of bad schooling and other environmental factors, then this deficiency impacts on the learner's academic reading ability. Again, the kind of world knowledge required in a Western-type educational setting, may not have been emphasized in cultural settings where printed information is not deemed important. Very closely linked with cultural factors and background knowledge are what are known as schemata. Hudson (1998:185) defines schemata as "knowledge structures that the reader brings to the text". Anderson and Pearson (1988:37) define a reader's schemata as "knowledge already stored in memory". One may distinguish two kinds of schemata, viz. formal schemata and content schemata. Formal schemata refer to the background knowledge the learner has of books and the rules which govern both spoken and written language. Content schemata refer to a knowledge of those concepts of the world around us, in other words, pre-existing knowledge structures stored in the brain. Each reader's schemata organizes his/her knowledge of language and the world. Thus, the reader's ability to understand a written text is based on prior knowledge. Prior linguistic experiences, semantic knowledge and general knowledge are all vital to the learners who have to cope with academic reading (Basham, Ray & Whalley 1993:300).

Reception theorists (Jauss 1982; Iser 1976) point out that the reader brings his/her own meaning to the text and this influences the reader's comprehension of the text. In short, without a knowledge of "life, language and literature" (Kilfoil 1992:2), the learner would have great difficulty



comprehending a "new" text. Kilfoil (1992:7) states that schemata involve content, which refers to information about the topic and culture-specific aspects; and also to format which is the rhetorical organization of the text. For the second language (L2) reader, the existing knowledge framework of schemata has a significant influence on reading proficiency. In a discussion on the effects of schemata on L2 reading performance, Hudson (1998:183) states that a 'short circuit' in the good reader's system is caused by a limited control over the language". Thus, even those readers who are good readers in their L1, experience comprehension difficulties when reading in their L2 as a result of low language proficiency.

Local researchers (Welthagen 1994:62; Hirsch 1989:22) stress the importance of a culture of literacy when it comes to building background knowledge or schemata: "A problem for many African children is that their parents, for a number of reasons, are illiterate. Although parents desire literacy for their children, they do not always understand why things are done the way they are in schools" (Welthagen 1994:62). The lack of writing skills of learners from disadvantaged backgrounds is another very serious obstacle to academic success (*vide* 4.4.3).

The reading/writing connection is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, but it is relevant here to mention this vital connection so as to illustrate the deprivation of learners who come from a background where this link was not emphasized through an integrated teaching approach at school level. Underpinning the reading-writing connection is the proposition that reading and writing are integrally linked as skills and that a correlation exists between effective readers and effective writers (Reid 1993:15). This link has already been suggested in the definition of literacy presented above. Effective writers have to demonstrate that they can control content and sentence structure, as well as all the lexical and other features required for language proficiency. Reid (1993:15) points out that reading and writing share the same cognitive

processes, and refers to Rosenblatt who called this relationship the "transactional paradigm". The same schemata referred to in the section on reading, come into play in the writing process as the writer actively discovers, reconstructs and interprets meaning with the written text becoming the "essential link" between the writer and the reader (Reid 1993:15).

A very direct comparison can be made between the interpretative community of the reader and the discourse community of the writer in that both require the sum total of all experience and knowledge to be brought to bear on the process.

In the preceding section, the prior learning of the target group was reviewed, and as a result of their scholastic deprivation, many of these learners did not obtain matriculation exemption which would ensure tertiary access. For this reason, many of the students were out of work and unable to access any institution of tertiary learning before joining the CPP programme (Strydom 1997:125). Thus, many fall into the category of young adults, which necessitates a brief look at this learner characteristic.

### **2.3.6 Age**

The majority of students are in the young adult phase of development as they fall into the age group of between 20 and 30 years and their average age is 20 years. This was revealed by a demographic profile of the CPP group of 1997, Fig. 2.2. A preliminary survey using a sample of 100 of the 185 (59,5%) of the CPP students produced the following results:

**Figure 2.2: Results from a preliminary survey of CPP students**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Home Language</b>
Distribution	36%	64%	Southern Sotho 58% Tswana 23% Xhosa 12% Zulu 4% Afrikaans 1% English 1% Ndebele 1%
<b>Age</b>			
Range	16-30	17-32	
Mean	20	20	

(Adapted from Khabanyane &amp; Francis 1997)

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:154) stress the importance of the issue in that an understanding of age in relation to SLA will impact on the choices made for learning mechanisms and classroom processes. Age and how this influences the choice of learning strategies was discussed in 2.3.4.2. and will, therefore, not be discussed here. There are several other age-related issues which impact on SLA (Ellis 1994:489; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:134).

Our focus is on the young adult learner in this study. The results of optimal age studies appear to be as controversial as the results of studies on any

other learner characteristic (Lightbown & Spada 1993:41; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:155; Stern 1983:361). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:155) conclude that clear patterns emerge when one has sorted long-term studies from short-term ones. They state that "older is faster, but younger is better" (1991:155). Ellis (1994:489), on the other hand, adds that early immersion groups show higher levels of attainment than learners who started learning the second language at a later stage. McLaughlin (1992:2) points out that the proficiency requirements of the young child are very different from those of adults. These requirements would be particularly different in an academic context. There is not sufficient evidence to claim that younger is better as factors such as formal learning instruction versus informal learning have to be considered. Ellis (1994:489) states that "formal learning environments do not provide learners with the amount of exposure needed for the age advantage of young learners to emerge".

Two main arguments are used in the age-related debate. These are, firstly, the argument that language learning is an innate ability which disappears with age (Ellis 1994:493; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:198; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:164). The second argument is a neurological one and proponents of this argument believe that changes occur in the structure of the brain at a certain age which affect learners' abilities to acquire L2 grammar and pronunciation (Ellis 1994:494; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:198). Cerebral maturation is said to bring about a loss of plasticity (Ellis 1994:494).

Opposing arguments focus on the fact that older learners, can and do, achieve higher levels of SLA than younger learners. Ellis (1994:489) states that the results of studies investigating this claim are "not supportive of the claim that children's level of attainment is greater than that of adolescents/adults". Ellis (1994:489) contends that too many variables exist to provide conclusive proof. One reason for doubt may be that formal learning settings "do not provide learners with the amount of exposure

needed for the age advantage of young learners to emerge". A common conclusion seems to be that adult learners have an initial advantage in terms of rate of acquisition of grammar, syntax and morphology, but that younger learners are more likely to achieve native-like proficiency and pronunciation (Ellis 1994:491; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:199; McLaughlin 1992:3).

An interesting contribution is made by Ellis (1994:490) who states that older learners do benefit from prior literacy experiences in that they have established reading and writing skills to draw on in the process of SLA. If this is true, then an older learner group from a prior learning environment where reading and writing skills have not yet been acquired, may experience great difficulty in a tertiary setting where academic communicative tasks are based on reading and writing.

The demographic profile of the learners given above (Fig. 2.2) reveals that the majority of the learners are female, and this profile therefore requires a brief look at gender as a learner variable.

### **2.3.7 Gender**

The term *gender* is used in preference to sex as gender emphasizes the social construction of 'male' and 'female' instead of the biological distinction (Ellis 1994:202). Much research has been done in the field of SLA concerning "the choice of strategies females and males employ for language learning" (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:199). Gender and the choice of learning strategies were briefly mentioned in 2.3.4.2, but need more clarification here as embedded, contextual support in the form of learning strategies is an important tool in the hands of the programme designer for a target group with low proficiency (*vide* 2.1.1).

Women use significantly more learning strategies than men and they use them more often than men do. Men do, however, demonstrate equivalent use of strategies after strategy training has taken place (Ellis 1994:204; Oxford & Ehrman 1993:199; O'Malley & Chamot 1990:106). A South African study done on learner variables which investigated the use of learning strategies by Afrikaans-speaking first-year students at Potchefstroom University, reveals similar results. The females in the group used strategies more often than their male counterparts and females made more frequent use of leaning strategies compared to male participants (Dreyer & Oxford 1996:72). This fact does seem to imply that any SL programme should include strategy training so as to provide males and females equal opportunity for success. It is important, however, to gain information on the social and cultural context of the target student group before any conclusions can be drawn about preferred learning strategies and gender (Kaylani 1996:88).

In countries such as Jordan where girls are required to be obedient as this character trait makes them eligible as marriage partners, girls are more likely to use "the strategies taught them by their teachers" (Kaylani 1996:85). Social approval is extremely important to girls from cultures such as the Jordanian. Girls will, therefore, be more likely to follow teachers' advice on learning strategies as a means of gaining approval. This need to be socially acceptable may be one explanation "for female students' willingness to use strategies sanctioned by the teacher" (Kaylani 1996:86). This may be a contributing factor in the target group.

Gender interacts with other variables in L2 development (Ellis 1994:204). Females do not always outperform men in, for example, Asia where women stay at home and rarely come into contact with English speakers. Their menfolk, on the other hand, interact with English speakers in their job situation on a daily basis. "Sex interacts with such factors as age, ethnicity,

and, in particular, social class" (Ellis 1994:204). Thus the position/role of the women in a cultural grouping does have bearing on their opportunity for L2 development and should be acknowledged by the programme planner. The young women from the target population come from a traditional setting where many are obliged to do domestic work and care for young children which would mean that they have less opportunity to communicate with groupings other than those in their immediate environment (Strydom 1997b:135).

In traditional communities women do a large part of the work in the home and within the family. Thus, the amount of time available to them for learning is severely limited: "There is a danger that literacy programmes and their outcomes will mean even more work for women" (Fordham *et al.* 1995:25). Strydom (1997b:135) found that the majority of learners in this target group come from single-parent homes where that parent works all day. It is a safe assumption that the young women on the CPP programme will have household chores to perform. Any programme developer planning a programme for this group will have to set homework tasks that allow for this in terms of time required to complete the task.

Ellis (1994:202) posits that two distinct principles have been identified by research into SL acquisition and gender-related differences, viz. that "men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women", and secondly, "women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men". Ellis (1994:202) concludes that "both principles suggest that women might be better at L2 learning than men; they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from target-language norms". O'Malley and Chamot (1990:106) refer to the fact that females use learning strategies more often than males and females use a wider range of strategies which substantiates the gender-related findings of Ellis (1994) stated above.

The last learner factor that needs to be discussed is intelligence and how it impacts on SLA.

### **2.3.8 Intelligence**

Research has pointed to a link between intelligence and second language learning (Lightbown & Spada 1993:36). Recent studies reveal that certain kinds of second language abilities may be linked to intelligence. Lightbown and Spada (1993:37) refer to studies done in Canada, which point to a correlation between reading, dictation, and writing tasks and intelligence levels. Intelligence does not seem to relate to oral productive skills. Ellis (1994:498) confirms that there is a low correlation between intelligence and listening comprehension and free oral production, but a much higher correlation between reading, writing and dictation.

The study by Strydom (1997:143), alluded to earlier, collated the results of an IQ test done on this learner group. He views the results as a general indication of the learners' scholastic aptitude and he concludes that the group has a below average scholastic aptitude. He adds a cautionary note: "Since the GSAT norms were constructed by using samples of non-environmentally disadvantaged pupils, it cannot be regarded as an estimate of environmentally disadvantaged students' intelligence as is the case in this study. Their performance on the intelligence scales is therefore an underestimation of their intelligence and is rather an indication of their general scholastic deprivation" (1997:143).

It should be noted that researchers (Gardner 1989; Roper & Davis 2000) in the field of developmental psychology and neuroscience favour the idea of multiple intelligences. Roper and Davis (2000:4) refer to Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences, stating that any global measurement of intelligence is



too crude a measurement to be of use to the educator. It generalizes across many faculties (intelligences) or the test samples are not representative of the different intelligences. Roper and Davis (2000:5) hold the view that education needs to draw on these intelligences so as to maximize learner potential. This view suggests that learners bring a wealth of potential to the learning situation on which the educator should capitalize.

Lightbown and Spada (1993:37) make the point that the so-called intelligence measured by IQ tests plays a less important role in the instructional situations where a communicative approach is used as this approach provides opportunity for sufficient practice in authentic communication to ensure skills transfer. A communicative approach which stimulates learners to use authentic communication through, for example, communication-gap exercises, is a useful means of encouraging learning (Ellis 1994:283). Such an approach combined with comprehensible input and input processing as discussed in 2.2 above, may provide learners with the opportunity of acquiring language skills (Ellis 1994:602). Therefore, a proposed language programme would have to accommodate this need for an eclectic teaching approach in the classroom situation.

#### **2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT**

It is necessary to summarize the overall implications of the above theoretical discussion on proficiency and learner characteristics on the development of a language and literature programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. Language proficiency is viewed in terms of the communicative tasks needed by learners in an academic context. The main focus of this programme is to facilitate SLA through teaching methods, materials and classroom activities which provide learners with a variety of opportunities to maximize their potential. Learners bring with them different learner characteristics which may facilitate or hinder the learning process. It is the job of the language

programme to draw on these learner characteristics when planning a programme of language learning. The implications for programme development are as follows:

- A programme of language learning at tertiary level should focus on the development of, among others, academic reading and writing skills as these are the skills the target group need in their present context, viz. the academic context (Blue 1993:11; Eskey 1993:224, *vide* 2.1.2);
- The use of a combined input processing and communicative teaching approach (*vide* 2.2) is favoured for this group as this approach accounts for the interactive nature of the four language skills and enables the teacher to focus learners' attention on the conventions and features of discourse necessary for academic communication (VanPatten 1996:63; Brown 1994:29);
- Learning tasks should be completed in pairs according to the principle of collaborative learning as it is integral to the communicative teaching approach (Brown 1994:29, *vide* 2.2);
- Motivation facilitates learning and there are several ways of maintaining motivation. An exchange of learner/lecturer expectations for the course has to be officially convened where each party expresses their expectations of the other. When learners know what is expected of them, they are better able to meet those expectations and success stimulates motivation (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, *vide* 2.3.2). It is important for any academic programme planner to take cognizance of the learners' expectations and then to make sure that these expectations are met, within reason, and within the context of the programme. Unrealistic expectations should be dealt with in a period of thorough orientation to the programme of study. Academic readiness entails a shared overall outlook and experience with regard to education and is shaped largely by the learners' formal and informal learning experience. The learners' expectations will differ accordingly (*vide* 2.3. 5.1). Much has been written

- about the mismatch of expectations between student and academic staff (Jordan 1997; Bloor & Bloor 1991; Greenall & Price 1980);
- Thorough course orientation should be done to ensure that learners understand the relevance of the language and literature components and their relevance to the motivational goals expressed by the learner group (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Regular monitoring of students' class attendance and test results is necessary so as to pick up on problems or to encourage where necessary. This ensures that good learning and teaching relationships are fostered and facilitates motivated learning (Skehan 1989:50, *vide* Appendix A no. 12b, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Continuous assessment should be implemented. This type of assessment should be cumulative so that learners are able to monitor their own progress and, is consistent with the principles of feedback, frequent assessment and reward (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191; Crookes & Schmidt 1991:488; Skehan 1989:50, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Regular weekly meetings with tutors/facilitators on the programme should be scheduled to ensure that they are informed and remain motivated. These meetings should provide a platform for discussing problems that they have encountered (Van Lier 1996:218, *vide* 2.3.4.1);
  - Classroom materials should be interesting and authentic to broaden learners' general world knowledge, sustain motivation and expose learners to a variety of genres. (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191; Crookes & Schmidt 1991:488, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Language learning styles vary; therefore, the programme developer should attempt to accommodate this variety, for example, analytic-style students enjoy rule learning, contrastive analysis and analyzing words and phrases, whereas global students use those strategies that will give them the global view, viz. guessing, scanning and predicting. A variety of interesting classroom activities and materials should be planned that will appeal to a

- variety of learning styles (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95; Oxford 1993:180, *vide* 2.3.3);
- Varying learner aptitude levels should be accommodated through the provision of a variety of tasks, teaching material and an emphasis on strategy training (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95, *vide* 2.3.1);
  - Proficiency should be facilitated by encouraging the use of appropriate learning strategies which provide learners with contextual support required to facilitate *proficiency*. The teaching of learning strategies provides the learner with opportunities for active, self-directed involvement (Ellis 1994:198, *vide* 2.1.1);
  - Encourage the use of specific LS such as reading strategies and make learners aware of how these can facilitate their learning through an orchestrated use of strategies (Oxford 1993:183). Thus, a reading task would include such strategies as, for example, previewing, activating background knowledge, scanning, skimming, summarizing and post-reading. Such strategies would then form an integral part of classroom instruction (*vide* Appendix A nos 18a and 18b). Once the language programmer is sensitized to the variety of learning styles and subsequent strategies favoured by learners, then a systematic inclusion of a broad selection of strategies may serve to enhance comprehension and learning and provide the contextual support to facilitate proficiency (Chamot & El-Dinary 1999:323, *vide* 2.3.4);
  - Achievable student learning objectives should be set to maintain motivation and facilitate the learning process (*vide* 2.3.2, Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191); and
  - Older learners, such as the target group, should not be limited in the challenges presented to them. Older learners should be presented with relevant, authentic materials and tasks to encourage maximum opportunity for SLA (Ellis 1994:489, *vide* 2.3.6).

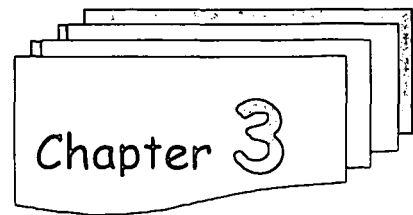
## 2.5 CONCLUSION

The development of a language programme at tertiary level requires a multi-faceted approach. It requires thorough knowledge of the learners and the context. This task is made more complex if the learners are from a disadvantaged scholastic background where they have not been afforded the opportunity to achieve the required language proficiency level in their language of instruction.

The programme developer has to define the concept *proficiency* within the academic context based on the communicative tasks that the learners are required to perform. The teaching approach is based on this definition of proficiency, which, for purposes of this study, is communicative competence with its favoured communicative language teaching approach combined with input processing, where attention is focused on form through meaning-bearing input which, in turn, are embedded in authentic classroom activities. Thus, a combination approach to teaching is used.

A study of SL learner characteristics leads to valuable insights regarding those learner variables which inform the learning process and guide the teaching procedure. Each of these characteristics influences the learner to a greater or lesser degree and possible negative influence is counteracted in the choice of materials and teaching approach selected for the programme.

In this chapter we have considered second language learner characteristics and how these may or may not be potentially useful in the SL acquisition process. However, the insights can only be useful once mediated by what is meant by second language acquisition. The next chapter will present an overview of relevant theories on second language acquisition whose implications for the proposed language programme were investigated.



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## SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LEARNING THEORY

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter dealt with the concept of proficiency in an attempt to inform the goal-setting process as well as the choice of teaching approach for the target group. SL learner characteristics facilitated an awareness of learner needs which, in turn, led to instructional guidelines. The process of developing and implementing a language course for low-proficiency learners requires an understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) and second language learning (SLL).

Corder (1981:7) states that efficient language teaching "must work with, rather than against, natural processes, facilitate and expedite rather than impede learning". This chapter focuses on theories and research of SLA and SLL, which will facilitate and inform the implementation of a programme of language learning within a very specific context, viz. the academic context. The rest of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of relevant theories and research in SLA such as interlanguage (IL), error correction, input, classroom interaction and learner participation. Finally, the discussion focuses on how these constructs impact on programme development and implementation.

### 3.1 DEFINITION OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The terms 'acquisition' and 'learning' need to be defined as the concepts are shrouded in controversy (Ellis 1994; McLaughlin 1987).

Krashen (1985:1) contends that the adult SL learner has two different ways of achieving competence in the SL. Krashen (1985:1) sees acquisition as subconscious and involving the same process as children utilize in the acquisition of their first language. Learning, on the other hand, is a conscious process, which results in knowledge about language usually gained in an instructional setting. Acquisition occurs in spontaneous, natural communication for meaning and learning occurs in a classroom setting with feedback and formal instruction (McLaughlin 1987:20). It is not the setting as such that distinguishes acquisition from learning, but the conscious attention to rules (Krashen 1985:1). Although Krashen's distinction does highlight SLA setting and process, several researchers (Ellis 1994:14, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:6) use the term interchangeably. Krashen's distinction between SL that is acquired and SL that is learned is problematic as it is difficult to determine whether knowledge that learners have gained is learned or acquired (Ellis 1994:14). Van Lier (1996:43) emphasizes the difficulty of distinguishing between acquisition and learning when he states that "language learning is the cumulative result of sustained effort and engagement over time, with continuity being central". Van Lier (1996:43) believes language development actually occurs between classroom sessions and not during them.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:6) see "acquisition as the superordinate term for all settings". There is a view that SLA may develop regardless of context. VanPatten (1996:49) maintains that SLA is "concerned with how people learn

a language other than their first. This can be any language in any context...". He states that SLA investigates questions that "ignore any classroom-versus-nonclassroom distinction in that the internally driven development of a second language does not change with context" (VanPatten 1999:50). SLA research concerns itself with those factors that shape the learner's developing linguistic system. Thus, SLA research focuses on acquisition as an independent, individual phenomenon. Kramsch (2000:314) defines SLA in terms of those variables which lead to outcomes. Kramsch (2000:314) observes that applied SLA research focuses on the teaching and learning of a second language with a concern for the identification of learner, teacher and curriculum variables which will lead to successful learning outcomes.

Kramsch (2000:315) adds that SLA research concerns itself mainly with the process of acquisition (learning) in natural settings or instructional settings. Thus, this last definition of SLA has a broad scope as far as setting is concerned, and the terms acquisition and learning are used synonymously. As pointed out by Van Lier in his view of SLA/SLL, it would be contentious to assume that learning which occurs in natural settings is subconscious and learning that occurs in instructional settings is conscious. Acquisition and learning can be both conscious and subconscious in both settings (Van Lier 1996:44). It cannot be decided, on behalf of each student, exactly what learning should take place in which learning situation. SL learners 'filter out' what they do not need, but this does not mean that all other input is filtered out. Van Lier (1996:53) states that "the emphasis should be on providing a rich variety of exposure-language and to let the students pick what they need". Thus, the distinction between acquisition and learning is not a pronounced one, and acquisition-replicating learning experiences could occur in the context of a conscious learning context.

Kramsch (2000:315) extends her description of SLA to being interested "in the nature of these learner languages and their development throughout life,



as well as in the nature of bilingualism, language attrition and loss". The learner's developing language system or interlanguage (IL) is a focus in her definition of SLA. This definition emphasizes the importance of the learners' interlanguage, the setting or environment in which the learning takes place and those variables which lead to successful learning outcomes. It is necessary to formulate the SLA approach taken in this study with a view to programme application.

The target group comprises tertiary learners who are expected to perform academic communicative tasks in an academic context and simultaneously improve their proficiency level. Whether SLA occurs consciously or subconsciously, the language skills which are the focus of a language programme should be useful to the learners in their context (Van Lier 1996:45). It is the concern of the programme developer to facilitate SLA and, based on choices informed by an understanding of language proficiency and SL learner characteristics, a combined teaching approach has been selected. A communicative approach is taken where interactive, integrated language tasks, based on authentic communication, are combined with comprehensible input and input processing (Van Patten 1996:34). Attention is paid to both form and meaning, since "input processing is concerned with how learners make form-meaning connections when attending to input" (VanPatten 1996:47). Thus, finding ways and means of directing learners' attention to form in input without loss of meaning is axiomatic to the SLA approach used in this study. Since the scope of SLA research is wide, it is necessary to establish a framework within which to discuss relevant components of SLA.

### **3.2 SCOPE OF SLA RESEARCH**

Questions explored in SLA research are: "To what extent do adolescents and adult learners draw on their natural language endowment or universal grammar and to what extent do they need formal instruction? What is the

nature of learners' developing linguistic systems as they try to approximate the native speaker norm? What kind of rules do they make for themselves as they go along? To what extent are language structures transferred from the L1? What is the role of input and interaction in the development of interlanguage?" and other related questions (Kramsch 2000:315).

Yet another framework for the scope of SLA is posited by Ellis (1994:17). The first area is the study of the characteristics of learner language as a source of information. Secondly, information is gained from a study of learner-external factors such as context of acquisition and the input and interaction which the learner experiences. Thirdly, findings are gleaned from research on "learner-internal mechanisms" which deal with how learners use their internal (mental) resources in communication. Finally, information is gained from a study of how individual learner differences influence SLA. Thus, the learners' interlanguage (IL), as well as the input and interaction the learner experiences, are important factors to consider when discussing SLA (Ellis 1994:18).

In sum, the above discussion, which attempts to define SLA and outline the scope of research, highlights the enormity of its range and the subsequent difficulty of selecting relevant theory for discussion. Our concern is mainly with research pertaining to formal/tutored language acquisition and those factors which shape the learners' developing linguistic system (VanPatten 1999:50). The learners on the CPP programme have been assigned four hours of class time per week for tuition. If learners are to acquire and use linguistic forms, then these forms have to become part of their developing system or IL (VanPatten 1996:56). Thus, an important component for a discussion on SLA for purposes of this study should include an overview of research on *IL development*. As a teaching approach based on comprehensible input has been chosen, it is relevant to include a discussion on *input* and how this influences SLA. *Error correction* is included in this framework because of its

possibilities for performance enhancement. Grabe and Kaplan (1996:407) refer to error correction as evaluative feedback which should be used as a learning tool. *Learner participation* included in this discussion as a learner-centred focus, is a goal of this study.

### 3.3 INTERLANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Interlanguage (IL) is the term coined by Selinker (1992) to describe the learner's developing linguistic system. Littlewood (1984:33) describes IL as "a continuum between the first language system (which constitutes the learner's initial knowledge) and the second language system (which is his target). [We] can say that at any given time, the learner speaks an interlanguage (IL) at some point along this continuum".

The term IL implies an "autonomous linguistic system" (Sharwood Smith 1994:7) which is at an intermediate stage of development. IL is the language that you can observe and record as it is used by the learner. Sharwood Smith (1994:8) also uses the word learner language interchangeably with IL. The term *interlanguage* denotes not only the internal, linguistic system that the learner constructs at a certain point in time, but also refers to the series of interconnected systems that typify the learner's progress in time (Ellis 1994:350).

Interlanguage studies constitute the first major attempt at explaining the internal factors involved in SLA and early interlanguage studies started by examining learners' errors (Ellis 1994:351; Sharwood Smith 1994:22; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:81) in an effort to facilitate language teaching and to discover how people learn second languages. Through these studies, insight has been gained into how language learning can be facilitated.

Eisenstein (1989:ix) states that variations in the learner language are "dynamic yet consistent and lend themselves to study and systematic description". His study revealed that "aspects of the second language have been found to be unevenly acquired and are differentially reflected in particular contexts or settings" (Eisenstein 1989:ix). Thus, IL is characterized by variability which may be unsystematic and unstable, but can be systematically variable as well (Sharwood Smith 1994:89). This variability serves as an impetus for language development (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:86).

Research (Sharwood Smith 1994:89; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:81) reveals that besides variability, IL is characterized by systematicity which means that IL is, in part, rule-governed and learners draw on the rules they have made their own (Ellis 1994:352). This gives us some idea of the acquisition process as IL evolves over time (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:83). The fact that IL evolves, is systematic and rule-governed, implies that IL can be systematically changed through, for example, instruction or acquisition (1991:83). Thus, learners are constantly in a process of constructing their own grammars, and learner utterances can only be regarded as erroneous with reference to the norms of the target language, but not with reference to the norms of their own grammars (Ellis 1994:352). The IL continuum is (as mentioned above) dynamic and consists of a number of overlapping grammars. Each of these grammars "shares some rules with the previously constructed grammar, but also contains some new or revised rules" (Ellis 1994:352; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:86).

Another substantive finding resulting from IL studies is that IL is influenced by the learners' L1 (Sharwood Smith 1994:46; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:81). This influence takes the form of modifying rather than altering learners' IL (Jordens 1995:11; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:106). Larsen-

Freeman and Long (1991:106) identify six fundamental ways that the learner's L1 modifies the developing IL. These are:

- The L1 can delay the fluent acquisition of a sequence;
- Where an abrupt movement to the L2 requires too great a change, the L1 provides access to a sub-stage in the form of an approximation to an IL structure;
- The L1 serves to accelerate the passage through a sequence where there is a great difference between a developmental structure and the L1;
- Where the domain of one language has been grammaticized and the other has not, it prolongs the period of error commission; and
- The L1 can extend the scope of a developmental structure.

Thus, the influence of the L1 is not an altogether negative influence on SLA, and differences between the L1 and L2 may actually serve as an impetus for IL development.

An understanding of how learners make connections between the L1 and L2 may enable teachers to structure meaningful classroom encounters and input to take advantage of these abilities (Gass 1995:38). For example, learners in the target group often use the word *stay* when they mean *sit* which is an indication of L1 interference as one word is used for both meanings in Nguni and Sotho languages (*vide* Appendix A no. 12a). This comment was made by one of the facilitators who is herself a speaker of an African vernacular. This distinction may be pointed out to learners. Classroom time may, alternatively, be given to pointing to relationships rather than dealing with structures separately (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:110). A list of some of these errors caused by L1 interference is given in Appendix A no. 12a. Facilitators teaching on the programme were requested to make a list of the most common errors made by their students. These errors were discussed and circulated at a facilitators' meeting. Errors relating to L1 interference were

noted and pointed out to learners by all facilitators. This was done to make learners aware of the differences between their IL and the TL and the influence of their L1.

A relevant consideration for teaching based on the above insights into IL, is error correction. As mentioned in Chapter 2, learner performance is based on the linguistic and pragmatic knowledge learners have and how they use this knowledge to produce and comprehend discourse. Thus, errors or deviations from the norm become opportunities to raise learner awareness as the errors are an inevitable feature of the learning process (Ellis 1994:70). Teacher and learner response to errors is a valid consideration in any proposed programme of language learning.

### **3.4 ERROR CORRECTION**

Error correction (EC) or error treatment is concerned with the way that teachers respond to learner errors (Ellis 1994:701). The focus of this section is to determine what is meant by an error in the learner's IL and then to suggest ways of responding to such errors from a pedagogical viewpoint.

An error occurs when the learner's language deviates from the standard norms of the target language (Sharwood Smith 1994:4). The term 'error' is misleading as it merely calls our attention to the "difference between the learners' own system and the system of the native speaker and makes a negative value judgement about it" (Sharwood Smith 1994:5). Whatever real SLA occurs through error correction is dependent on several factors such as the nature of the task, the nature of the interlocutor, when error correction takes place, and the form the error correction takes (Ellis 1994:70; Sharwood Smith 1994:6). Error correction also takes place in a process of interaction and negotiation. Interaction and negotiation are central to SLA because in negotiation "the learner is focusing on linguistic form, and that focus, or

specific attention paid to linguistic form, is the first step toward grammar change" (Gass 1997:101). Language tasks involving the exchange of information require negotiation and Tarone (2000:192) claims that "a task which [has a] student-student [focus] involves more negotiation than one which is teacher-fronted". Thus, a teaching approach, where interaction and negotiation of meaning is encouraged and central to the teaching, would facilitate the development of the IL, and hence SLA.

In a study done on the error correction of non-native speakers (NNS) (Japanese) learning English, Gass and Varonis (1989:84) conclude that the degree of SLA achieved through error correction is dependent largely on the task involved and the nature of the interlocutors. The term 'nature' refers to whether the interlocutors are NS or NNS, experienced or inexperienced or have a high or low status in the eyes of the learner. Much corrective feedback, in the classroom context, is done verbally by the teacher. This form of feedback assumes the facilitation of language learning.

Carroll (1995:77) argues that error correction, in the form of verbal feedback, is largely irrelevant to the on-going communicative event in which it occurs. Corrective feedback is no longer useful when the communication has already taken place. It is clear that error correction is complex, and yet it is through close analysis of learners' 'errors' that we learn "most directly about what the current learner system is" (Sharwood Smith 1994:61). The learner system is expressed in terms of performance. Analysis of learner performance informs us most directly of the state of the learners' IL. The implications of performance analysis for the language programme developer are what VanPatten (1996:84) refers to as input enhancement. Input enhancement refers to any attempt by teachers or classroom materials to give certain features of input more prominence for learners. Thus, any effort aimed at focusing learners' attention on form is called input enhancement. It is, however, not consistent with processing instruction merely to focus on form,

but rather to provide plenty of opportunity for "consistent form-meaning mappings in activities" (VanPatten 1996:84). Classroom activities and materials selected should, therefore, provide ample opportunity for exposure to form-meaning patterns. If SLA is to occur, then the developing IL should be provided, repeatedly, with examples of this nature (form-meaning connections). This is consistent with input processing, which is the teaching approach selected for this programme of learning (*vide* Appendix A 18-25 for examples of form-meaning classroom activities).

Edge (1989:17) suggests that the word error or mistake should be regarded as synonymous with 'learning step' where the error correction becomes a way of providing learners with information that will support their learning. Edge (1989:18) contends that it is "the teacher's job to help the learners improve their English, and sometimes this is best done by not correcting". This is the conclusion reached by several other researchers (Carroll 1995:77; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:229; Dulay *et al.* 1982:35). The idea behind this finding is that over-emphasis of correction of form hampers fluency and communication. Edge (1989:20) contends that learners "need the experience of being listened to as people with things to say". The strong communicative approach to SL teaching does not emphasize grammatical correctness, but tends to encourage learners to achieve their communicative purpose (Allwright & Bailey 1994:85). The combined input processing/communicative approach taken in this study, not only encourages authentic communicative interaction, but also includes "delivering form-meaning connections as intake to the developing system" (VanPatten 1996:85). It is clear from this comparison of two teaching approaches that error correction is shaped by the selected teaching approach. An important component of the English programme is for learners to acquire the conventions of expository essay writing. Learners are required to follow the whole process of academic writing: Think - Discuss - Think (in pairs) - Plan (all of this is done in class) - Write - Read (partner) - Revise - Edit (at home). Only then is the final copy



handed in. Their essays are given a mark out of 20, of which only 4 marks account for grammatical errors, spelling and punctuation. The rest of the total is awarded for content, organization and clarity. Thus, the focus of error correction is not on grammatical errors, but on textual organization. These essays are based on a passage of reading and a topic emanating from the passage. Thus, a meaning-bearing academic activity is used to encourage correct usage.

There are different types of errors such as those that influence meaning, viz. minor grammatical errors and attempts (when learners have not yet learned the language necessary to express what they want to say) or slips of memory (Allwright & Bailey 1994:91; Edge 1989:22).

There are mainly two reasons why learners make errors (Johnson 1996:122). These are that learners either do not have the appropriate declarative knowledge (knowing or learned knowledge) or that they have "some aberrant knowledge". Another reason for errors may be a lack of procedural knowledge (ability to process). Thus, teachers cannot assume that learners recognize these errors as 'wrong', but these form part of their current system of IL rules (Allwright & Bailey 1994:92). Johnson (1996:123) identifies four steps in error correction. These are:

- the learner must have the desire to eradicate the error;
- a model of a correct form is used in 'real operating conditions';
- a realization by the learners that their performance was deviant; and
- an opportunity to practise under 'real operating conditions'.

Second language learners receive mainly two kinds of feedback from their teachers, viz. cognitive feedback which is feedback about language use, and secondly, affective feedback which involves emotional reactions to utterances (Allwright & Bailey 1994:94). Learners need clear, cognitive guidelines

together with positive, affective feedback so as to prevent fossilization so that they see a reason for changing their output. In other words, in feedback we have to provide information that will be relevant to a learner's interlanguage. This feedback information will have a performance-enhancing impact when the information allows the learner to modify his/her rule system.

A brief comment has to be made about fossilization. Fossilization takes place when learners stop learning "while their internalized rule system contains rules different from those of the target system" (Ellis 1994:703). This phenomenon has caused much research, resulting in controversy, and has become a persistent problem for researchers into SLA (Selinker 1992:251). Fossilization does not seem to have a single cause, and internal as well as external SLA factors play a role (Ellis 1994:354). A result of research into fossilization is that "there is nothing in the SLA literature to suggest that some effects of fossilization cannot be bypassed in the learning/teaching process if emphasis is placed on communicative abilities in context" (Selinker 1992:252).

Two guidelines for the treatment of errors are currently favoured. The first is that errors should be treated in a way that is compatible with learners' interlanguage development (where learners themselves are able to spot their own flaws, as this will coincide with the stage of their IL development). The second is that self-correction is more conducive to SLA than any other form of error correction (Johnson 1996:127; Ellis 1994:586). This is attempted in several ways (two are mentioned here) on the CPP English programme (Cycle 3), viz. learners write reading reactions every week which count towards their continuous evaluation (*vide* Appendix A 18 and 19). The reading reaction is based on the reading of a graded reader. These reactions are written in rough and then brought to class where learners exchange reactions and through a process of peer marking are guided to spot their own flaws. The same is done with the expository essay. Ellis (1994:586) adds, however, that both

the above-mentioned guidelines need empirical support before they may be accepted as conclusive.

A recurring theme in almost every aspect of SLA is learner motivation. Here, again, this learner variable is relevant. Learners need to have intrinsic motivation to model accepted linguistic usage. Moreover, the language teacher can help by setting tasks which require and encourage grammatical correctness (Johnson 1996:124). Learners are not automatically aware that they have made an error and must be supplied with a model in the form of appropriate feedback. Learners need to see the mismatch between the flawed and the model performance (Johnson 1996:127). Johnson (1996:127) concludes that it "may be left up to the students themselves to note and learn what they will from the comparison". The approach taken by processing instruction is that "it assists certain processes that can aid the growth of the developing system over time" (VanPatten 1996:84). As we do not know what kind of grammatical knowledge is contained in the developing language system, we cannot assume that explicit knowledge leads to implicit knowledge. VanPatten (1996:85) refers to "enriching " the subconscious intake of the learner. Cook (1991:100) adds the reminder that everything "the teacher does provides the learner with opportunities for encountering the language". For this target group, an approach of comprehensible input has been selected, viz. exposure to extensive reading at their level of comprehension, through a programme of graded reading.

One of the teacher's vital forms of input is error correction, and how she does this will be shaped by the selected teaching approach. The efficacy of that error correction will depend largely on learner motivation, whether the EC is compatible with the learners' IL development, and how effectively the teacher manages to effect self-correction by the learners. The errors that learners make are a valuable tool in the hands of the teacher as they indicate the state of the learners' IL and may act as a spur in the acquisition process. As

comprehensible *input* is one of the cornerstones for this language programme, it is relevant to discuss input.

### 3.5 INPUT

SLA can only occur when learners have access to L2 input. This input may occur in written or spoken form (Ellis 1994:26). Sharwood Smith (1994:200) refines the definition of input to "observable, potentially processible language data relevant for acquisition". Input becomes intake if learners process it and it becomes knowledge. Van Lier (1996:45) prefers the term exposure, viz. language that surrounds the learner. Input is language that the learner hears or sees and which is used to communicate a message (VanPatten 1996:6).

According to Van Lier (1996:50), the issues around input, exposure and the role of the learner, have been clouded by research. He (1996:50) contends that much research does not account for the difference between exposure and input, and the active role of the learner has been neglected in much of this research. Not only must the learner be exposed to the TL, but the language or input must be usable to the learner. Van Lier (1996:45) identifies three characteristics which make language usable, viz. "when the learner can make sense of it, is receptive to it and makes an effort to process it". Quantity of exposure to input, alone, is not sufficient to facilitate SLA. The quality of that exposure/input is a determining factor in language development (Van Lier 1996:47). More discussion on what is meant by quality exposure/input follows later in this section.

Input is of crucial importance to educators who wish to manipulate the classroom environment to maximize L2 learning (Rosa & O'Neill 1999: 521; Ellis 1994:243; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:128). There are several factors which affect the learners' linguistic environment in the classroom and hence impact on SLA. These factors include the effect of deviant input, input

frequency, input modification and comprehensible input (Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991 128-143). Ellis (1994:269) explores input in terms of the input/interaction relationship, and distinguishes four broad categories, viz. the impact of frequency of input on IL development, comprehensible input and how collaborative discourse aids SLA. The discussion here focuses on those aspects of input which pertain directly to the classroom, viz. deviant input, input frequency, input modification and comprehensible input. This section is followed by a discussion of classroom interaction, the forms it takes, and how the learner negotiates meaning.

### **3.5.1 Deviant input**

Research (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:129) seems to suggest that the impact of persistent deviant or ill-formed input on the developing IL may be negative. Deviant input is ungrammatical. Learners may be exposed to deviant input during interaction with their classmates or the deviant input of a teacher whose proficiency level is low. Sufficient evidence (Ellis 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991) exists to conclude that learners are not disadvantaged by exposure to deviant input from their peers in the classroom situation. The same is not, however, true of consistent deviant input by the teacher (Ellis 1994:599). Ellis (1994:272) suggests that it is possible that "input and transfer work jointly to shape interlanguage development". The learner engages in a process of searching for correspondences in form between his/her NL and the SL. Thus, those learners who have consistently been exposed to ungrammatical input will acquire at best, a marked, substandard variety of the target language" (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:129). Learners can, therefore, be negatively influenced by consistent deviant input by the teacher and may end up acquiring a pidginized variety of the SL (Cook 1991:89). This has bearing on the target group of this study in that their prior learning was conducted in English, which is not their L1, by teachers

who were themselves, often, not proficient (*vide* section 2.3.5 on prior learning).

The implications of deviant input by the teacher may be far-reaching. Not only does the learner not hear the correct forms of the target language, but a teacher with low language proficiency will not be able to use evaluative feedback (written or spoken) as an effective teaching intervention because of his/her lack of the necessary proficiency (Van Lier 1996:47). Input from the teacher will not serve to "enrich" the subconscious intake of learners (VanPatten 1996). Another component of *input* is the frequency of input and the influence this has on the developing IL.

### 3.5.2 Input frequency

The frequency hypothesis states that the order of SLA is influenced by the frequency with which linguistic items occur in the input (Ellis 1994:269; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:133). The focus of this hypothesis is on the relationship between input and accuracy. Studies (Rosa & O'Neill 1999:546) testing this hypothesis have revealed conflicting findings, and it "is possible that frequency may be more important at some stages of acquisition (for example, elementary) than others, but no clear conclusion is possible on the basis of these studies" (Ellis 1994:272). Linguistic items, such as articles, have a high frequency in ESL input and yet are acquired late (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:134). The difficulty of acquiring the system of articles in English is underscored in the research of Young (1996:135), who states that "articles are the most frequent forms that are available to learners in input, the difficulty that learners experience in using them appears at first sight, surprising". He adds, however, that articles are a very complex system to acquire and the complexity is related to the ways in which meaning is mapped onto form in the English article system. Frequency of articles in input given to the learners does not ensure transfer (Young 1996:135).

Clearly, frequency of input is one of many factors relevant for SLA to occur, for example, input must be meaning-bearing for learners to acquire their L2. "[W]ithout meaning-bearing input learners cannot build a mental representation of the grammar that must eventually underlie their use of language" (VanPatten 1996:5). A study investigating the type of exposure or input to which learners were exposed (which included frequency), and the effect of input on intake of differing levels of awareness on SLA, was done by Rosa and O'Neill (1999:546). Rosa and O'Neill (1999:546) conclude that learners who noticed/were made aware of specific linguistic input in formally instructed conditions performed better than control groups exposed to the same linguistic input. Paribakht and Wesche (1999:195) refer to a combination of frequency and "input processing" for SL vocabulary acquisition to be successful. They (1999:195) define input processing as the process through which learners attend to unfamiliar linguistic features in context.

Thus, accepting that SLA is facilitated by a multiplicity of factors working together, there does seem to be sufficient evidence to claim that frequency does influence SLA (Ellis 1994:272). Frequency of input does influence linguistic development and the underlying conclusion is that familiarity "breeds automaticity" (Day & Bamford 1998:16). Automaticity is an important aspect of proficiency (*vide* 2.1.1) and according to the definition of proficiency outlined by Cummins and Swain (1986), proficiency is dependent on how much the learner is able to automatize. The next section covers input modification which is yet another influence on the developing linguistic system.

### **3.5.3 Input modification**

One cannot discuss SL input without touching on input modification, as this is a technique used frequently by teachers and NS to facilitate communication. Input modification implies "manipulating the range of structures and

vocabulary items" in reading materials and spoken input to facilitate NNS comprehension (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:134). The idea behind this type of manipulation in a teaching situation is that comprehension and thus learning are enhanced (Ellis 1994:274; Long 1983:126).

Input modification involves three general processes, viz. simplification, regularization and elaboration (Ellis 1994:254). *Simplification* takes place when NSs simplify the language they use. *Regularizations* involve the use of linguistic forms that are regarded as basic or more explicit, and *elaboration* involves lengthening sentences to clarify meaning (Ellis 1994:254; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:139). *Elaboration* and *regularization* aim at simplifying L2 processing and may result in language that is not simple in itself and, therefore, may include linguistic input that SLLs have not yet acquired.

The beneficial effects of various elaborative and interactional modifications on SL comprehension have been substantiated (Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:139). It has not yet, however, been proved that the beneficial effects of interactionally modified input result from the greater quantity of input or better quality of input (input made accessible through negotiation of meaning) (Ellis 1994:276).

Several other factors influence the extent of the input modification, viz. learners' proficiency levels and learners' age. The lower the proficiency level, the greater the effort to communicate and therefore the more use that is made of various modification techniques. It should be noted that input modification occurs spontaneously in the process of trying to communicate and is referred to by Van Lier (1996:129) as audience design.

Linguistic modification, which occurs in texts such as these found in graded readers, is often considered non-authentic input. These texts are not regarded as examples of genuine language and are, therefore, not



representative of real-world communication. Widdowson (1979:80) states that a piece of real-world language such as a newspaper article, which is introduced to the classroom, only becomes inauthentic if we require learners to perform inauthentic tasks such as memorizing it. If the tasks set on the piece of language are appropriate and aimed at facilitating learning, then those tasks lend authenticity to the passage (*vide* Appendix A 23-25 for tasks set on a magazine article). The primary criterion for authenticity is, however, intrinsic merit and not "the mere fact that their audience is the learner rather than the native speaker" (Van Lier 1996:137).

Authenticity of materials may, however, be important and relevant when:

- texts are linguistically distorted and are not representative of the target language;
- learners are, in fact, able to deal with texts aimed at native speakers;
- learners prefer a variety where they can choose the level of the text with which they wish to engage; and
- the learner is forced to deal with the target language on a daily basis such as immigrants in an English-speaking country (Van Lier 1996:137).

In sum, it seems that input modification in teacher talk and in classroom materials may facilitate language acquisition, depending on the aim and tasks set. Selection of modified texts such as graded readers should be carefully done to ensure that the texts have intrinsic merit. The discussion of Input Modification and its influence on SL comprehension is closely related to a much debated environmental factor, viz. that of the role of comprehensible input and SLA.

#### **3.5.4 Comprehensible input**

Much research has emanated from the concept that comprehensible input (CI) drives L2 acquisition (Ellis 1994:273; Sharwood Smith 1994:106; Long

1985:378, Krashen 1981:101). Comprehensible input is input that is understood by the learner, and "comprehension may be at the heart of the language acquisition process: perhaps we acquire by understanding language that is 'a little beyond' our current level of competence" (Krashen 1981:103). The real issue "is the amount of intake the acquirer can get" (Krashen 1981:116). It is the "intake-rich" SL classroom which is the best environment for the SLL. Krashen (1981:116) does not clarify the concept of intake other than to say that intake is "simply where language acquisition comes from, that subset of linguistic input that helps the acquirer acquire language" (1981:101). Krashen also does not clearly define what is meant by comprehensible input other than to state that input is comprehensible when it is meaningful and understood by the learner (McLaughlin 1987:43).

Comprehensible input alone, is not the only factor driving L2 acquisition (VanPatten 1996:6; Ellis 1994:278; Sharwood Smith 1994:106). There are differences in the ways that learners process input because acquisition and comprehension are different processes. In spite of exposure to CI, some learners may evidence only partial acquisition of the grammar of a language because that input has not been processed by the learner. Some input, however, assists learners to interpret meaning and other input helps to advance the learner's interlanguage in that the learner is encouraged to process the input. A breakdown in comprehension often triggers acquisition in that learners reassess the current IL and the drive to comprehend input "is crucial for their further development" (Sharwood Smith 1994:106). Thus, the learners' drive to understand input may lead to their paying close attention to syntactical properties in order to access meaning (Allwright & Bailey 1994:121). VanPatten (1996:7) points out that learners 'filter' input and only some of the input is processed by the developing linguistic system. VanPatten (1996:7) refers to that which is processed by the developing system as *intake*. It is clear that comprehensible input alone, as already

mentioned, is not a sufficient condition for language acquisition to take place (Van Lier 1994:289; Ellis 1994:289; Sharwood Smith 1994:106).

As already stated in section 3.5.3 on IM above, the quality of the input as well as the usability to the learners, are important facilitators in the acquisition process. Learners need access to input that has meaning for them and which they are motivated to learn (Ellis 1994:289). This crucial role of CI in SLA is succinctly summed up by Van Lier (1996:45) who states that input or exposure-language is "usable when the learner can make sense of it, is receptive to it, and makes an effort to process it". Simply exposing learners to a quantity of CI does not ensure SLA, as it may be that "the effort made by the learner to comprehend the input, fosters development" (Allwright & Bailey 1994:121). The motivation/attention interface was briefly discussed in the previous chapter (2.3.2). The learners themselves play an important role in the acquisition of language through CI. The learners' prior learning, attitudes, analytical abilities and motivation (*vide* section 2.3) are important contributing factors in the SLA process and will largely determine the use made of CI (Van Lier 1996:45; Ellis 1994:289).

Quality of input significantly affects the influence of input on SLA. Comprehension is one factor that contributes to quality of input, but how the learner is assisted to use that input, and the learner's own motivation to use the input, are contributing factors (Van Lier 1996:46).

Clearly, there are more factors involved in the accessibility of input than comprehension and the factors mentioned here. Factors such as socio-cultural circumstances and degree of comprehension contribute to the accessibility or otherwise of input (Van Lier 1996:47). The focus here is on CI as it pertains to the classroom, and although these factors may play an indirect role, only those factors which have direct bearing on the classroom situation are discussed here.

The above discussion on input has emphasized a variety of factors relating to classroom input and its relevance in the SLA process. Input is crucial to language learning and, as summarized above, should be carefully planned by the programme developer of a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. Input planned for the classroom should be meaning-bearing, selected on intrinsic merit, accompanied by form-focused tasks and should provide stimulating content so as to maintain learner interest. Modified input is productive if it occurs during classroom interaction where the learners have to negotiate meaning for themselves. If interaction involves engaging learners in a process of making meaning, "it is the interaction itself which is productive" (Allwright & Bailey 1994:121).

In a formal instructional setting, various forms of interaction occur, viz. teacher and learner and learner and learner. It is necessary to discuss these forms of interaction as they are an important form of input on the learners' developing IL. The following section deals briefly with classroom interaction.

### **3.6 CLASSROOM INTERACTION**

Classroom interaction is the result gained from implementing a planned syllabus with a selected teaching method as vehicle within the context of an encouraging classroom atmosphere (Ellis 1994:573). The question is whether such classroom interaction facilitates SLA or not. Input in classroom interaction takes a variety of forms, viz. teacher talk, learner participation and small group work (Zuengler & Brinton 1997:263-265). Negotiation of meaning occurs when speakers collaborate to come to a mutual understanding so as to generate comprehensible input (Ellis 1994:261). Several methods of negotiating meaning were mentioned in section 3.5.3 on modified input. Classroom input and its potential to allow for the negotiation of meaning are discussed below.

### 3.6.1 Teacher talk

Research (Zuengler & Brinton 1997:263-265; Allwright & Bailey 1994:148; Ellis 1994:583; Wong-Fillmore 1985:17) indicates that teachers display a sensitivity to the proficiency levels of their learners and modify their speech in different ways to facilitate communication with their learners. Teacher talk involves structuring, soliciting and reacting. Structuring of the learning process, soliciting learners' responses and reacting to learners' responses are involved in teacher talk. Teacher talk is one of the primary ways that teachers convey information and control learner behaviour (Allwright & Bailey 1994:139; Petersen 1997:163).

It is the teacher who sets up conditions for learning, and the teacher's ability to structure group and pair work is critical because these techniques and activities are implemented through teacher initiations. The teacher should have clear strategies for response and should explain these clearly to learners (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998 :146). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998:146) state that the teacher can minimize misunderstanding by taking the following steps:

- Explain clearly the "philosophy of response" to be used throughout the year. As mentioned in 2.4, a thorough orientation is necessary at the beginning of the year. Explanation about feedback and teacher response to that feedback may form part of this orientation;
- The types of response used in feedback should be explained clearly; for example, written responses by the teacher to learners' expository essays should be explained orally in a plenary session so that there is no confusion about what is expected for this task and outcomes should be specified and explained clearly;
- The teacher should "state and restate that students are encouraged to ask questions if they do not understand" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998: 146) the teacher's responses or explanations; and

- Students should be encouraged to analyze and reflect on the teacher's feedback. This can be done with a simple question and answer spot-check.

Thus, teacher talk is a critical component in the structuring of learner freedom to learn in the classroom.

In studies done by Wong-Fillmore (1985:23-58) on the characteristics of successful teacher talk as input to facilitate SLA, she concludes that language learning does occur when teachers modify their input, and "through their efforts to communicate with learners provide them enough extralinguistic cues to allow them to figure out what is being said.... and when the situation is one that allows learners to make astute guesses at the meaning of the language being used" (Wong-Fillmore 1985:35).

The use of repetition and set patterns or routines for a lesson also characterize successful teacher interaction as input for SLA. Routine usage, such as a greeting at the start of every lesson, focuses learner attention on structural regularities in the target language as well as on familiarity with when to use them (Allwright & Bailey 1994:141; Wong-Fillmore 1985:39). Allwright and Bailey (1994:140) add a cautionary note when they state that language which the teacher uses in the classroom is unlike the language that learners will encounter outside the classroom. Teacher talk is often related to statements, imperatives, questions and comprehension checks, which the L2 speaker may not encounter outside the classroom and includes many other forms of interaction.

It is, however, not clear at this stage what constitutes optimal teacher talk or on what basis teachers make modifications to their talk (Ellis 1994:583). The conclusion to be drawn from the above is that a learner-centred classroom will have to accommodate learner participation so as to provide opportunities for genuine communicative practice. Learner participation is an important

form of interactive classroom input which needs discussion, as active participation of learners is one of the goals of the proposed language programme.

### **3.6.2 Learner participation**

Learner participation in plenary classroom settings is restricted to responding only (Allwright & Bailey 1994:139, Ellis 1994:592). It would seem, then, that learner participation may be restricted in the L2 classroom. Ellis (1994:592) states that there is no existing evidence to suggest that "the extent to which learners participate productively in the classroom affects their rate of development". There seems to be no way of telling whether participation causes learning or proficiency causes participation (Allwright & Bailey 1994:132; Ellis 1994:592). What does seem clear is that learners' degree of participation vary and non-participation may not be an indication of lack of learning. Allwright and Bailey (1994:147) state that learners "will speak when they are ready and that learners rather than teachers should make the decision". Learners are at differing stages of interlanguage development and therefore different expectations of participation should be placed on learners.

The quality of learner participation is a key factor in L2 acquisition (Ellis 1994:594). Factors which influence quality are opportunities where the learner has a certain degree of control, and where a wide variety of linguistic items are produced as opposed to one-word or short-phrase answers in response to a teacher-controlled lesson. Learner control is planned in the learning activities given to learners. Activities should be designed to "engage the learner in using the language communicatively or reflectively in order to arrive at an outcome" (Ellis 1994:595). In other words, in a learner-centred classroom, where the focus is on the communicative use of language, learners should be given interactional opportunities plus an opportunity to be made aware of the need to revise their output (Zuengler & Brinton 1997:267;

Allwright & Bailey 1994:141). One way of achieving meaningful interactive tasks is through groups or dyads.

### **3.6.3 Small groups**

Group work is considered an essential feature of CLT (Ellis 1994:598; Allwright & Bailey 1994:147). The advantages of group work are that it increases opportunity for language practice, improves the quality of learner talk, individualizes instruction, promotes a conducive affective atmosphere and is a tool to motivate learners (Ellis 1994:598). The small group allows for meaning negotiation and hence more opportunity for SLA (Grabe & Stoller 1997:8; Allwright & Bailey 1994:148).

In sum, classroom interaction should focus on quality interaction where learners are afforded opportunities to do productive, engaging tasks and activities which allow for participation where learners participate to different degrees as they become ready to do so. Much classroom time on this course is spent doing pair work, whether it be in the form of peer marking, discussion based on reading passages or revising of written drafts.

## **3.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT**

The review of research, pertaining to SLA factors involved in classroom SLA such as IL development, input, error correction and classroom interaction, provides a framework for the implementation of a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. Implementation involves the following:

- Learner IL can be systematically guided to evolve closer to the TL through instruction which engages the learner and focuses attention on the difference between his/her own IL and the TL through detailed feedback (Ellis 1994:352);



- Errors or mistakes are an indication of learners' development along the IL continuum. These errors should be viewed as an indication of what learners need to know next in a sequence and then to point out where their production differs from the TL thus, getting learners to 'notice the gap' between their own production and the TL (Johnson 1996:124; Allwright & Bailey 1994:92). This process is often referred to as consciousness-raising. This is achieved through repeated form-meaning connections: "learners' internal mechanism will detect grammatical form early on only if it is relatively high in communicative value" (VanPatten 1996:30). In the context of the Cummins and Swain (1986) definition of proficiency, SL proficiency is developed through contextual support available for receiving or producing meaning. Error correction may be regarded as a means of on-going contextual support;
- Much use should be made of co-operative learning through peer marking which encourages self-correction of errors;
- Language tasks should represent "real operating conditions" (rocs) where the learners perform tasks that are representative of real-world tasks and are meaning-bearing within the context that the learners find themselves (Johnson 1996:127);
- Materials which stimulate learner interest and motivation should be selected as CI is not the only driving force in SLA. Motivation and prior learning, together with CI, impact on classroom language learning (Ellis 1994; Sharwood Smith 1994; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991);
- CI is vital to SLA, therefore, the quality of CI is crucial and comprehensible input should be bolstered with carefully planned assistance in the form of meaning-bearing tasks aimed at focusing attention on linguistic forms (form-meaning connection). In addition to this stimulating materials, which have intrinsic merit, should be selected. This may be achieved if graded readers are used as a means of promoting SLA;
- Learners' prior learning should be taken into consideration when planning classroom learning and their level of proficiency should be tested, while

- input should be planned systematically to improve proficiency levels (Cook 1991:89; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:129);
- Input processing by learners should be fostered. In other words, input should be processed so that it is accessible to learners (Rosa & O'Neill 1999:546; Paribakht & Wesche 1999:195);
  - Input frequency influences SLA, provided it is meaning-bearing and learners' attention is focused on the unfamiliar through specially designed tasks which ensure that input processing occurs (Paribakht & Wesche 1999:195; Rosa & O'Neill 1999:546; VanPatten 1996:5);
  - Modified input influences SLA positively, provided it occurs interactionally while the learner is communicating and is engaged with meaning-bearing input (Van Lier 1996);
  - Teacher response "philosophy" should be clearly explained during an orientation session; and
  - Classroom interaction should focus on quality interaction so as to afford learners maximum opportunity to negotiate meaning interactively. This is achieved through using dyads where meaning is negotiated between students. Group work and pair work should be an integral classroom method so as to facilitate the negotiation of meaning.

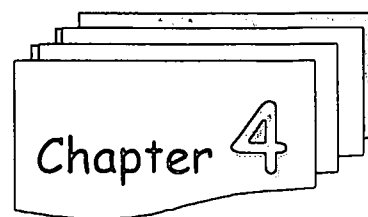
### 3.8 CONCLUSION

The development of a language programme for low-proficiency learners at tertiary level requires a knowledge of SLA and the factors involved in facilitating SLA in the classroom.

The scope and concerns of SLA are broad and varied. For purposes of this study, the scope is defined within a classroom context and limited to the academic setting. The classroom context with its learner and curriculum variables, as well as classroom opportunities afforded the learner, form the main focus here. Learner internal factors, such as learner IL and those

factors which facilitate language development within the classroom setting, are relevant to classroom SLA. These factors involve various types of input, error treatment and types of classroom interaction which play a role in facilitating SLA and form a framework for the development of a language programme for low-proficiency learners.

This framework, however, needs an even broader focus if the language programme is to provide a quality service to learners. Planning should be informed by a look at current international teaching trends. As outlined in the next chapter, international shifts in student populations have resulted in an increasing awareness of the tertiary SL learner. This awareness has led to the development of language courses which focus on the training of language skills at tertiary level. The next chapter presents some approaches and trends that occur in the wider international context.



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## INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC LITERACY

### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

**A**n increasing demand world-wide for English language skills in tertiary education has led to the establishment of courses such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and other related courses at institutions throughout the world (Bamford & Day 1998:125; Brumfit 1993:115). The demand for English language courses at tertiary level stems from demographic shifts of student populations internationally. These shifts result in an ever-transforming student population which, in turn, has created an increasing awareness of the needs of the tertiary second language learner (Bernier 1997:95).

In Chapters 2 and 3 of this study, the focus is on the theoretical underpinnings of proficiency, second language learner characteristics and second language acquisition as they occur in the language classroom. Recommendations, for the implementation of a language programme emerged from these chapters, which need to be bolstered by a knowledge of what academic literacy entails, as well as current trends in the teaching of

this literacy at tertiary level. Thus, in this chapter, the focus is on defining related terminology (tertiary support courses) such as English for Specific Purposes, English for Academic Purposes, English for General Academic Purposes and Academic Development, as well as a brief look at a variety of settings, scope, teaching approaches, and content of academic literacy courses. The chapter includes a discussion of academic reading and writing as well as a review of international, literacy teaching trends. The programme included (Cycle 1) a literature component, and therefore, a look at the literature/language relationship is relevant so as to inform programme development. The aim of this chapter is to draw on international experience for the process of developing a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners.

#### **4.1 TERTIARY LANGUAGE SUPPORT COURSES**

English language skills are needed not only in countries where English is not the mother tongue, but also in countries where English is the lingua franca for those students who come to English-speaking countries to further their education (Jordan 1997:xvii; Cohen, Glasman, Rosenbaum-Cohen, Ferrara & Fine 1988:152). For purposes of this study the superordinate term SL learner will be used when referring to students studying in a language other than their mother tongue. In other words, their chosen medium of instruction (for example, English) functions as a recognized means of, in this case, academic communication.

For students with low language proficiency in their medium of instruction, effective language courses could mean the difference between success or failure at tertiary level, perhaps "the most important factor that needs to be considered in relation to academic success is simply proficiency in the language of instruction" (Blue 1993:5). There are other factors involved such as intellectual ability and background knowledge which are equally crucial to

academic success, but language proficiency is certainly a significant problem to non-native speakers of English at institutions where English is the language of learning. Blue (1993:10) cites research that demonstrates the importance of language proficiency. Students scoring 6.5 in the English Language Testing Service (ELTS) had a 6 per cent failure rate, students who scored 6.0 a 19 per cent failure rate, and students on a 5.5 score demonstrated a 30 per cent failure rate. A local experiment referred to as The Basic English Language Skills (BELS) project at the University of the Western Cape (Tucker: 1988) seems to support the link between academic success and language proficiency. The results of this experiment demonstrated that students, who received on-going assistance in the form of intensive language development by means of a tutorial system, performed better academically than the control group who did not receive on-going language support. The project aimed at developing English language skills through a year-long course of intensive tutorial teaching. Twenty percent of the experimental group of 60 students passed their third year successfully and 13,3% of the control group passed their third year successfully. The above research appears to support the premise that academic success is closely linked to language proficiency.

The survival requirements of the academic community are different from everyday social skills and these survival skills are the skills and strategies needed by the second language tertiary learner. Ness and Ghawi (1997:15) identify some of these survival skills as "strategies for condensing large quantities of material; synthesis of original idea with the concepts of research and familiarity with expository conventions of academic writing". As already indicated in Section 2.3.4 of this study, second language learning strategies facilitate language acquisition and lead to improved proficiency and efficient performance in academic learning tasks. In section 2.3.4, it is indicated that an effective language programme should account for the strategies SL learners need to facilitate their SLA. Internationally, there are several responses to facilitating SLA of SL learners, and these courses are identified

by different names. Some clarification, of current terminology used to describe these English support programmes, is necessary.

**English for Special Purposes** (ESP) initiated as a "practical alternative to the 'general' orientation of language teaching: cultural and literary emphases, education for life" (Maher 1986:113). Such support courses at tertiary level have taken a variety of names, depending on setting and circumstance. Terms such as academic development (AD), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) are often used to refer to English skills training at tertiary level. While there is some consensus that tertiary learners, who are non-native speakers of English do need English language support, there exists a variety of approaches to address the problem (Grundy 1993:25; Jordan 1997:2; Blue 1993:4).

**English for Academic Purposes** (EAP) is "concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal education systems" (Jordan 1997:1). The main aim of courses such as EAP or ESP at tertiary level is to prepare ESL/EFL students for the literacy demands at tertiary level (Johns 1993:274). Within this context, even more distinctions are made in that some EAP courses focus on academic reading and writing and others on general communicative competence. As Ferris and Hedgcock (1998:8) observe, the focus is often on what the instructor determines as appropriate content for devising reading and writing tasks. But, broadly speaking, the term EAP may be applied to "any course, module, or workshop in which students are taught to deal with academically related language and subject matter" (Brown 1994:127).

**English for Specific Purposes** (ESP) refers to the subject-specific, profession-specific or career-specific English required in specific contexts. ESP includes "the language structure, vocabulary, the particular skills needed

for the subject, and the appropriate academic conventions" (Jordan 1997:5). Thus, a specific content-based approach to skills training is taken.

**English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP)** and **Academic Development (AD)** refer to more general academic skills. EGAP includes common core skills, such as study skills, as well as subject-specific skills, such as language structure, vocabulary and particular language skills necessary for the subject and the required academic conventions (Jordan 1997:5; Blue 1993:7).

**Academic development (AD)** is a term frequently used to refer to general academic support of which English language skills form a part. The term academic development is a familiar term in South African Higher Education and is broadly similar to what has been termed 'educational development' in Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). These terms embrace a wide variety of contexts and functions such as teaching support, advisory services, learning strategies, study skills and language proficiency (Moyo, Donn & Hounsell 1997:10). Andresen (1996:38) sees AD as a 'landscape of vague contours' with many participants no least of which are the teachers and learners involved in literacy programmes or adjunct language programmes aimed at assisting underprepared learners (Kotecha 1995:36). Morphet (1994:5) regards the English language component of Academic Development as "a process of advanced literacy: students and tutors, continuously learn to write, to read others' texts, to articulate and scrutinize their own and others' experience and perspective". She does not, however, elaborate on the term "advanced literacy".

A further perspective is that students who study English for academic purposes do so because they have a weak reading ability, which is a language skill essential for academic success (Day & Bamford 1998:45; Grabe 1988:63). The SL learners at tertiary level need to read fluently and



confidently in their SL so as to read broadly and deeply enough to obtain the necessary background knowledge on which to base speculative and interpretative thinking which, in turn, is a requirement of academic study.

EAP/EGAP courses, generally, aim to improve the basic language skills a student needs to achieve success in the academic community, while ESP courses are tailored to the language needs of non-native speakers of specific academic courses (Blue 1993:11; Eskey & Grabe 1988:231). In several local institutions such as the University of Cape Town, AD takes the form of supplementary courses presented by trained Academic Development staff members located within the different departments "who provide supplementary programmes, and Academic Development consultants who work with departments on curriculum development" (Kapp 1994:113).

South African institutions have taken individual responses to addressing the language proficiency of students with low proficiency. The University of Port Elizabeth addresses low language proficiency as an integral component of a course known as an Advancement Programme which is pre-sessional. The English communication component of the course focuses on academic reading and writing based on the academic texts students will encounter in the course of their studies (Snyders 2000:2).

The content emphasis for most academic support programmes in South Africa tends to fall on the productive side of writing and oral expression with a tutorial group work approach as the favoured method (Blacquièrè 1989:81). The reason for this is that this approach addresses the most evident symptoms of the perceived language problem. Each institution has responded to the needs of their specific target population, and this has resulted in these different approaches. It is essential for programme development to account for the proficiency levels, background, learner characteristics and expectations of each individual target group before

deciding on teaching approach and content (Silva 1994:18). This aspect will be discussed more fully in the section on teaching approaches below. It is necessary to look at the settings and scope of a variety of EAP courses with a view to drawing on this experience for programme development.

## 4.2 SETTINGS AND SCOPE OF EAP COURSES

Reference has already been made to some EAP settings. These settings range from English-speaking environments such as the UK, Ireland, the United States of America (USA), Canada, Australia and New Zealand. There are other settings where English is taught as a foreign language in the learners own countries or in environments where English is a medium of instruction, such as in South Africa.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, several global trends have catalyzed the growth of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) wishing to study at tertiary institutions where the medium of instruction is English. Some of these reasons are:

- a globalized economy which stresses the exchange of goods and services;
- the recognition of English as a global language (a fact recognized by the student population under study [*vide* section 2.3.2] ); and
- within current globalization tendencies, cross-national migration and co-operation in the form of regional movements such as the European Union, the North American Free Trade Association and the Association of South East Asian Nations, have facilitated the use of English as a medium of communication (Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt 1999:4).

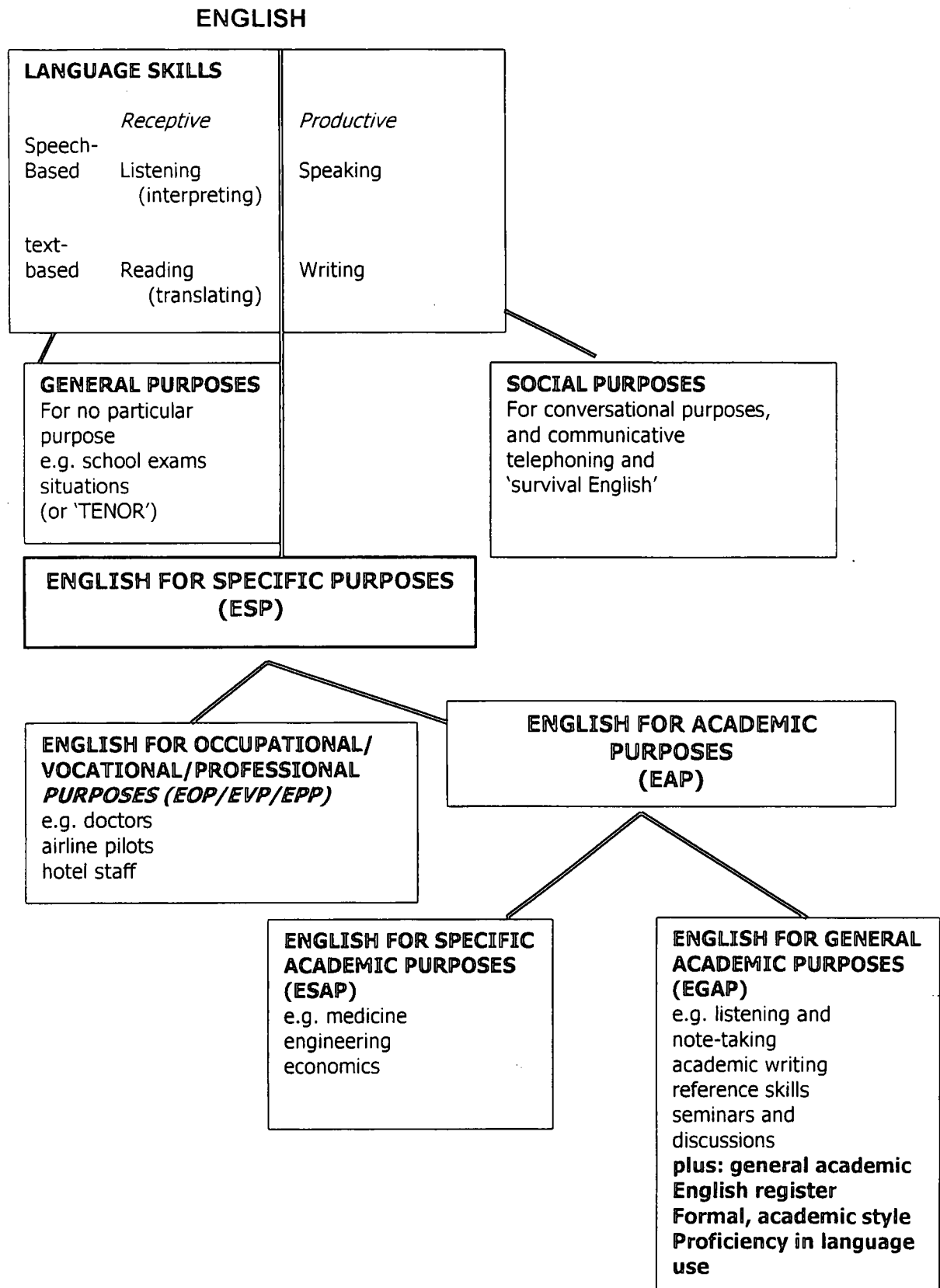
Language support courses take many forms and are also termed 'bridging' courses in some institutions. Such courses may be taught before actual academic study commences (pre-sessional) or during the academic term or semester (in-sessional) or on a part-time basis at times mutually agreeable to

students and staff. The duration of the courses varies from a few weeks to a year or as in the case of the CPP students, two years. Often successful completion of such courses is a prerequisite for foreign students before entering a course of study at university as in the USA with the TOEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) courses.

Language support courses, internationally as well as locally, are run from Language or Academic Support Centres attached to the institution or are run as a function of the Department of English or form part of the Department of Linguistics or Department of Education (Jordan 1994:2; Mayo *et al.* 1997:44).

Jordan (1994:3) presents the scope and definition of these EAP courses in the form of a flow-chart which clearly demonstrates their inter-dependence and uniqueness. Spack (1988:29) points out that the difficulty of assisting students with academic discourse is that researchers and teachers have endeavoured for years to determine and define the nature of academic communicative tasks. Not only is the nature of academic literacy difficult to define, but it generates yet another problem: that of determining when a student is adequately prepared to cope with academic communication. Tonkyn, Locke, Robinson and Furneaux (1993:47) agree that the "uncertainties surrounding the criterion of 'adequate' for academic study seem to be intractable...". The complicated nature of academic communication is reflected in Fig. 4.1 in that the variety and particular needs of the academic community are displayed.

Figure 4.1 English Language Skills (Jordan 1997:



In spite of the differing focus and aim, all of the above courses are aimed at developing academic language proficiency, which include core components such as reading comprehension, academic writing, listening comprehension and academic speech. Ryan and Zuber-Skerritt (1999:94) caution that no generalizations may be made concerning tertiary responses to students from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB). Each country and each institution respond to their unique situation because the students come from different backgrounds and have varying levels of academic and English proficiency. Silva (1994:18) pinpoints more precisely why responses to the needs of low-proficiency students differ. Any effective EAP course has to address: (1) the learners as L2 writers (their language proficiency, motivation, cultural orientation and learner characteristics), (2) the L2 text and the requirements in terms of genre, aims, discourse structures, as well as (3) the context. The interaction among the above components will differ with varying results in academic communities. In other words, the weight given to components in the EAP course should take the needs of the students into account, for example, their prior learning should be considered which may indicate whether learners have received explicit teaching of reading and writing skills. The literacy levels of the learners should be taken into account. If learners have acquired a level of literacy in their L1, they will be able to utilize this knowledge (interlingual transfer) and they will also be able to utilize L2 input from literacy activities (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:56).

The academic context should also be considered in course design for the low-proficiency tertiary learner. The course should prepare students for the actual academic tasks which they will need in an academic context. Thus, as a needs' analysis of each student group will produce different results, there can be no 'one size fits all' approach when it comes to designing EAP programmes. It is with this caution in mind that some international, instructional approaches are documented here. The next section covers instructional trends in EAP.

### 4.3 INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

A variety of methods (overall plan for language presentation based upon a pre-selected approach) are harnessed to implement EAP syllabus and course design world-wide. Factors such as "needs, aims, means (the teachers, materials, equipment, facilities, time and finance), and variables or constraints" are all carefully considered and inform the process (Snow 1998:243; Jordan 1997:58). A syllabus focus may be (1) content-based, where the focus is on the language skills and academic conventions of a particular subject area; or the focus may be (2) skills-based, or task-based, where the syllabus aims at improving the four basic language skills through carefully selected tasks, or (3) product-based, which focuses on the end result.

The product-based approach is one of the oldest methods and is essentially a grammatical approach which emphasizes verb tenses, sentence patterns and parts of speech (Burton 1998:287; Jordan 1997:60). Language teaching has moved away from form-based teaching where classroom approach was devoted to establishing control over specific forms and meaning-based activities were not the main focus (Skehan 1998:268). The current perspective favours an approach where the communicative value of form plays an important role in determining the learners' attention to it (form) (VanPatten 1996:24). The approach taken in this study is the latter perspective, viz. a form-meaning connection through a process of input processing instruction (*vide* 2.2). A wide range of teaching options are now available which integrate content and task in meaningful ways (Grabe & Stoller 1997:5; Skehan 1998:268). This integrated focus is evident in Skehan's (1998:268) definition of task described below.

A language-focused task complies with the following requirements, viz. meaning is primary, teaching is goal-directed, the activity aims at measurable

outcomes and the task is real-world related (Skehan 1998:268). It is clear that a form-focused approach would rule out the inclusion of meaning or a real-world connection, for example, pattern drill exercises do not comply with either of these criteria. Task-based language teaching (TBLT) focuses on meaning through carefully selected goals and activities. At tertiary level this would mean the completion of academic communicative tasks (Carson, Taylor & Fredella 1997:367). A TBLT approach would focus on the necessary procedures and strategies involved in completing a task such as, for example, expository essay writing. Within an academic context, a task focuses not only on the product which students produce, but also on the routes they take to produce an answer (Doyle 1983:162). The third teaching approach, which may be used in the tertiary language classroom, is content-based instruction (CBI).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) focuses on content with the dual purpose of improving language and mastering content knowledge (Carson *et al.* 1997:367). Thus, curriculum is organized around content with "the learning of a second language and the mastery of content knowledge" (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989:182) as goals. It is necessary to determine what is meant by content in content-based instruction. Content "in content-based programs represents material that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner, and is material that extends beyond the grammar or culture of the target language" (Snow 1998:259).

Thus, content is selected to support the acquisition of tasks in TBLT while CBI bases tasks on authentic content which learners will encounter in their learning context (Carson *et al.* 1997:367). The CBI approach focuses on language as a means of learning content and using content to achieve task mastery. Task-based EAP "also requires mastery of content, but it is the task that focuses the way that language learners will read/write/listen/speak about content" (Carson *et al.* 1997:367). The approach selected, from current

trends for this target group, is a combination of TBLT and CBI. The expository writing component is task-based whereas the reading instruction follows a CBI approach.

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) has been widely used in ESP settings as well as EAP and Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) settings (Grabe & Stoller 1997:5, Snow 1993:40). There is much endorsement (Grabe & Stoller 1997:16, Iancu 1997:149) for CBI approaches in a tertiary context. In particular, ESP curricula "throughout a history that spans more than forty years, have been designed to teach specific content and language skills to students and professional employees..." (Grabe & Stoller 1997:17). Several practical features make CBI a useful approach to use at tertiary level. Features which make CBI useful are, for example, employing "authentic reading materials which require students not only to understand information, but to interpret and evaluate it as well" (Grabe & Stoller 1997:17). CBI provides a forum in which students can respond orally to reading and lecture materials. CBI recognizes that academic writing follows from reading and listening, and that students have to synthesize information from multiple sources before writing can begin. These facts make CBI a good choice when designing a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners (Brinton *et al.* 1989:2).

Other effective instructional approaches may be incorporated into a content-based approach to language learning. Approaches such as Task-based Language Learning, Co-operative Learning (learners work together in groups or dyads), and extensive reading approaches, are all instructional options which may be included (Grabe & Stoller 1997:8). Extensive reading as an approach to teaching academic literacy is discussed below in the section on Academic Literacy. Thus, sufficient evidence exists (Carson *et al.* 1997:368; Grabe & Stoller 1997:19, Johns 1997:363, Snow 1997:290) that CBI has become a powerful and innovative trend in SL teaching at tertiary level.



In sum, each tertiary institution organizes its language courses for low-proficiency learners according to its learners' needs and within the boundaries of its own constraints and strengths. It is recognized internationally that to succeed at tertiary level "successful academic writers must be skilled at meeting the standards and requirements of their readers" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:39). Besides mastering the compositional aspects of academic writing, learners must learn to generate texts that are acceptable in the academic community. Silva (1990:17) posits that "learning to write is part of becoming socialized to the academic community - finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it". Academic reading and writing represent a joint "journey through ideas" (Littlewood 1995:433) at tertiary level. Therefore, these two skills are the focus of tertiary language courses (Aebersold & Field 1997:116; Johns 1993:227; Ryan & Zuber-Skerritt 1999:119). Ultimately, the proficiency level of the learners will determine which emphasis becomes important for which particular low-proficiency tertiary group (Kroll 1998:219). Nunan (1988:45) cautions that whatever the focus of the second language course, the most important factor in the development of such a course is "engaging learners in interesting and meaningful classroom experiences". International instructional trends such as CBI and TBLI echo the emphasis for meaningful or real-world language in the tertiary language classroom.

The section above has highlighted international instructional approaches to low proficiency at tertiary level, as well as some relevant theoretical underpinnings. It is necessary now to look more closely at what is meant by *academic literacy* and to examine current instructional approaches so as to draw from this discussion some guidelines for a language programme.

#### **4.4 ACADEMIC LITERACY**

It is necessary to define what is meant by *academic literacy* and then to establish the scope for purposes of this study. Academic literacy is defined

and described in terms of current international trends. Literacy within an academic context implies more than simply reading and writing. It implies an understanding that reading and writing skills are influenced by speaking and listening and are related to skills such as study skills and academic practices such as referencing, note-taking/making, presentational skills and many other skills (*vide* Fig. 2.1) related to the academic context (Carson *et al.* 1992:26). *Academic Literacy* may be defined as "language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) that are developed in, and required by, the academy" (Carson, Chase & Gibson 1993:6). Academic Literacy is a goal of tertiary education, but it is also a tool that may be used to meet other academic requirements. Thus, the scope of the language skills taught in a programme of academic literacy is determined by the context, viz. the academic context.

*Academic literacy*, like any other literacy, does not occur in a vacuum (Brumfit 1993:113; Smith 1988:4; Spack 1988:29). As already illustrated in Fig. 4.1, academic literacy is a complex term and the term encompasses a variety of emphases. Reksodiputro and Tasman (1997:54) state that English language teachers play a vital role in promoting chances of the non-English-speaking (NES) students to achieve academic success. It is the ESL teacher who has the responsibility of socializing students "to the demands and challenges of academic institutions" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:36). The English teacher introduces the student to the conventions and communicative practices needed to achieve success in his/her new environment, viz. the academic community. This is particularly so of the target group who are being prepared for full-time tertiary academic learning.

Many of the skills required in academic discourse are not simply linguistic in nature, they can be classified as study skills (Blue 1993:7). Blue makes the point that students may already have acquired a set of study skills which they will apply to the new situation, but "expectations of behaviour in the academic context may differ between different educational systems" (Blue

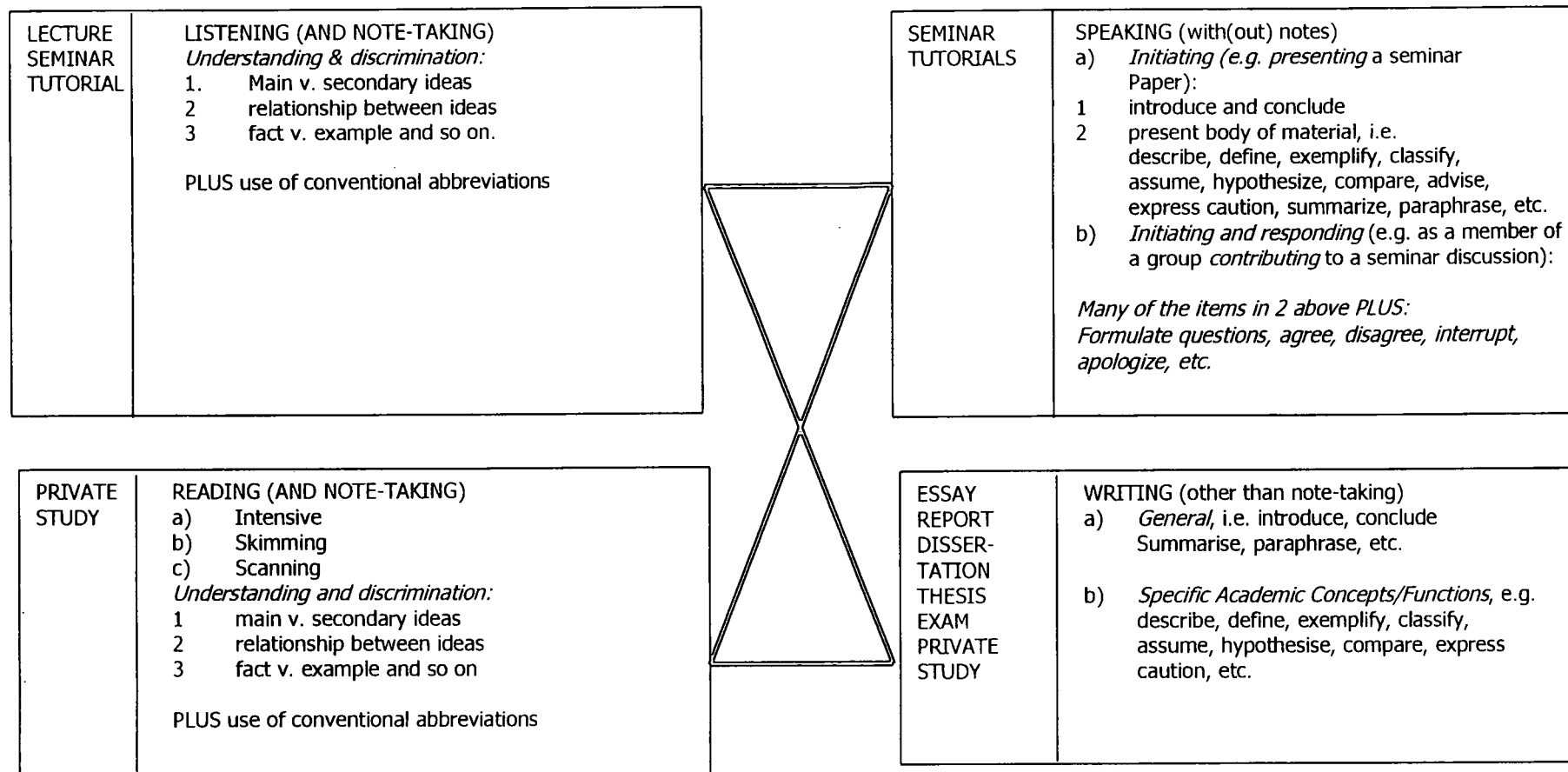
1993:7). The relationship between study skill and language skill will depend on the situation or activity, for example, lectures "involve not only understanding the content, recognising the main points and the supporting detail, but also such skills as summarising, evaluating and making notes" (Blue 1993:70). In fact, a symbiotic relationship appears to exist between language skills and study skills. A definition of study skills demonstrates this close relationship: study skills are "abilities, techniques, and strategies which are used when reading, writing or listening for study purposes. For example, study skills needed by university students studying from English-language textbooks include: adjusting reading speeds according to the type of material being read, using the dictionary, guessing word meanings from context, interpreting graphs, diagrams and symbols, note-taking and summarising" (Jordan 1997:6). The symbiotic relationship between language skills and study skills is demonstrated in Fig. 4.2.

A symbiotic and reciprocal relationship exists between receiving input and being able to construct meaning (Kroll 1993:62). Receptive and productive skills are necessary to communicate in the academic context. A language programme which aims to ease novices into academic discourse should account for this close relationship between receptive and productive skills in the instructional approach as "ESL writers benefit from engaging in reading-based writing tasks that encourage them to read like writers and to write like readers" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:36).

Figure 4.2: Study skills: receptive and productive skills (Jordan 1997:9)

## RECEPTIVE SKILLS

## PRODUCTIVE SKILLS



Academic discourse often requires that much writing is composed from the reading of various sources, an approach that often emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between reading and writing in the academic environment. Spivey (1990:259) states that this symbiosis is a reality "because reading and writing processes blend and co-occur". Both reading and writing involve the construction of meaning, the development and application of complex cognitive and linguistic skills, as well as the activation of existing knowledge and past experience, and the ability to solve problems for purposes of controlling thinking (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:29; Reid 1993:35; Cohen 1990:75). Reception and production of written texts are the main tools used in academic discourse therefore the focus of academic literacy, for purposes of this study, is on academic reading and writing.

The next section deals briefly with academic reading and academic writing with the view to defining, outlining the scope and referring to international experience. The section then concludes with some brief observations and instructional implications drawn from the discussion.

#### **4.4.1 Academic reading skills**

Academic reading is more complex than simple knowledge of technical terms and unknown vocabulary: in fact, "the structure of the writing causes more difficulty in reading comprehension, [while] features such as adverbial phrases, conjunctions or words used in anaphoric reference are the kinds of features which cause problems" (Cohen *et al.* 1988:153). In Fig. 2.1 reference is made to the kind of academic skills required in academic communication to achieve success. These are, ultimately, the standards or aims to be set by any language course which hopes to support low-proficiency tertiary learners. In other words, learners should be involved in learning the skills, developing the strategies and mastering the spoken and written

conventions required at tertiary level (Spack 1993:187). The above-mentioned aims are currently the core focus of the language programme on the CPP (*vide* Appendix C. SAIDE report p.42).

Academic reading entails intensive reading where learners' knowledge of features of the text, such as lexical features, syntax, cohesive devices and discourse markers, assists in the construction of meaning and should form a critical part of the instructional focus. Other features, such as discriminating and understanding the difference between the main ideas of a text and the secondary ideas, grasping the relationship between ideas, separating fact from opinion, distinguishing and relating ideas, comprehending conventional use of abbreviations, drawing inferences and conclusions, deducing unknown words, understanding graphic presentations such as data and diagrams, are important in any intensive reading approach where academic reading is developed (Spack 1993:184-194; Blue 1993:7). Skills such as making inferences, drawing conclusions and separating facts from opinions are critical reading activities, which are essential in academic reading. If learners come from a background where the written word is not criticized, then this in-depth scrutiny of a text will be very difficult to teach (Jensen 1986:107). As is demonstrated in Chapter 6 of this study, many of the students in the target population are unable to deal with the textual features described above (section 6.1.2.6). All of the above-mentioned textual features play a part in comprehending an academic text. Mere knowledge of technical vocabulary will not suffice and study/reading skills are not acquired automatically. These have to be acquired through focused instruction and intensive practice in a core classroom reading component (Jordan 1997:8; Leki 1993:15; Jensen 1986:114).

Academic reading proficiency is developed through the integration of reading (reception) and writing (production) (Blanton 1993:237; Eskey 1993:230). Thus, proficiency may be facilitated through interacting with texts; moreover,

learners who do not grow up in environments where time is spent reading, may be at a disadvantage (Blanton 1993:237; Blacquièrè 1989:78). It is important to focus on the reading needs of the target group of learners before any decisions about a reading programme can be made. Blanton (1993:235) profiles a group of low-proficiency tertiary learners who are refugees with minimal schooling and a disrupted education. These learners were not learning in their first language nor in their second language (English) for long periods of time. The subjects seem to cope with spoken English, but they cannot read or write the language well. These students, as readers, are "disconnected from the text, and it seems extremely difficult for them to believe that their perceptions, ideas, or reflections should have any connection to the printed page" (Blanton 1993:236). This experience echoes the teaching experience of the group of learners on the CPP programme (*vide* 2.3.5 ). Learners who fall into the category of students profiled above are not proficient readers because they do not spend time reading and, "they aren't writers because they aren't readers" (Blanton 1993:238). Blanton defines academic proficiency as the presence of a reader/writer "persona" and she contends that without this persona, learners have little chance of academic success. In short, 'they are strangers to academia and to the roles of reader and writer; they are strangers to what readers and writers do with language' (Blanton 1993:239). Having accepted this, the challenge now faces the teacher of 'disadvantaged' tertiary learners to introduce learners to academic reading by means of a meaningful, integrated reading and writing programme which should aim at preparing learners for academic discourse.

Students should be provided with the opportunity to read the work of experienced writers that will not only stimulate discussion and act as sources for ideas, but will serve as a model for the type of writing the student is required to produce in the academic context (Reid 1993:45; Johns 1993:283; Gajdusek & van Dommelen 1993:201). Thus, the context and its meaning for the learner become the primary focus and not the code itself (Hudson 1998:54, Widdowson 1998:327). The students acquire what they need to

perform in an academic context. When focusing on the needs of low-proficiency tertiary learners, the question concerning the relationship between low language proficiency and reading instruction arises, and several factors have to be considered. Factors, such as learners' proficiency levels, the integration of language skills, and which teaching approach to select, have to be taken into account.

Reading instruction need not be delayed until some set amount of language is achieved. The task may be varied to ensure that the threshold of language knowledge alters accordingly (Hudson 1998:53). Hudson states that this appears "to be particularly important when dealing with literate adult learners who are familiar with the orthographic system of the target L2" (1998:53). Thus, reading strategies can be taught immediately, in spite of the learners' low proficiency levels. This can be successfully achieved, in particular, where an integrated approach to the teaching of reading and writing is taken (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:24; Johns 1993:277). Because of the symbiotic relationship between reading and writing "they can act as scaffolding for each other in the acquisition process" (Hudson 1998:54). If we agree that the reading/writing relationship is important in an academic reading programme, then this symbiosis begs the question of how this can be achieved within the context of a tertiary programme.

In a study (Flahive & Bailey 1993:131) of 40 low-proficiency tertiary learners enrolled in a university level ESL composition class, the researchers tested three specific hypotheses, viz. learners who read more are better writers, (2) learners who are better readers are better writers, and (3) learners who read more and with better comprehension write more complex, more grammatically correct prose.

Their findings (Flahive & Bailey 1993:129) suggest that reading, writing and grammar are related second language abilities and they argue for a "unified language proficiency factor underlying reading comprehension, writing ability



and the various measures of grammatical ability" (1993:137). The researchers found that those participants who read more performed better on reading comprehension than those who read less and lastly, and more relevant to this study, that "reading abilities developed through pleasure reading transfer to more traditional academic reading tasks" (Flahive & Bailey 1993:138). Ferris and Hedgcock (1998:24) state that "the ability to produce written text emanates at least partly from long-term, self-initiated reading and that this ability can develop without learners' conscious awareness". Both writing and reading are processes of making meaning: they require similar patterns of thinking and "similar linguistic habits [as] both are multifaceted complex processes that involve many subskills and both depend on individual past experience" (Reid 1993:43).

Thus, a programme of reading should take note of the reading/writing connection, but should also include recognition of top-down (higher-order mental conceptualization) or bottom-up (a process of decoding through building of meaning from the letters and words of the text) processing (Hudson 1998:49; Carrell 1988:2). As Hudson (1998:49) rightly points out, reading is both a perceptual as well as a cognitive process, which starts in the retina and ends with an idea about some author's intent. Therefore, any reading programme would account for these factors.

#### **4.4.2 Comprehensible Input**

It has been emphasized (*vide* 3.5.4) that learners may benefit from a large amount of comprehensible input and that a stimulating variety of texts could facilitate the acquisition of reading skills. Bamford and Day (1998:135) remind us that "it is people who can and do read that are most willing to learn strategies to enable them to become more skilled in doing the particular types of reading they wish to or need to do". Thus, a group of low-proficiency tertiary learners could benefit from a reading programme where learners are exposed to materials which are well within the students' linguistic

capability, in other words, CI. A programme of extensive, out-of-class reading could provide these learners with the opportunity to develop "the components upon which fluent second language reading depends: a large sight vocabulary; a wide general vocabulary; and knowledge of the target language, the world and text types" (Day & Bamford 1998:16).

Each class of students is a unique population as far as needs and learner characteristics are concerned and the weight given to reading and writing tasks will vary accordingly. There is sufficient evidence (Day & Bamford 1998:35; Hudson 1998:49) that low-proficiency tertiary learners "with little or no ESL academic literacy may benefit from extensive and intensive reading coupled with abundant practice in writing for fluency" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:35). As mentioned above in the section on reading, learners need to be exposed to the writing of experienced writers to experience the modelling of lexical features, syntax, cohesive devices and discourse markers in text. In the words of Day and Bamford, "familiarity breeds automaticity". As mentioned in the discussion on factors that facilitate SLA (*vide* 2.1.1), the development of automaticity is a crucial factor in the process of achieving SLA.

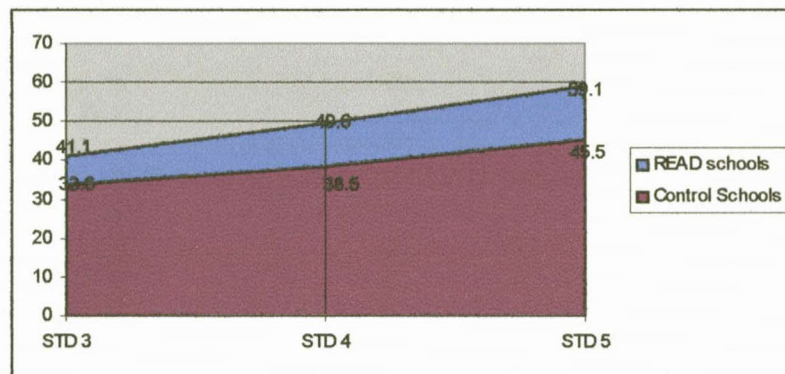
Local (South African) experiments point to a positive link between CI and a reading-based approach to SLA. The research described below details an experiment conducted in township schools which were part of the old Department of Education and Training (DET), an education system from which the majority of the students on the CPP programme come.

In 1996 the Read Educational Trust (a non-governmental organization which has for many years run reading programmes in disadvantaged schools and trained many teachers and voluntary workers how to teach reading) ran a survey to test the reading and writing skills of 4937 pupils from grades 5, 6 and 7. These pupils were randomly selected from 49 schools representing 6 of South Africa's 9 provinces. They were selected as follows:

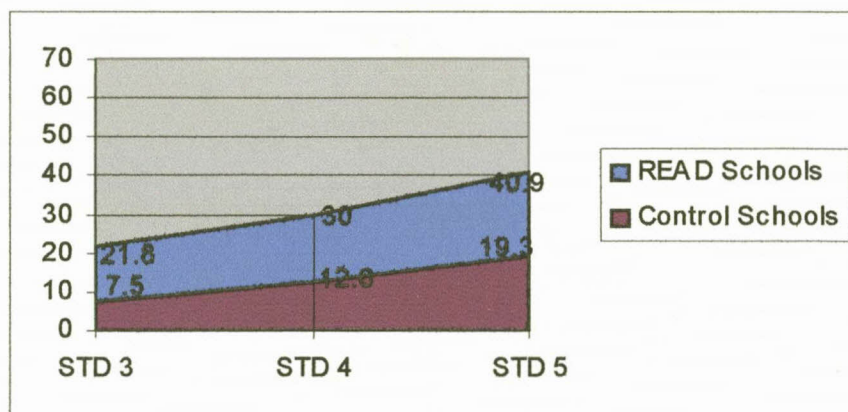
- 29 schools were selected where READ programmes were run (READ schools); and
- 20 other schools were carefully selected as matching control schools. These schools had no reading programmes in their schools.

The results of the survey (Fig. 4.3) demonstrated remarkable differences between the READ schools and the control schools. Pupils all wrote a multiple-choice English Reading Comprehension Test and a Stimulus Response Writing Test. The READ schools outperformed the control schools in both reading and writing.

**Figure 4.3 National Results of READ survey**  
(Le Roux & Schollar 1996:4)  
**Reading Test Scores**



**Writing Test Scores**



The reading test results revealed that the READ schools outperformed the control schools by 24.1% in Grade 5; by 28.8% in Grade 6 and by 29.8% in Grade 7. The writing test results were even more significant (proving consistency with Krashen's Input Hypothesis theory). The READ schools outperformed the control schools by 190.6% in Grade 5; by 138.0% in Grade 6 and by 111.9% in Grade 7. The results of this survey led the researchers (Le Roux & Schollar 1996:5) to conclude the following: "There is a very high correlation between the pupils' reading skills and their ability to write good English".

The lesson is obvious: children who read well, write well. Conversely, to improve writing skills, we need to improve reading skills. The report concludes further: "The READ programmes have indicated that pupils in these schools have accelerated their language proficiency skills by up to two years". This is indeed evidence that cannot be ignored. What makes it even more significant for this study is that the pupils selected for the READ survey come from similar educational backgrounds as the learners under study in this project. The READ survey findings are backed by similar results in other parts of the world (Hafiz & Tudor 1989:4-11).

Hafiz and Tudor (1989:4-11) describe a three-month extensive reading programme using graded readers with one experimental group and two control groups of ESL learners in the United Kingdom. The experiment was inspired by Krashen's Input Hypothesis and his distinction between acquisition and learning. The experiment was based on the principle that extensive reading would be practised for acquisition and, simultaneously, it would provide a source of 'comprehensible input'. Extensive reading aims to 'flood' learners with large quantities of L2 input with few or possibly no specific tasks to perform on this material. The underlying pedagogical assumption is that exposing learners to large quantities of meaningful, 'comprehensible input'

will eventually produce beneficial effects on the learners' proficiency. The experimental groups consisted of a group of ESL learners whose home language was Punjabi. The experimental groups were matched with two similar groups of ESL learners. The extensive reading programme lasted for 12 weeks and participants were encouraged to select their own reading material from the titles provided. Participants were requested to give an oral report on their reading in the form of a reading reaction. Participants were not required to undertake any language exercises based on their reading. Not only did the reading of the experimental group improve markedly from the control groups, but their writing abilities also showed significant improvement. The researchers conclude: "this increase in productive skills is particularly significant in the present context, as it indicates that the receptive exposure to the language which subjects received during the reading programme (as already mentioned, no productive activities were required of subjects) would appear to have been transferred to subjects' active L2 repertoire" (Hafiz & Tudor 1989:8). The pleasure reading or 'comprehensible input' provided learners with a range of lexical, syntactic and textual features as source, and simultaneously created a more positive attitude towards the target language. Hafiz and Tudor's study certainly appears to give credence to Krashen's Input Hypothesis in that learners were given 'comprehensible input' in a tension-free environment.

Another meaningful experiment in this regard is the research of Elley and Mangubhai (1983) which examined specifically the role of extensive reading on the development of proficiency in the second language. This study was inspired by Krashen's Input Hypothesis. In a two-year study which examined the effects of an extensive reading programme (using simplified reading materials in English) in a number of Fijian primary schools, produced similar results as demonstrated by the READ project outlined above. A substantial improvement was observed in not only the learners' reading skills, but their productive skills had improved markedly (Elley 1991:375-411).

In spite of much criticism and accusations of vagueness and imprecision (McLaughlin 1987:50) levelled at Krashen's Input Hypothesis, there is enough substantial evidence to prove that his theories do merit close scrutiny and are worth noting by the educator wishing to set up a language programme for low-proficiency learners. Although many researchers (Van Lier 1996:45; Ellis 1994:26; Schwartz 1993:148; Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:114) agree that meaning-bearing input or CI is axiomatic to SLA, there are those (Van Patten 1996:7; Sharwood Smith 1993:167) who posit that CI alone does not necessarily facilitate SL learning. Comprehensible input does not merely enter the learners' linguistic system resulting in instantaneous SLA. The input that learners receive is filtered and this 'filtering' process has to be guided by meaningful language activities (*vide* 2.2). These activities aim at providing the embedded contextual support (Van Lier 1996:45) which facilitates the automaticity necessary for SLA to occur (*vide* 2.1.1).

An extensive (out-of-class) reading programme coupled with intensive (in-class) reading activities has become common L2 pedagogical practice, based on the research outlined in the above section. This is particularly so for low-proficiency tertiary learners (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37; Flahive & Bailey 1998:137). Therefore, once again, a combination approach has been selected for this target group, viz. an out-of-class extensive reading programme using graded readers combined with a programme of intensive in-class reading focusing on textual features.

This section merely touched on some of the more recent international trends in the teaching of academic reading and, as already mentioned, no discussion on reading can exclude a discussion on writing because "teaching writing is teaching reading" (Kroll 1993:61).

### 4.4.3 Academic writing skills

This section aims to define and describe what is meant by *academic writing* before considering international instructional trends. It would be convenient to provide a tidy definition including various accessible components to guide any teaching programme. This is not possible as academic writing means different things to different people (Spack 1993:183).

Since its genesis in the 1960s, much EAP research has been done on what approaches to writing are required by different faculties in academic settings (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:39; Reid 1993:33). These findings have assisted teachers in defining learner' needs. Ferris and Hedgcock (1998:39) suggest that to generate acceptable academic writing, students must "master the mechanical aspects of composing sentences, paragraphs, and larger units of discourse that correspond to the dominant genres of the academy and/or a specific field".

Silva (1990:17) emphasizes that "learning to write is part of becoming socialized to the academic community- finding out what is expected and trying to approximate it". Teachers should provide learners with the tools they need for academic literacy and guide learners to see that "texts are the currency of academic discussion and debate" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:48). The authors (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37) go on to identify the writing-related tools needed to participate in academic discourse. These are:

- skills and strategies for reading texts assigned in general education and discipline-specific courses;
- techniques for taking reading notes to be used for subsequent tasks and assignments (e.g., exams, reports, essays, research papers, etc.); and
- skills and strategies for selecting topics, as well as drafting, revising, and editing various types of written texts (e.g., exams, reports, essays, research papers, etc.) (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37).

The above writing tasks cannot be taught in isolation and should be accompanied by reading tasks (*vide* 4.4.1). After all, as pointed out by Farquhar (1999:119), it is our job to introduce students to the requirements of the whole communicative context of the academic community.

Spack (1993:183) raises the challenging point that approaches to composition instruction stem from differing views of how such writing expertise is achieved. One school of thought emphasizes general knowledge of writing strategies and another holds that specific writing strategies required by specific disciplines should be taught, in other words, "ESL writing courses should feature the specific subject matter that ESL students must learn in their major and required courses" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:7). This dilemma need not be a dichotomy, but is, in fact, a continuum as suggested by Carter who states that (1990:271) "performance is a complex interaction of general and local knowledge". Spack (1993:183) confirms this idea that the "journey from novice to expert involves the acquisition of an increasingly sophisticated framework of knowledge about composing". Boughey (1998:171) illuminates the problems of the SL novice writers when she states that an understanding of the reasons for students' errors, is necessary if we are to assist students in the process of acquiring the framework of knowledge necessary for academic communication. She states that even educated native speakers of English produce sentences that are grammatically incorrect when writing or composing texts. This may be a result of the fact that writing is a process of discovering meaning and the writer 'discovers' what he/she wants to say in the process of rewriting. She (Boughey 1998:171) contends that "students make errors because they do not understand writing as a process of discovering meaning but rather as a process of writing down what they remember". Thus, the problem that SL learners have is not overgeneralized or simplified to mean "a simple lack of linguistic awareness" (Boughey 1989:171). If this is indeed true, then it has implications for the teaching



approach taken with a group of low-proficiency tertiary learners from a scholastically disadvantaged background. The focus of a programme of intervention should be the facilitation of an understanding of the purpose, process and practice of academic writing.

Schema Theory has an implication for the teaching of writing to this target group. Schema is the "organized chunk of knowledge or experience, often accompanied by feelings" (Weaver 1994:18) brought to the reading/writing situation by the reader. Research into L1 and L2 reading and writing conclude that "when content and form are familiar, reading and writing are relatively easy, but, when one or the other (or both) are unfamiliar, efficiency, effectiveness, and success are problematic" (Reid 1993:63). An important implication derived from the above is that the language programmer should ensure that students find the "texts and topics of a class accessible from a cognitive standpoint" (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:11). This can be done in two ways, viz. select reading and writing tasks which allow students to draw on their prior learning and select in-class activities which develop students' schemata where they may be lacking.

Thus, once again, CI could be a useful tool in the hands of the language programmer as learners' schemata are developed because the variety of reading material provides learners with ideas and views not encountered before. In turn, these ideas and views become available for their writing activities. Reading materials and writing assignments selected for low-proficiency learners should take cognizance of learners' prior learning experience (*vide* 2.3.5) and in-class activities should aim at developing learners' schemata. Learners may come from an educational background where writing conventions have not been explicitly taught, which would imply that students are unfamiliar with processes used in composing texts. This unfamiliarity would have to be accounted for (through effective contextual support) in any writing programme focusing on SLA.

In conclusion, according to current international trends, a writing programme for tertiary learners should aim to socialize learners into academic discourse and the kind of tasks required of them in this context. Composition tasks, which follow a reading passage and require activities such as scanning, skimming, summarizing, inferencing, drafting and revising and other skills related to the academic context, should shape the programme of language intervention. These academic reading skills should be coupled with writing activities based on an extensive reading programme where CI forms the theoretical foundation (Grabe 1986:43).

As the CPP programme includes a literature component, it is necessary to look at the literature/language proficiency issue and draw on current research to inform the planning of a programme of language learning for low-proficiency tertiary learners.

#### **4.5 THE LITERARY SKILLS/ACADEMIC LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RELATIONSHIP**

The initial phase of the English course for this target group included a full literature component as this was a requirement of the Department of English (*vide* 6.1.3.2). This proved difficult from the beginning. A research review, the researcher's own observations coupled with an understanding of the students' prior learning experience (*vide* 2.3.5), led to the inclusion of an academic reading and writing skills component. The inclusion of additional course content resulted in tension on two levels. Firstly, learners were not able to cope with the workload (*vide* 6.1.5.3) and secondly, there was not enough time to provide learners with the embedded contextual support and practice which are conducive to automaticity and, hence, SLA (*vide* 2.1.1). These tensions begged the question : Can literature and academic literacy be taught together effectively to this particular target group?

It was necessary to gain an understanding of the threshold skills learners need to be able to cope with the discipline-specific demands of a literature programme. What, then, does literature study entail?

The focus of literature study is on the 'literariness' of a text. Elements of fiction such as plot, theme, character, narrator and setting are studied to discover how the author uses them to communicate his/her message. Learners are taught the characteristics of the different literary genres, focusing on the nature and components of each. They then learn to look at literature critically and to respond to literary prompts/assignments/tasks given by the teacher.

The learner brings to the literary text, a knowledge of how such a text works and an understanding of the conventions which guide the reading and interpretation (Hawkey & Rezk 1991:84). In other words, this knowledge refers to a literary competence which means that students have "an implicit understanding of, and familiarity with, certain conventions which allow them to take the words on the page of a play or other literary work and convert them into literary meanings" (Lazar 1993:12). Maley (1993:10) makes the point that for this to be achieved successfully by the learner "we have to assume that students have already attained a level of competence in the language, and familiarity with the literary conventions, which will allow them ready access to literary texts for this purpose". The learners from this target group do not come from a "print-rich" environment where literary conventions were inculcated (*vide* 2.3.5). Their responses to literary assignments were ample proof of this (*vide* 6.1.8.1 and Appendix A 8a, 8b, 8c and 10a and 10b). The errors, made by the students in their answers to the literature assignments, are discussed in Chapter 6. The learners in the target group are operating at a basic level of English language comprehension and "are

missing the subtleties of the ways in which strategies of critique are developed and expressed in different contexts" (Kapp 1998:29).

The competent reader of a literary text will be able to pinpoint the literary conventions as they operate for different literary genres, for example, when reading a novel the reader will identify plot and themes and how plot, themes and character embody certain values or attitudes (Lazar 1993:13). In spite of a detailed mindmap explaining the elements of fiction, students were unable to grasp how these elements are used by authors to communicate their message (*vide* Appendix A 8a, 8b, 8c). The literary tests did not represent comprehensible input for this target group. The literature was not meaning-bearing input, hence their responses to the texts were garbled. To be able to cope with a literature component, learners would have to be able to read fluently and be able to write a sentence, construct a paragraph, and generally, have an understanding of textual organization as well as the often complex schemata activated by literary texts.

It is then safe to say that learners must already have attained basic communicative competence before literary skills can be acquired successfully (Hawkey & Rezk 1991:84). Without this competence, the literary 'experience' becomes one of rote-learning and empty repetition of critical terminology without understanding (Maley 1993:11; McRae 1991:43).

McRae (1991:42) contends that literature aims to stimulate response in the reader and often an author uses unexpected and unfamiliar words to elicit that response. For learners lacking the necessary schemata, vocabulary and general nuances of the language, literary language may present insurmountable problems (Milne 1977:12).

The act of fluent reading requires that learners are able to accurately and automatically recognize words (sight vocabulary). The automatic recognition

of a word allows lexical access (Stanovich 1992:4). Thus, without this lexico-syntactic automaticity, the reading process becomes extremely difficult. Automaticity is a vital component on the proficiency continuum (vide 2.1.1), and without embedded textual support and goal-directed practice, this requirement for fluent reading comprehension is not facilitated. If this lexical access is difficult, the reader has to slow down the reading process and pay conscious attention to the word and its possible semantic and syntactic interpretations (Harris & Sipay 1990:436). This effort would make the reading of a literary text which does not, then, represent comprehensible input, extremely difficult for the low-proficiency learner (Samuels 1994:829).

If readers have to slow down the reading process to pay conscious attention to phonemic decoding, they may find it difficult to grasp meaning in sentences or paragraphs where unfamiliar words occur (Samuels 1994:829). If so much attention is taken up with the processing of the text, this will interfere with the process of constructing meaning described above. The vital link between the decoding process and the comprehension process is broken, "if the reader's attention is on decoding and if attention can be directed at only one process at a time, the comprehension task is not getting done" (Samuels 1994:821). If readers are obliged to switch their attention from decoding to constructing meaning in every passage of reading, reading becomes a frustrating struggle.

As already detailed in 4.5.1, an important factor for reading comprehension is the background knowledge that the reader brings to the text. Whether the reader will be able to construct meaning will depend on the reader's knowledge of language, the structure of texts, and a broad background or knowledge of the world. These elements of knowledge interact with one another to construct meaning (Steffensen & Joag-Dev 1984:48; Ruddell 1994:416). Thus, the reader needs an organized, interrelated set of

structures or schemata in order to access the meaning in a text. We know that the target group in this study lacks this world knowledge (*vide* 2.3.5).

In summary, without the necessary world knowledge, sight vocabulary, lexico-syntactic decoding skills and prior knowledge of text types, accessing a literary text may become extremely difficult and the high levels of interpretation demanded by the teacher's literary assignments/tasks may become an impossible task for the low-proficiency learner. Current international teaching trends for low-proficiency tertiary learners favour a teaching programme where academic language skills form the focus (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37). Course content for a language programme is structured around the needs of the student and is not based on syllabus requirements. As outlined in 4.2 above, institutions should base language support programmes on the L2 proficiency levels of the target group, the context and the L2 discourse requirements (Silva 1994:18).

The above discussion on international teaching trends and approaches dealing with low proficiency at tertiary level, as well as the brief look at the language/literature relationship, have implications for programme development.

#### **4.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT**

If a programme of language intervention is to be meaningful, the programmer has to take cognizance of why learners do not demonstrate the necessary skills to achieve success. Such understanding should not be simplified or overgeneralized and programme development should be informed by a focused teaching approach.

Understandings gained from a research review on international trends in tertiary L2 teaching, as well as a closer look at the demands of a literature

programme on the SL learner, led the researcher to deduce the following implications for the programme developer:

- language proficiency levels, must be Learner characteristics, particularly prior learning and motivation as well as taken into account before preparing a programme of SLA (Silva 1994:18);
- An eclectic teaching approach, which includes content-based as well as task-based learning, may be taken when teaching reading and writing skills as this facilitates the development of procedures and strategy-training while improving language and encouraging content knowledge (Carson *et al.* 1997:367);
- Classroom content and tasks should model real-world academic tasks (Grabe & Stoller 1997:5);
- Academic reading strategies, such as pre-reading activities, skimming, scanning, summarizing, post-reading activities etc., should be systematically taught to provide contextual support and automaticity which, in turn, facilitate SLA (*vide* 2.1.1);
- Writing skills needed in the academic context should be specifically taught, viz. the process of think-plan-draft-revise-write-edit and rewrite should be explicitly practised as this encourages the process of discovering meaning;
- Weighting of reading and writing components in a language programme should be based on students' proficiency levels. Proficiency should be tested and the results of the testing should determine the time and weighting of the two components. In other words, the needs of the learners determine the time spent on each component (Bamford & Day 1998:35);
- A programme of language through academic literacy should focus on the symbiotic relationship between academic reading and academic writing. In other words, reading-based writing tasks should be the focus (Hudson 1998:49);

- A programme of out-of-class extensive reading coupled with an in-class intensive reading course is an internationally recognized option for low-proficiency tertiary learners and could be a viable option for this target group (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37);
- Learners should be exposed to plenty of CI. An internationally recognized method of achieving this is the use of graded readers in an extensive out-of-class reading programme;
- An in-class intensive reading programme should be followed which structures the way learners process reading material and focuses on salient textual features; and
- Lastly, if students have not attained a certain level of language competence as well as a familiarity with literary conventions, then a programme of literature will not facilitate SLA (Maley 1993:10).

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

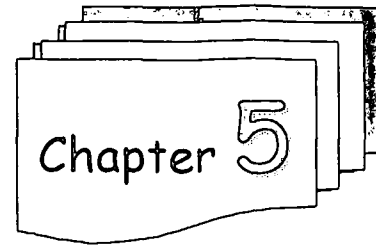
In sum, demographic shifts in student populations have resulted in a proliferation of English language skills courses for low-proficiency students at tertiary level. Students who need language support come from different backgrounds with varying levels of proficiency and academic preparedness. An effective EAP course has to address the specific needs of the learners, as well as the requirements of the academic context.

Learners should receive a thorough language programme aimed at improving their academic communication skills and facilitating their language acquisition as they grow towards cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (*vide* 2.1.1) and are socialized into the 'new' academic context. A programme of in-class intensive reading coupled with an out-of-class extensive reading is currently recognized as a relevant method of addressing low proficiency at tertiary level. The symbiotic relationship between reading and writing is



internationally acknowledged and the teaching approach for writing tasks is a reading-based approach.

It is important to emphasize the reason for abandoning the literature component of the programme in cycle three of the action research. In cycle two some of the literature was jettisoned, but not all of it. From the above discussion on reading and writing skills, it becomes clear that skills develop on a continuum from the more general to the specific (*vide* 4.4). If this is true and practical criticism of literary works assumes basic language competence, then the implications for this group of learners is evident. Current international trends for the teaching of low-proficiency SL learners at tertiary level aim to develop academic language skills. In other words, the general skills needed to access academic communication should be the focus of a programme of learning. Specific, discipline-related skills, such as those required for literature study, develop after the learner has mastered the more general language skills. The next section is devoted to the methodological orientation underpinning this study.



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## METHODOLOGICAL ORIENTATION

### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

The aims of this study (*vide* 1.6) are twofold, viz. to develop and implement a language proficiency course for low-proficiency tertiary learners at the University of the Free State; and secondly, to reflect critically on the development and implementation in order to improve the teaching and learning as an on-going process. Therefore, to reflect critically on the process implies putting into place tools or means of reflection which would create the momentum for "increased professional competence" (Wallace 1998:12). Such an approach presented itself in the form of action research methodology with its reflective phases or cycles of planning to improve a process; acting to implement that predetermined plan; observing the effects of the planned action; and finally, reflecting on the effects which become a framework for planning the next phase.

Action research takes its name from two processes which are central to it, viz. a data-gathering component (the research element) and a focus on bringing about change (the action component) (Richards 1998:28). This structured framework of the action research phases, with its research component combined with the action component serving as an impetus for change,

provided the researcher with a valid tool to facilitate the teaching and learning of a group of underprepared learners (*vide* 2.3.5).

This chapter aims to define action research, outline the goals of action research, discuss the nature of this research methodology and provide a rationale for the choice of action research for this study, and finally, briefly to discuss more traditional research methods and how they differ or prove useful to the action researcher.

## 5.1 DEFINING ACTION RESEARCH

The origins of action research are unclear within the literature. Authors such as Kemmis and McTaggart (1990), Zuber-Skerrit (1992), and Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993) state that the term action research was first coined by Kurt Lewin, an American psychologist. The research methodology describes a vehicle for social research leading to change which is characterized by active participation and democratic decision-making (Kember & Gow 1992:297). McKernan (1991:8) contends that action research as a method of inquiry has evolved over the last century and careful study of the literature shows "clearly and convincingly that action research is a root derivative of the scientific method reaching back to the Science in Education movement of the late nineteenth century" (McKernan 1991:8).

McKernan (1991:8) states that there is evidence of the use of action research by a number of social reformists prior to Lewin, such as Collier in 1945, Lippitt and Radke in 1946 and Corey in 1953. Despite the clouded origins of action research, Kurt Lewin, in the mid 1940s, constructed a theory of action research, which described action research as "proceeding in a spiral of steps, each of which is composed of planning, action and the evaluation of the result of action" (Zuber-Skerritt 1991:11; Kemmis & McTaggart 1990:8; McNiff 1988:3; Carr & Kemmis 1986:162). In order to "understand and change

certain social practices, social scientists have to include practitioners from the real social world in all phases of inquiry (McKernan 1991:10). This construction of action research theory makes action research a method of acceptable inquiry.

Van Lier (1996:33) emphasizes that the action research process is an intervention in practice, a "small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of such intervention". Carr and Kemmis (1986:162) define action research as "a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out". If applied to educational practice, the above definition refers to participants such as, for example, teachers, students, tutors or any other person involved in the educational situation. Questions relating to professional teaching problems can be solved through a process of structured reflection, which involves the collection and analysis of data, the input of participants and observers of which the combined results improve implementation (Wallace 1998:16).

Action research converts what may be an informal process of inquiry and critical reflection into a systematic inquiry which simultaneously allows for problem-solving. The action research process of structured reflection and action takes place in settings which are action-oriented, viz. settings where planned change aims at improvement and where strategies are evaluated. In fact, educators often follow this cycle when they notice that something is not working as well as they would like it to: "they consider the situation based on the information they have, they look for alternative ways of dealing with the problem, they select one way and try it out, they then observe the results and if necessary adjust what they are doing or try something else" (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:26). Educational practice is regarded as social practice which can be changed through collaborative actions of planning, acting, observing

and reflecting. Having described the concept *action research*, it is necessary to outline the purposes or goals of action research. These will, in part, provide a framework for the choice of this methodology in this study.

## **5.2 GOALS OF ACTION RESEARCH**

Action research is already established as a recognized means of organizational development, improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as a means of staff development in higher education (Kember & Gow 1992:297; Perry & Zuber-Skerritt 1992:197).

### **5.2.1 Organizational development**

Action research lends itself to the process of organizational development or organizational learning which is described by Zuber-Skerritt (1994:112) as "...one which is capable of detecting and correcting error even when that correction requires changing the organisation's norms, policies and/or objectives (double-loop learning)". It provides a useful vehicle for facilitating transformation in institutions of higher education. The University of the Free State, like most other tertiary institutions in the country, is faced with a dramatically changing socio-political context. These changes stem from a growing local demand for access to higher education from previously disadvantaged groups. This demand has led to the intake of vastly diverse student groups in terms of preparedness for tertiary study, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds (Moore, Paxton, Scott & Thesen 1998:10).

In order to accommodate such diversity, institutions of higher education in South Africa are obligated to think innovatively and continuously evaluate and reflect on practice so that dynamic organizational development occurs (Hay & Strydom 1999:17). In addition to the demand for access, the need for organizational development and change has impacted heavily on South

African universities because "of our long isolation, the pent-up demand released by our political transition and the rapidity of our entry into the global economy" (Moore *et al.* 1998:10). The action research phases/cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting present themselves as a meaningful vehicle for achieving the equity and redress required in transforming the institution and, simultaneously, lead to quality enhancement.

### 5.2.2 Quality enhancement

To meet the challenges (the information explosion, a shrinking of the formal job sector and frequent career-changing) of a changing global market, educational institutions are forced to produce graduates who are flexible, and who have "strongly developed 'generic' skills linked to a firm knowledge base, lifelong learning skills and problem-solving ability" (Moore *et al.* 1998:10). Thus, the challenge of tertiary institutions to improve the quality of learning and teaching must be effectively met within constraints of time, human resources and cost. Educational action research affords the researcher the opportunity of participatory activities in curriculum development, professional development, programme improvement, systems planning and policy development. All of these educational processes have in common "the identification of strategies, of planned action which are implemented and then systematically submitted to observation, reflection and change" (Carr & Kemmis 1986:164). The participants in all these activities are integrally involved in action research.

Action research involves formative evaluation as well as qualitative description. Such evaluation and description contribute towards an understanding of a particular problem related to educational initiatives. The action research process facilitates the quality of educational change in that it is decision-driven and not hypothesis-driven and therefore spurs quality decision-making (Krathwohl 1998:601). Vulliamy, Lewin and Stephens

(1990:19) use an apt analogy to compare the impact of traditional positivist methods of research to action research, when they argue that the quality of the results of traditional research can be compared to "a critic who reviews a production on the basis of the script and applause-meter readings, having missed the performance". The participants in the action research process form the core of the "performance" and are therefore in a position to make quality-enhancing decisions. This is particularly so of an action research project which involves the development and implementation of a curriculum (Kember & Gow 1992:300). Recommendations regarding the development of the curriculum for an English course for the CPP programme have rested largely with the researcher. As already stated, the final decision regarding content rests with the Department of English, who may accept the recommendations of the researcher. Decision-making was, therefore, collaboratively taken. Recommendations regarding content of the syllabus were also taken collaboratively as the researcher worked closely with the facilitators who teach on the programme, viz. questionnaires and regular input at meetings which were documented in a journal (*vide* 6.1.5.3 and Appendix A 7, 9 and 17).

### **5.2.3 Staff development**

In a rapidly changing educational environment, language programme designers have to decide on the content focus of academic literacy courses to accommodate the diverse needs of the student population. The participatory nature of action research enables the researcher to proceed with the core business of curriculum development while simultaneously evaluating such development to improve teaching and learning. Central to the process is the lecturer/researcher whose research and organizational skills are being developed (Kember & Gow 1992:301). Ideally then, projects for action research should be derived from the concerns and suggested changes

initiated by the lecturer/researchers themselves to facilitate optimal professional growth.

Finally, the efficacy of action research as a means of staff development is best measured by its effect on student learning "since the goal of the exercise is to improve the quality of student learning, by modifying teaching practices, through action research as a staff development activity" (Kember & Gow 1992:309).

### 5.3 THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF ACTION RESEARCH

The above discussion emphasizes not only the participatory nature of action research, but also its self-reflective spiral of phases/cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting which are typical of the approach. **Planning** involves problem analysis and strategy planning; **acting** involves implementation of the plan; **observation** includes evaluation of action through appropriate methods and, finally, **reflecting** involves looking at the effects of the action as a basis for evaluation of the whole research process. The results of such reflection could lead to a new phase (*vide* Fig 5.1) of planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt 1991:11).

It is important to emphasize that the action research process is an on-going spiral. Carr and Kemmis (1986:185) state that "in action research, a single loop of planning, acting, observing and reflecting is only a beginning - if the process stops there it should not be regarded as action research at all". It is a continuous process, whereby retrospective understanding is related to prospective action, a characteristic which makes this method ideally suited for solving the unique problems of a particular teaching situation such as that presented by a group of registered tertiary learners with low English proficiency.



Carr and Kemmis (1986:186) make a further valuable observation, viz. that "retrospective understanding and prospective action are enacted in each of the four 'moments' of the action research process, each of which 'looks back' to the previous moment for its justification and 'looks forward' to the next moment for its realization. The spiral is characterized by critical self-reflection which links reconstruction of the past with construction of a concrete and immediate future through action" (Carr & Kemmis 1986:187).

Evidence of this self-reflection of practice is evident throughout the phases of implementation of the language programme referred to in this study: from the very first meeting with the students, certain observations were made with a view to meeting their needs, as well as a process of questioning existing methodologies for tertiary students. Action research is about rational transformation of educational practice. It is about a sharpened, on-going awareness of educational practice and whether and why such practice is successful or not. Gore and Zeichner (1991:123) affirm this perception of the researcher by stating that "... in action research, no conceptual distinction is drawn between the practice being researched and the process of researching it".

McNiff (1988:38-39) ties the action-reflection spiral of action research into a set of questions which can be used as a starting point for reforming an educational programme such as the one referred to in this study. These initial questions are critically-reflective and serve as a starting point for action research:

- What is the concern?
- Why are you concerned?
- What do you think you can do about it?
- What kind of 'evidence' could you collect to help you make some judgement about what is happening?

- How would you collect such evidence?
- How could you check that your judgement about what has happened is reasonably fair and accurate?

While the above questions represent a starting point for an action research spiral, the answers to these questions are likely to generate more questions that beg answers; so much so, that the action research spiral continues. It is the generative nature of this methodology which makes it so suitable for a study which aims at identifying the problems of a proposed programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. The on-going spirals of enquiry allow the practitioner to 'discover' new problems and continue to improve her teaching practice while the programme is being developed. This particular characteristic makes action research more applicable for purposes of educational programme development than more traditional research methods because it is on-going and never concluded. The on-going process allows for conclusions drawn from a data-based inquiry to be fed into the reflective cycle, thereby improving professional practice and, at the same time, allowing the process to continue. Action research, by its very nature, is practitioner research at its best. That is, it has the "potential to bring about change from the bottom-up and the inside-out" (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:15).

The question now arising relates to how action research differs from more traditional research methodologies.

#### **5.4 THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH (POSITIVISM) TRADITION VERSUS ACTION RESEARCH**

The empirical research tradition implies a clear cause and effect relationship: data are collected, control groups put in place, pre-testing and post-testing conducted, and conclusions drawn which are then widely applied. Positivism is a method which has been developed in the natural sciences and has been

adopted by human and social sciences (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:16). The classroom situation is viewed as a controlled, predictable phenomenon and the researcher determines in advance what she hopes to achieve and through empirical evidence and data analysis sets out to prove it. The action researcher, on the other hand, seeks to explain and enhance practice rather than just describe it (McNiff 1988:126). The empirical researcher usually sets up two groups, viz. the experimental group who receive some input or treatment and a matching control group who receive some alternative treatment. Both groups are tested at the start of the experiment and at the end. The differences in the results are tested and documented and, according to Allwright and Bailey (1991:41), "from the results, the paradigm claims, we can infer that the treatment either did or did not cause a measurable change in behaviour or learning (the hypothesised effect)". Allwright and Bailey (1991:41) warn against the enormous difficulties involved when implementing the above kind of research, "in the natural setting of public education".

In traditional positivist research, the researcher stands apart from the system she is researching. The researcher is separated from the system by boundaries which reduce the system under study to "one or only a few parts, with the rest of the system assumed to be held constant" (Perry & Zuber-Skerritt 1992:198). The action researcher, on the other hand, is at the centre of the system being transformed. The researcher is, at once, researcher and active participant in the contextual interpretation process. Such a central position allows for exploration of a dynamic social process while linking such exploration with implementation or "acts of changing" social situations (Perry & Zuber-Skerritt 1992:199).

Although statistical results, based on empirical research, contribute to an overall reconnaissance of the problem, they do not form the foundation of the study. In this study, statistical data collected on this particular learner group by another researcher (Strydom 1997b), were included for purposes of

clarifying the problem, but these findings did not form the sole basis for this inquiry. McNiff (1988:13) describes the nature of empirical research: "The epistemology of the empiricist tradition is that theory determines practice. Teachers are encouraged to fit their practice into a stated theory, and this can often lead to malaise. The approach itself and the theory it generates are often couched in terms of the control of teachers' practice". It is clear from this that the teaching situation is shaped to perform according to the theory which is stultifying because the teaching situation is treated as a commodity rather than the complex, unpredictable, often irregular situation that it really is. As noted above, the paradigms of traditional positivist methods differ from those of action research in that action research places the emphasis on changing praxis, within a social system, where that which is being researched is not limited by preformulated boundaries.

Action research does not attempt to control the classroom situation; rather, it allows for the constant generation of new problems which prompt the teacher to improve practice continually through the on-going cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection. Allwright and Bailey (1991:45) distinguish between the degree of control imposed by empiricists as opposed to action researchers. They state that the empiricists attempt to control the classroom variables and impose a high degree of intervention, whereas the action researcher does not rigorously attempt to control the variables, albeit that intervention is also an essential characteristic of the action research construct.

In summary, following Allwright and Bailey (1991:45), one has to conclude that "it is becoming increasingly clear in general educational research (though research on language teaching and learning has lagged behind somewhat in this area) that action research is often a viable alternative, and one which offers immediate rewards to teachers and learners". Action research allows the researcher to be at the centre of that which is being researched, while

facilitating quality decisions based on the observation and reflection of action, in a social setting such as teaching and learning.

## 5.5 THE INTERPRETATIVE TRADITION VERSUS ACTION RESEARCH

Whereas the empiricist operates from a statistical, quantitative base, the researcher in the interpretative tradition studies through collecting and analyzing qualitative data. Through triangulation (three different points of view), the researcher compares and tests evidence and comes to subsequent conclusions. Triangulation is the process of attempting "to balance the researcher's opinion or interpretation against those of other participants" (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:19). The more voices (stakeholders) who contribute in the research process, the more accurately 'reality' will be reflected.

This research method acknowledges the input of the researcher to be as valid as that of the participants, and the focus lies in attempts to resolve the discrepancies between the responses of the researcher and her selected participants. The case study is the widely used example in this genre. Case studies focus on individual units, individual events, and a particular group or school or class. Findings based on case studies are, therefore, not usually generalizable to a whole population of learners, but pertain to the subjects only. Case studies can be used as evidence to support a more general theory. The aims of the case study fit easily into the action research framework. These aims are the following: solving a particular problem of a particular learner group (*vide* Chapter 1); applying theory to practice (*vide* Chapters 2, 3 and 4) and; generating hypotheses based on illustrations drawn from the results of data-gathering (*vide* 5.7 and Chapter 6). In fact, all four of these aims are incorporated in this study, and comply with the action research criteria of being "tightly focused and personalised and allowing for on-going

critical reflection and improvement" (Wallace 1998:170). The use of the case study approach within the framework of action research methodology is "a highly appropriate tool for teachers wishing to promote their own professional development within their own context" (Wallace 1998:170).

The interpretative method, like the empirical, imposes a framework "into which the researcher must fit himself and his practice" (McNiff 1988:18). Both research methodologies study subjects rather than educational practice, and herein lies a valuable difference between these research methods and action research for the teacher/researcher: "They do not allow for such questions as, How can I account for my own educational development?, firstly, because it is not part of their methodological design to ask such practical, problem-based questions and secondly, because it is not part of their conceptual repertoire to answer them" (McNiff 1988:18). Thus, Action research allows for questions about educational practice and the development of the practitioner. As these are exactly the questions relevant in this study, it seems appropriate to seek answers through action research and not through more traditional methodologies.

Action research differs from qualitative/interpretative research in three important ways, viz.

- findings/conclusions are produced specifically for other educational practitioners and not for the general scientific community, albeit that the latter may find the results useful;
- qualitative research observes, describes and interprets events in educational settings, but action research aims to transform these settings as well as observe, describe and interpret them; and
- action research (as its name suggests) is driven by action following on the heels of reflection and it occurs in action-oriented settings where planned

change aims at improvement and where strategies are evaluated (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:19).

It should be noted that action research is not a linear process as indicated by the spirals in the process, just as slavishly following the spirals does not constitute action research (McTaggart 1996:248). It is in the dynamic nature of action research, which is captured in the spirals, where the greatest distinction lies between action research and other research methods. The spirals explain "the need for acting differently 'within the study' as a result of progressively learning from experience" (McTaggart 1996:248). Each cycle allows for systematic feedback which, in turn, feeds information into the next cycle.

The tools of research from the empirical tradition and the interpretative tradition can be gainfully used within the cyclical action research framework. This viewpoint is supported by Crookes (1993:132) who states that all "the normal tools of social science or educational research can be brought to bear, to the extent that the teacher doing action research is familiar with them or wishes to use them". Thus, depending on the researcher, traditional methodologies may be utilized (as is demonstrated in this study) to elucidate the initial teaching problem.

Action research which aims at improving social practice through a form of collective, self-reflective enquiry is known as emancipatory action research. This type of action research is described in the next section.

## **5.6 EMANCIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

Grundy (1987:353) discusses three modes of action research: technical, practical and emancipatory. Holter and Schwartz-Barcott (1993:301) also discuss three types of action research, that of a technical collaborative

approach, a mutual collaborative approach and an enhancement approach. McKernan (1991:16-27) lists the following types of action research:

- Type 1: the scientific-technical view of problem solving which focuses on the efficacy of education practice;
- Type 2: practical-deliberative action research leans towards the singular focus of the development of the practitioner; and
- Type 3: critical-emancipatory action research.

Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992:205) demonstrate the three main types of action research and their main characteristics in Fig. 5.1:

**Figure 5.1: Types of action research and their main characteristics**  
(adapted from Perry & Zuber-Skerritt 1992:205)

Type of action research	Aims	Facilitator's role	Relationship between facilitator and participants
1. Technical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Effective/efficiency of educational practice</li> <li>- Professional development</li> </ul>	Outside 'expert'	Co-option (of practitioners who depend on facilitator)
2. Practical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- as (1) above</li> <li>- practitioner's understanding</li> <li>- transformation of their consciousness</li> </ul>	Socratic role, encouraging participation and self-reflection	Co-operation (process-consultancy)
3. Emancipatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- as (2) above</li> <li>- participant's emancipation from the dictates of tradition, self-deception, coercion</li> <li>- their critique of bureaucratic systematisation</li> <li>- transformation of the organisation and of the educational system</li> </ul>	Process moderator (responsibility shared equally by participants)	Collaboration



From the above, it is clear that the parameters of practical and technical action research are firmer than those of emancipatory action research, which means that, potentially, emancipatory action research provides more opportunity for staff development, quality enhancement and organizational learning within a flexible, ever-changing social situation. The researcher involved in emancipatory action research works as full collaborator and aims for transformation without being bound by the dictates of tradition. This characteristic makes emancipatory action research a good tool to use in situations or institutions of educational change, as is being experienced at the University of the Free State. Kemmis and McTaggart (1990:21) contend, however, that "research that is participatory and collaborative, let alone critical and self-critical, must evolve slowly if its development is to follow its own principles". The current project was started in 1996 and is on-going, even though only three cycles have been described in this thesis.

Early advocates of action research such as Lippitt and Radke in 1946, Lewin in 1947, Corey in 1953, and Taba en Noel in 1957 put forward a scientific method of problem-solving as a means of action research. This is now known as technical action research (McKernan 1991:16). The underlying goal of the researcher in technical action research is to test a particular intervention based on a pre-specified theoretical framework, while the nature of the collaboration between the researcher and the practitioner is technical and facilitatory. The researcher identifies the problem and a specific intervention, after which the practitioners are involved and agree to facilitate with the implementation of the intervention (Holter & Schwartz-Barcott 1993:301). The communication flow within this type of research is primarily between the facilitator and the group, so that the ideas are communicated to the group (Grundy 1982:360). As already mentioned above, the emancipatory researcher incorporates this type of approach, as well as practical action research and emancipatory approaches. The term emancipation in the context

of action research refers to "critique of current conditions and more or less immediate attempts at concrete improvement" (McTaggart 1996:245).

Carr and Kemmis (1986:7) feel strongly that only emancipatory action research is real action research, which they define as "having strategic action as its subject matter; proceeding through the spiral of planning, acting, observing and reflecting; and involving the participation and collaboration in all phases of the research activity".

Emancipatory action research "promotes emancipatory praxis in the participating practitioners; that is, it promotes a critical consciousness which exhibits itself in political as well as practical action to promote change" (Grundy 1987:154). This type of research methodology is not hierarchical in that all participants are equal contributors to the inquiry. The very nature of emancipatory action research allows for problem-solving, is on-going and acts as an agent for change (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:35). Perry and Zuber-Skerritt (1992:206) contend that the different types of action research are not mutually exclusive and that the shifts from technical to practical to emancipatory action research are gradual. The relationships of shared participation moves from the practitioner depending on facilitators, to a process of co-operation between participants, to a full collaboration where all participants become part of the process.

The above characteristics make emancipatory action research well suited to a study aimed at developing a new programme for an underprepared group (*vide* 2.3.5) of students who wish to join a traditional educational institution which, until now, has adopted an approach that has not optimized the students' participation in course development.

It has been established why emancipatory action research is the action research model selected for this study, but a brief review of action research as a valid vehicle for research, is necessary.

## **5.7 JUSTIFICATION OF KEY ISSUES**

It is necessary to look, briefly, at certain key issues regarding action research as a valid research methodology, viz. how the collaborative nature of action research impacts on methodological triangulation and investigator triangulation of the research.

Triangulation is the procedure of acquiring more than one perspective on the problem so as to validate and cross-validate the process (Wallace 1998:36). Investigator triangulation was achieved in that several collaborative contributions were incorporated which were instrumental in carrying the process forward. These collaborative contributions were:

- the evaluation of the South African Institute for Distance Learning (SAIDE);
- the monitoring report of the Unit for Research into Higher Education of the UFS;
- the facilitators teaching on the programme; and
- the learners on the programme.

Methodological triangulation was achieved through several data-gathering methods such as:

- Interviews;
- A research journal documenting tutor-training meetings ;
- Classroom observation;
- Evaluation of students' written work;

- External evaluations performed by SAIDE and the Unit for Higher Education (two reputable organizations in higher education);
- Questionnaires to facilitators;
- Student perception of learning questionnaires (to gauge students' perception of their own learning);
- Monitoring techniques such as mark sheets which documented students' progress;
- An attendance register to identify students who did not attend class regularly so that problems could be pre-empted;
- The results of an Academic Aptitude Test;
- The results of a Language Placement Test;
- The English matriculation results of the group; and
- A literature review of SLA, SL learner characteristics, low proficiency at tertiary level and international teaching trends.

The question of validity is motivated by McNiff (1988:131), who contends that the strength of action research lies in its relevance, its emancipatory characteristics, its democracy and its collaborative nature. The action researcher capitalizes on "the actors' and investigators' deep familiarity with the situation" (1993:134).

Triangulation or the value of multiple perspectives is integral to the concept of validation in action research. This term has been borrowed from Anthropologists, who suggest that at least two perspectives are necessary if an accurate perspective is to be obtained. In classroom research these two perspectives are usually those of the teacher and the learner or the researcher and the learner. Allwright and Bailey (1991:73) caution that in the practice of classroom research, these two different perspectives do not guarantee accuracy, but "at least they counterbalance each other and make it much more difficult to believe in the absolute truth of data taken from any single perspective". Allwright and Bailey (1991:73) claim that the researcher

should gain as many perspectives as possible to ensure validity. Triangulation can take different forms, viz. data triangulation (a variety of sampling strategies which are discussed in the next section), investigator triangulation (more than one observer as indicated above) and methodological triangulation (different data-collection methods as indicated above). Theoretical triangulation, which requires that more than one theoretical perspective be included, also needs to be taken into account (*vide* Chapters 2, 3, 4 & 5).

As indicated above several data-generating methods were used in this study. A brief discussion of these methods outlines the input and feedback which stimulated the action research spirals.

## **5.8 DATA-GENERATING METHODS USED IN THIS STUDY**

The action researcher does not only collect data in order to act, but also studies the intentions, consequences and circumstances of the action he or she has taken, and uses the information to influence further actions. Elliott (1992:70–83) recommends that the action researcher make use of a wide range of monitoring techniques and states that “multi-techniques will help to secure a more penetrating grasp of the situation”. He lists a number of data-gathering procedures that an action researcher may undertake, and suggests the use of monitoring techniques which provide evidence of how well the course of action is being implemented and which provide evidence of the unintended as well as intended effects.

In this study a variety of techniques were used to gather data (*vide* 5.7). The emphasis was on collaboration where data were collected from several observers and participants.

Some of the techniques most frequently used in this study are described below.

### **5.8.1 Interviews**

For purposes of this study, focus group and semi-structured interviews were used. The researcher did not personally gather the qualitative data gleaned from the focus group interviews, but made use of the results of research done on the same target group by Strydom (1997b). These results are discussed in the next section.

#### **5.8.1.1 Focus group interviews**

According to Babbie (1991:254-256), focus groups bring together several participants to discuss a topic of mutual interest to themselves and the researcher. It is suggested that focus group interviews should be introduced by a "moderator" who then encourages all participants to take part in the discussion. Interaction among the participants should be informal to stimulate in-depth discussion and reflection on the topic, and interviews should be timed to last no more than two hours.

The researcher made use of the qualitative findings resulting from the focus group interviews conducted by Strydom (1997b) in a study of the Counselling Needs of Students in a Resource-Based Learning Programme. The study focused on the counselling needs of the very same target group that is the focus of this study. Strydom used thirty students from this target group (all of whom took English as a subject) who were interviewed in March, April and May of 1997 (Strydom 1997b:118-120). Information gained from these focus group interviews is documented in section 2.3.5. Some of the data from Strydom's study were valuable to the researcher, as the same target group formed the focus of inquiry.

### 5.8.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

The researcher made use of the semi-structured interview in obtaining input from the facilitators teaching on the CPP programme.

Interviews are used extensively across all the disciplines of social sciences. It has been used in education research as a key technique in data collection. There are different kinds of interviews, depending on the nature of questions asked, the degree of control over the interview exercised by the interviewer, the number of people involved and the overall position of the interview in the research itself (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989:79).

The researcher used semi-structured interviews mainly because of the small scale nature of this research (Johnson 1994:51). These semi-structured interviews took place with the facilitators teaching on the English programme and occurred every Monday afternoon between 1pm and 2pm at the university. All facilitators (tutors) were involved and the results of these meetings/interviews were documented in a journal (an important and valued technique in action research) by the researcher. Excerpts from these interviews are included in section 6.1.5.2 and the journal which (is retrievable) is lodged with the researcher. These meetings constituted the only semi-structured interviews that were documented. Other semi-structured interviews occurred with students on an *ad hoc* basis when it was requested by students to discuss problems being experienced. These, however, were not documented.

De Vos (2000:299) refers to semi-structured interviews as qualitative interviewing, which is characterized by the following:

- A relatively informal style, for example, it takes on the appearance of a conversation rather than a formal question-and-answer format;

- A thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach, which covers the issues or themes the researcher wishes to cover; and
- The assumption that data are generated via interaction.

Semi-structured interviews have the advantage that they allow the interviewer to introduce new ideas into the discussion which have, as yet, not been thought of beforehand, but are developed during the course of the interview (Hitchcock & Hughes 1989:79). This approach also allows flexibility for the interviewees to extrapolate freely on their views (Stake 1995:65).

### **5.8.2 A research journal**

From the beginning of the study, the researcher kept a research journal (referred to in the section above), documenting all activities and experiences related to the research. Through keeping a journal, the researcher was able to keep track of the research activities. She could also reflect on facts, thoughts, perceptions and feelings. Elliott (1992:77) states that a journal "should contain personal accounts of observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations. Accounts should not merely report the 'bald facts' of the situation, but convey a feeling of what it is like to be there participating in it". The classroom observations documented in 6.1.2.2 were noted in this journal.

Elliott (1992) views a research journal as "a place to make explicit questions and concerns for later answering in organising, ... a way of imaging a stream that flows through and surrounds the territory of the research". By compiling a journal, the researcher was able to link all the different research experiences and could see key themes emerging. Excerpts from this journal are documented in cycle 1 of the action research in Chapter 6.



### 5.8.3 Observation

Babbie (1991:288-290) identifies two interim positions on a continuum of participant-observation techniques. He describes these as an "observer-as-participant" in which the researcher is known as the researcher, but does not participate in the events and a "participant-as-observer", in which a researcher participates, as fully as possible, in the on-going activities of the research group.

Observations for this study included the following:

- field notes made in the journal referred to above;
- documented classroom observations (*vide* 6.1.2.2);
- selected samples of students' writing (*vide* 6.1.2.6);
- written statements of the course expectations of learners (*vide* 2.3.2);  
and
- mark sheets (*vide* Appendix A 10-11). These mark sheets and the information gained from them are discussed in 6.2.4.4.

#### 5.8.3.1 External Evaluation

Two important sources of information/data for this research were the evaluation of the South African Institute for Distance Learning (SAIDE) and the monitoring report presented by Khabanyane (1997), who was tasked by the Unit for Research into Higher Education at the Free State University. The SAIDE report (the relevant section) is included in Appendix C no. 1 and the relevant sections of the Khabanyane report in Appendix C no. 2. The SAIDE report was a comprehensive evaluation of the course which covered course outcomes, assessment, monitoring, materials, teaching approach, course profile, student progress, plans for improvement of teaching and learning, as well as conclusions and recommendations. SAIDE was involved with the CPP

programme since its inception and all facilitators and co-ordinators received extensive training from SAIDE regarding monitoring, assessment and the design of materials. SAIDE was involved in the pilot programme (sponsored by the Ford Foundation) which served as the incentive for this study in 1996. Thus, because of this long-standing involvement, the SAIDE report with its critical-evaluative findings and assessment was an extremely valuable contribution to this project.

### 5.8.3.1 Questionnaires

Three questionnaires were designed for purposes of qualitative data triangulation. These included two questionnaires for students on their perceptions of learning (*vide* Appendix A no. 5 and no. 6 and no. 13 and no. 14). Two questionnaires were designed for the facilitators on the programme to obtain their perceptions of the teaching and learning (*vide* Appendix A nos 7, 9 and 17).

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

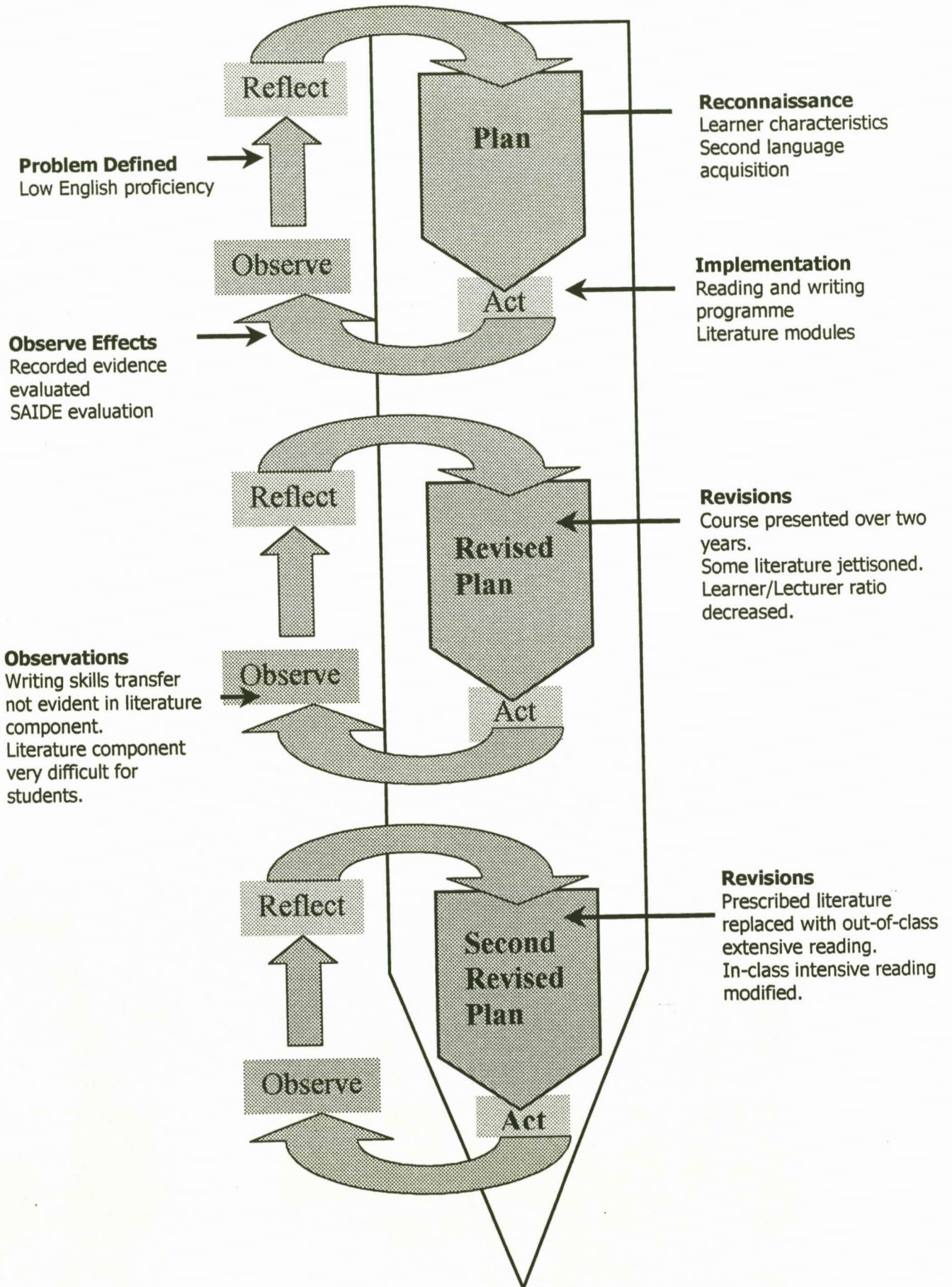
In summary, the main reasons (Crookes 1993; Gore & Zeichner 1991:123; Allwright & Bailey 1991; Carr & Kemmis 1986) for selecting action research with its phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, for a study of this nature, were the following:

- emancipatory action research provides a means of critical reflection on the development and implementation processes of a programme of learning and teaching;
- action research provides a means of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning within particular institutional constraints (*vide* 6.1.5). It is also a means of on-going quality enhancement in that the process is on-going and implementation is refined continuously;
- the results of this research may facilitate transformation in the teaching approach, materials design and content used for this target group and

- application occurs as the research progresses. In other words, an immediacy of perspectives is provided in that this research provides valuable information which has immediate relevance to learner needs, such as insights regarding learners' responses to their own learning;
- action research is firmly based in theory (*vide* Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5) and faces up to practices and values which may hitherto not have been challenged in specific institutions. This research constitutes the first research project which has led to learner-driven course development on a bridging course at the University of the Free State and insights gained from this research continuously inform practice, with the result that the course has evolved to accommodate the general academic communication (academic reading and writing skills) needs of low-proficiency, previously disadvantaged learners;
  - action research encourages teacher reflection which, in turn, leads to professional growth. For example, the insights gained from the research review (*vide* Chapters 2, 3 and 4) enabled the researcher to draw on current trends and approaches to SLA, L2 teaching and learning and instructional trends; and
  - research of this kind encourages on-going research as more concerns are raised in the process and institutional learning occurs. For example, this research has raised the researcher's awareness of the language proficiency problems experienced by students who come from similar backgrounds as the target group of this study, but who (for a variety of reasons) do not receive any supportive language assistance.

These reasons convinced the researcher that action research is appropriate in this particular case where the target group has specific needs, which may or may not be met by traditional tertiary approaches and practices. The following figure (Fig. 5.2) is a representation of the action research cycles taken in this study and which are described in the next chapter.

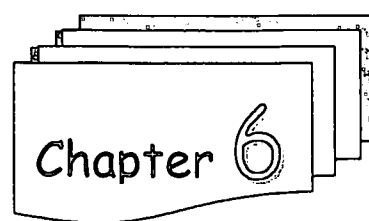
**Figure 5.2: Action research cycles of programme development**



The planning phase of the first cycle (*vide* 5.2 above) included an extensive literature study (Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5), as well as the data-gathering techniques described in 5.8 above. The act phase of the first cycle included the implementation of a basic reading and writing component in addition to the full, prescribed literature component required by the Department of English (the same number of prescribed texts required for a full-time, first-year course). The observation phase included the SAIDE evaluation report and other observations made by the researcher as listed in 5.8 above. The reflectx phase involved careful consideration of the data gathered in the observation phase of the cycle. The second cycle of the action research spiral was implemented over a two-year period. The planning phase was informed by the critical reflection of the first cycle of the research. For example, students were not coping with the literature component of the course and more time was needed for language skills training (*vide* 6.2.1.3). The implementation (act) phase of the second cycle of the action research involved the action taken after consideration of insights gained during the planning phase. For example, more time was allocated to the basic academic reading and writing skills component. The observation and reflection phases followed and the steps taken are described in 6.2.3.

The final cycle of the action research was informed by the critical reflection phase of the second cycle of research resulting in a revised plan. The implementation (act) phase reflected the results of the revised plan. For example, the course became a basic academic reading and writing skills training course aimed at second language acquisition within an academic context. The observation and reflection phases involved the taking of several steps which are described in 6.3.3 and 6.3.4

Chapter 6 describes the above three spirals of the action research in more detail and is substantiated by samples of the data gathered in Appendix A, B and C.



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# THE DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME FOR LOW- PROFICIENCY TERTIARY LEARNERS VIA ACTION RESEARCH

## 6.0 INTRODUCTION

**T**he primary aim of this research was the development of an English language programme which would meet the requirements set by the Department of English and Classical Culture at the University of the Free State, as well as meet the academic language needs of a group of low-proficiency, scholastically disadvantaged students. However, the researcher did not only develop this programme, but also implemented and critically reflected on every phase of the unfolding (implementation) of the programme with the aim of improving teaching and learning on the CPP programme.

The focus of this chapter is on providing an in-depth description of the three cycles of implementation, development and evaluation, and the various steps that were taken to complete the action research phases of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. In the following description of the action research, the researcher refers to the various steps that were executed to (1) identify

the problem, survey the problem, identify other role players and identify possible constraints (2) plan programme outcomes, select teaching approach, select teaching materials (3) act on planning, describe how the plan was implemented and organized, (4) reflect on actions taken. Eventually, the combination of these phases represent a cycle of the action research. For purpose of consistency, the researcher uses the term *cycle* when referring to a complete action research cycle. The term *phase* is used to describe each component of one cycle and the word *step* is used to indicate the parts of each phase.

Cycle one is described with as much detail as possible and cycles two and three focus on relevant information which contribute to the improvement and unfolding of the programme. Some repetitive detail has been omitted from cycles two and three so as to enable the reader to follow the actual progress of implementation. The following section describes the planning phase of the first action research cycle.

## **6.1 CYCLE ONE**

During the first cycle of this research project considerable time was spent on analyzing and interpreting the research problem. This formed part of the planning phase of this cycle. This survey includes extensive data-gathering on the target group. As emphasized by Carr and Kemmis (1986:26), the action researcher usually starts with a clear problem statement followed by a thorough survey or reconnaissance of the problem.

### **6.1.1 Step 1: Identification of research problem**

As detailed in the introduction to this study, the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) at the University of the Free State, which was launched in 1996, was followed by the first actual intake of students in 1997 and aims

to provide those students who do not meet the traditional entrance requirements of the university with an opportunity to access tertiary learning (*vide* 1.3).

In 1997 this programme started with 185 students who all enrolled for English as an accredited university subject. The intake has since grown to 400 students. As described in Chapter 1, these students have low English language proficiency, making it difficult to compete in an academic environment (*vide* 1.3). This presented the following research problem:

#### **RESEARCH PROBLEM**

The English language proficiency of scholastically disadvantaged tertiary students makes them vulnerable to academic failure.

Originating from the literature review, the research questions for this project were formulated as follows:

- What can be done to improve the low English language proficiency of these students?
- Should a specific English language programme be designed to address the language needs of these students?
- What should the content and nature of such an English language programme be?
- Should low-proficiency learners be required to cope with an English literary component as well as an English language component in the same programme?



In order to interpret the research problem appropriately, the researcher did an expanded reconnaissance of the research problem.

### 6.1.2 Step 2: Reconnaissance of the research problem

According to Zuber-Skerritt (1991:29), reconnaissance enlightens the researcher regarding the exact problems experienced by the target group, and provides meaningful insight into the variety and nature of particular problems experienced in the specific research context.

During this step the researcher used a multi-faceted approach by combining both qualitative and quantitative techniques. This synthesis of multi-faceted and combined methods and techniques makes action research a potent tool in the hands of the researcher as these methods and techniques ensure triangulation of findings and deductions (Kerfoot & Winberg 1997:19). The following data were gathered and interpreted to verify the research problem:

- Implications for programme development concluded from the literature review (Chapters 2, 3 and 4);
- Classroom observations (*vide* 6.1.2.2);
- Quantitative data such as matriculation results (6.1.2.3) and data obtained from a Language Placement Test which the target group completed (*vide* 2.4.5, 6.1.2.5);
- Quantitative data such as the results of an Academic Aptitude Test (*vide* 6.1.2.4);
- Samples of student writing (*vide* 6.1.2.6); and
- Recommendations of the feasibility study done by SAIDE (*vide* 1.5).

In the next section, the researcher explains how each of the above contributed towards (1) the survey of the learning and language problems of

the target group and (2) the implications for development of a programme of language learning.

### **6.1.2.1 Information from the literature review**

In action research, the literature is viewed as part of the researcher's task of exploring the research phenomenon and the research population. The literature informs the way the researcher plans the steps and activities to be included in each of the research phases. The following perspectives and insights, regarding the research population, were gained from the literature review. The literature review substantiated and confirmed some intuitive conclusions, drawn by the researcher, regarding the language proficiency and problems of the target group.

The researcher therefore investigated the following essential areas which are pivotal to the research problem:

#### **6.1.2.1.1 The implications of second language learner characteristics and programme development (*vide* Chapter 2)**

It is necessary to summarize the overall implications of the above theoretical discussion on proficiency and learner characteristics on the development of a language and literature programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. The implications for programme development are as follows:

- A programme of language learning at tertiary level should focus on the development of, among others, academic reading and writing skills as these are the skills the target group need in their present context, viz. the academic context (Blue 1993:11, Eskey 1993:224, *vide* 2.1.2);

- The use of a combined input processing and communicative teaching approach (*vide* 2.2) is favoured for this group as this approach accounts for the interactive nature of the four language skills and enables the teacher to focus learners' attention on the conventions and features of discourse necessary for academic communication (VanPatten 1996:63, Brown 1994:29);
- Learning tasks should be completed in pairs according to the principle of collaborative learning as it is integral to the communicative teaching approach (Brown 1994:29, *vide* 2.2);
- Motivation facilitates learning and there are several ways of maintaining motivation. An exchange of learner/lecturer expectations for the course has to be officially convened where each party expresses their expectations of the other. When learners know what is expected of them, they are better able to meet those expectations and success stimulates motivation (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, *vide* 2.3.2). It is important for any academic programme planner to take cognizance of the learners' expectations and then to make sure that these expectations are met, within reason, and within the context of the programme. Unrealistic expectations should be dealt with in a period of thorough orientation to the programme of study. Academic readiness entails a shared overall outlook and experience with regard to education and is shaped largely by the learners' formal and informal learning experience. The learners' expectations will differ accordingly (*vide* 2.3. 5.1). Much has been written about the mismatch of expectations between student and academic staff (Jordan 1997, Bloor & Bloor 1991, Greenall & Price 1980);
- Thorough course orientation should be done to ensure that learners understand the relevance of the language and literature components and their relevance to the motivational goals expressed by the learner group (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, *vide* 2.3.2);
- Regular monitoring of students' class attendance and test results is necessary so as to pick up on problems or to encourage where necessary.

- This ensures that good learning and teaching relationships are fostered and facilitates motivated learning (Skehan 1989:50, *vide* Appendix A no. 12b, *vide* 2.3.2);
- Continuous assessment should be implemented. Such a policy of assessment should be cumulative so that learners are able to monitor their own progress and is consistent with the principles of feedback, frequent assessment and reward (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, Crookes & Schmidt 1991: 488, Skehan 1989:50, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Regular weekly meetings with tutors/facilitators on the programme should be scheduled to ensure that they are informed and remain motivated. These meetings should provide a platform for discussing problems that they have encountered (Van Lier 1996:218, *vide* 2.3.4.1);
  - Classroom materials should be interesting and authentic to broaden learners' general world knowledge, sustain motivation and expose learners to a variety of genres. (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, Crookes & Schmidt 1991:488, *vide* 2.3.2);
  - Language learning styles vary; therefore, the programme developer should attempt to accommodate this variety, for example, analytic-style students enjoy rule learning, contrastive analysis and analyzing words and phrases, whereas global students use those strategies that will give them the global view, viz. guessing, scanning and predicting. A variety of interesting classroom activities and materials should be planned that will appeal to a variety of learning styles (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95, Oxford 1993:180, *vide* 2.3.3);
  - Varying learner aptitude levels should be accommodated through the provision of a variety of tasks, teaching material and an emphasis on strategy training (Sparks & Ganschow 2001:95, *vide* 2.3.1);
  - Proficiency should be facilitated by encouraging the use of appropriate learning strategies which provide learners with contextual support required to facilitate *proficiency*. The teaching of learning strategies provides the

learner with opportunities for active, self-directed involvement (Ellis 1994:198, *vide* 2.1.1);

- Encourage the use of specific LS such as reading strategies and make learners aware of how these can facilitate their learning through an orchestrated use of strategies (Oxford 1993:183). Thus, a reading task would include such strategies as, for example, previewing, activating background knowledge, scanning, skimming, summarizing and post-reading. Such strategies would then form an integral part of classroom instruction (*vide* Appendix A nos 18a and 18b). Once the language programmer is sensitized to the variety of learning styles and subsequent strategies favoured by learners, then a systematic inclusion of a broad selection of strategies may serve to enhance comprehension and learning and provide the contextual support to facilitate proficiency (Chamot & El-Dinary 1999:323, *vide* 2.3.4);
- Achievable student learning objectives should be set to maintain motivation and facilitate the learning process (*vide* 2.3.2, Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191); and
- Older learners, such as the target group, should not be limited in the challenges presented to them. Older learners should be presented with relevant, authentic materials and tasks to encourage maximum opportunity for SLA (Ellis 1994:489, *vide* 2.3.6).

#### **6.1.2.1.2 Second language acquisition and language proficiency** (*vide* Chapter 3)

The review of research pertaining to SLA, factors involved in classroom SLA such as IL development, input, error correction and classroom interaction provided a framework for the implementation of a language programme for low-proficiency tertiary learners. The key insights gathered from the literature were:

- Learner IL can be systematically guided to evolve closer to the TL through instruction which engages the learner and focuses attention on the difference between his/her own IL and the TL through detailed feedback (Ellis 1994:352);
- Errors or mistakes are an indication of learners' development along the IL continuum. These errors should be viewed as an indication of what learners need to know next in a sequence and then to point out where their production differs from the TL thus, getting learners to 'notice the gap' between their own production and the TL (Johnson 1996:124, Allwright & Bailey 1994:92). This process is often referred to as consciousness-raising. This is achieved through repeated form-meaning connections: "learners' internal mechanism will detect grammatical form early on only if it is relatively high in communicative value" (VanPatten 1996:30). In the context of the Cummins and Swain (1986) definition of proficiency, SL proficiency is developed through contextual support available for receiving or producing meaning. Error correction may be regarded as a means of on-going contextual support;
- Much use should be made of co-operative learning through peer marking which encourages self-correction of errors;
- Language tasks should represent "real operating conditions" (rocs) where the learners perform tasks that are representative of real-world tasks and are meaning-bearing within the context that the learners find themselves (Johnson 1996:127);
- Materials which stimulate learner interest and motivation should be selected as CI is not the only driving force in SLA. Motivation and prior learning, together with CI, impact on classroom language learning (Ellis 1994, Sharwood Smith 1994, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991);
- CI is vital to SLA, therefore, the quality of CI is crucial and comprehensible input should be bolstered with carefully planned assistance in the form of meaning-bearing tasks aimed at focusing attention on linguistic forms (form-meaning connection). In addition to this stimulating materials,

which have intrinsic merit, should be selected. This may be achieved if graded readers are used as a means of promoting SLA;

- Learners' prior learning should be taken into consideration when planning classroom learning and their level of proficiency should be tested, while input should be planned systematically to improve proficiency levels (Cook 1991:89, Larsen-Freeman & Long 1991:129);
- Input processing by learners should be fostered. In other words, input should be processed so that it is accessible to learners (Rosa & O'Neill 1999:546, Paribakht & Wesche 1999:195);
- Input frequency influences SLA, provided it is meaning-bearing and learners' attention is focused on the unfamiliar through specially designed tasks which ensure that input processing occurs (Paribakht & Wesche 1999:195, Rosa & O'Neill 1999:546, VanPatten 1996:5);
- Modified input influences SLA positively, provided it occurs interactionally while the learner is communicating and is engaged with meaning-bearing input (Van Lier 1996);
- Teacher response "philosophy" should be clearly explained during an orientation session; and
- Classroom interaction should focus on quality interaction so as to afford learners maximum opportunity to negotiate meaning interactively. This is achieved through using dyads where meaning is negotiated between students. Group work and pair work should be an integral classroom method so as to facilitate the negotiation of meaning.

#### 6.1.2.1.3 International trends in the development of academic literacy (*vide* Chapter 4)

Understandings gained from a research review on international trends in tertiary L2 teaching, trends in the teaching of academic literacy, as well as a closer look at the demands of a literature programme on the SL learner, led

the researcher to deduce the following implications for the programme developer:

- Learner characteristics, particularly prior learning and motivation as well as language proficiency levels, must be taken into account before preparing a programme of SLA (Silva 1994:18);
- An eclectic teaching approach, which includes content-based as well as task-based learning, may be taken when teaching reading and writing skills as this facilitates the development of procedures and strategy-training while improving language and encouraging content knowledge (Carson *et al.* 1997:367);
- Classroom content and tasks should model real-world academic tasks (Grabe & Stoller 1997:5);
- Academic reading strategies, such as pre-reading activities, skimming, scanning, summarizing, post-reading activities, etc., should be systematically taught to provide contextual support and automaticity which, in turn, facilitate SLA (*vide* 2.1.1);
- Writing skills needed in the academic context should be specifically taught, viz. the process of think-plan-draft-revise-write-edit and rewrite should be explicitly practised as this encourages the process of discovering meaning;
- Weighting of reading and writing components in a language programme should be based on students' proficiency levels. Proficiency should be tested and the results of the testing should determine the time and weighting of the two components. In other words, the needs of the learners determine the time spent on each component (Bamford & Day 1998:35);
- A programme of language through academic literacy should focus on the symbiotic relationship between academic reading and academic writing. In other words, reading-based writing tasks should be the focus (Hudson 1998:49);



- A programme of out-of-class extensive reading coupled with an in-class intensive reading course is an internationally recognized option for low-proficiency tertiary learners and could be a viable option for this target group (Ferris & Hedgcock 1998:37);
- Learners should be exposed to plenty of CI. An internationally recognized method of achieving this is the use of graded readers in an extensive out-of-class reading programme;
- An in-class intensive reading programme should be followed which structures the way learners process reading material and focuses on salient textual features; and
- Lastly, if students have not attained a certain level of language competence as well as a familiarity with literary conventions, then a programme of literature will not facilitate SLA (Maley 1993:10).

#### 6.1.2.2 Classroom observations

The researcher documented classroom observations to gain insight into the learners' language needs and to facilitate the development of a language programme which focuses on the needs of the learners. The aim of the classroom observations was to assess these against the findings of the literature review, and if possible and applicable, to use these as input in the planning of an effective language programme. The classroom observations, coupled with a literature review, would provide the researcher with insight regarding the language needs of the target group and would assist in providing a programme of learning to meet these needs. These classroom observations form part of the reconnaissance of the problem.

From the very start the researcher took a critical-reflective stance in the programme. Within the first few classroom sessions, it became abundantly clear to the researcher that the low proficiency of the students posed a serious threat to the possibility of their achieving university access through

their selected medium of instruction, viz. English. This conclusion was, partially, based on classroom observations during interactive sessions. These were the following:

- Students took approximately 25 minutes to read a passage of 480 words.
- Many students were sub-vocalising while reading, indicating that they were relying on oral reconstruction to gain meaning instead of proceeding straight from the written word to meaning;
- The very first passage of reading was followed by 6 questions testing comprehension. Not one student gained a full score on these 6 questions;
- Students had great difficulty in following written and oral instructions of any kind. (The researcher often had to "repeat and repeat" instructions before all students started the task. If instructions were written, they would call her over one by one and request that she explain what had to be done);
- They were incapable of peer evaluation even with the help of a written example and mark allocation on a transparency in front of them;
- Students were not used to solving problems themselves and constantly asked for guidance and lecturer input;
- They found the first literature assignment of the year extremely difficult as it required a transfer and integration of skills;
- Students had very little or no general knowledge and had no idea of basic knowledge, for example, what a volcano was;
- Students had no idea of time management or how to pace their studies; and
- Their first attempt at writing their own paragraphs revealed that they could not group ideas together, did not know how to connect sentences using connectives, had no idea of a topic sentence, did not understand the concept of supporting sentences or a concluding sentence. Many students had no idea of punctuation or of what constituted a sentence, and spliced sentences abounded in their work. They could not use pronouns or

prepositions adequately (*vide* 6.1.2.6 for an example of student writing and Appendix A no. 12a which is a facilitator's summary of the most common errors made by students).

The classroom observations made it evident to the researcher that these students did not have the academic communicative skills necessary to engage in academic communicative activities successfully.

### 6.1.2.3 Quantitative data such as matriculation results

Quantitative data were gathered as part of the reconnaissance phase and was, together with the literature review, a means of verifying the classroom observations. Quantitative data were gained from information provided by the relevant administrative section of the university. The results of the Free State English Second Language Examination for this group of students are summarized in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1 English Second Language matriculation results of the target group**

B-Symbol	C-symbol	D-symbol	E-symbol	F-symbol
1	3	39	121	11

N = 185

The results demonstrate that the majority of students fall into the D and E symbol categories which vary between 50% and 59% for a D symbol, and between 40% and 49% for an E symbol. The majority, however, (69%) fall in the E category, and the E and F categories together account for 75% of the students. The summative deduction is that these learners, as a group, gained weak scores on their English matriculation examination and it could be reasonably predicted that they would experience difficulties with a programme of English learning as well as other subjects.

#### **6.1.2.4 Quantitative data of the Academic Aptitude Test (AAT)**

Van der Westhuizen, Monteith and Steyn (1989: 729) found the AAT to be a good measure of the predictive validity of cognitive variables in predicting DET matriculants' academic achievement. The purpose of the test is to serve as an objective, reliable and valid aid in guiding of students with respect to choice of a field of study and subject choice. Strydom (1997a:103) states the following regarding the test: "The Academic Aptitude Test (for universities) was standardised for African university students or prospective African students to historically 'black' universities. The test is intended to give an indication of the testee's intellectual, verbal, spatial perceptual abilities as well as his/her mathematical proficiency".

The test consists of a number of English passages which are each followed by questions testing comprehension of the passages. The results of this subtest, as documented by Strydom (1997a:152), confirm a low reading proficiency and he states that these needs should be addressed in the CPP programme: "The results for the AAT indicated that students had a below average English reading comprehension ability which has an adverse effect on students' chances of academic success and suggests that the counselling system should develop initiatives to address students' reading ability" (Strydom 1997a:152).

#### **6.1.2.5 Quantitative data obtained from a Language Placement Test**

This test was developed by the Applied Language Studies Section of the Department of English and Cultural Studies at UFS and assesses the following:

- Accuracy: concord and verb phrases;
- Accuracy of noun-phrase concord;
- Controlled composition; and
- Comprehension.

The students in the target group achieved an average score of 22% which was compared to the results achieved by full-time students on campus who took the same test. The students on campus (who were enrolled for an English course on campus) achieved an average of 47%. This indicated that the CPP students seemed to have a much lower English proficiency than full-time, first-year students and they could, therefore, be labelled as high-risk students.

#### **6.1.2.6 Samples of student writing**

Students (35 who were in the researcher's class) were asked to write a paragraph in which they stated their reasons for choosing English and outlined their expectations of the course. The aim of the task was twofold, viz. firstly, to gain insight into their expectations, and secondly, also to collect samples of their writing. This was done, at the beginning of the year, as a means of diagnostic assessment of students' language proficiency. Two samples are dealt with here and are representative of the writing of the group. (Two more examples are included in the Appendix A nos 1 and 2). All four classes had a session on course expectations, but only two facilitators asked students to record their course expectations on paper.

General observations made about their writing constituted the following:

- Students had little idea of the course content, in spite of an orientation session. During the orientation session each student received a booklet

giving a course description of each of their courses, as well as a general CPP programme orientation;

- All expressed sincere instrumental motivation;
- Many expressed dependence on the course facilitator;
- Some comments revealed prior learning experiences (*vide* 2.3.5) as demonstrated by the two examples given below. These comments seemed to articulate their educational needs; and
- Students made no mention of the literature component of the course and appeared to see it as a means to an end as was later documented by the very thorough SAIDE evaluation on the CPP course.

The following two samples were chosen from a group of samples representative of the target group. There were no 'good' responses from the students. Sample 2 is, however, representative of the weaker responses, viz. no punctuation and little understanding of the task of describing his expectations of the course. Both expressed the commitment to learn English language, but did not refer to course content and course outcomes. The samples, which are typical of the group, will be discussed in more detail below:

### Sample 1:

I would like to be fluent at the end  
 I would also like to know better where to put a  
 comma in a sentence  
 I would also like to know (I don't remember the word but  
 it's like) eg I am full of numbers but when you look  
 at me you want find 13. answ clock

**Sample 2:**

My expectations from this course:

I am expecting to understand in each and everything i do in this course and to learn it the hard way. And i swear to do the best i can in this course and to know English what i am meaning is to be the best in it. J

The writing demonstrates:

- Little understanding of the components of a paragraph, for instance, no topic nor support sentences are found in them. In example 1, the heading or title is used as entry into the topic, viz. "My expectations from the course." (This seems a common practice in the paragraph writing of students in this target group);
- Little understanding of what constitutes a sentence, for example, "And I swear to do the best I can in this course and to know English what I am meaning is to be the best in it." This is a run-on construction with ideas confused: no use of suitable connectives; in sample 1, a line on the page appears to be equated with a sentence;
- Little understanding of punctuation, for example, "I", no full stops at the end of sentences, no use of commas (in fact, the student who wrote example two, clearly expresses his need to understand punctuation and, in particular, the use of commas); and

- Little sense of audience.

The above insights from the literature review, classroom observations (qualitative in natural setting) and quantitative data ensured research triangulation.

The next step in this first action research phase necessitates the identification of all other role players involved in the establishment of the CPP programme with a view to clarifying their expectations and requirements for the English course.

### **6.1.3 Step 3: Course requirements**

The Unit for Strategic Services initiated and established the CPP programme. This was achieved through much negotiation with community leaders, university management and other tertiary institutions in the Free State. These discussions led to the drawing up of certain requirements which all parties agreed to uphold. These requirements were communicated to the newly appointed course co-ordinators, of which the researcher was one, on the programme. Another set of requirements was given to the course co-ordinator, viz. those from the Department of English. These requirements are outlined in the next section and form part of the survey/reconnaissance of the research problem.

#### **6.1.3.1 The Unit for Strategic Services at the University of the Free State**

The brief from the Unit for Strategic Services (who co-ordinates and monitors the CPP) was to provide an English Programme of learning that would follow a learner-centred approach where prior learning was recognized with a focus on achievable outcomes/outputs and with a qualified person facilitating the



learning process. The aim of a programme of learning on the CPP was to provide students with the skills they needed to prepare them for university study. Skills such as academic literacy as well as study and thinking skills were to form part of each course. The CPP programme was to function as a 'bridging' programme into tertiary study.

### 6.1.3.2 The Department of English and Classical Culture

The brief from the Department entailed the following:

- to present a course which was equivalent to the English 1 course presented to full-time on-campus students (ENG 115 and ENG 125);
- the course had to be accredited and carry the same weighting as the above courses so as to ensure articulation into a second-year English course; and
- the students on the CPP course would be required to take the same examination at the end of the year as the full-time, first-year English students.

The intention behind the above rather "impossible" requirements was to ensure that students would be getting a quality course equivalent to their more privileged on-campus counterparts. These requirements were agreed to by university management and community negotiators alike. They have to be viewed in the light of the political and social sensitivities prevalent in the country at the time, viz. that learners from disadvantaged backgrounds would, in no way, be singled out or discriminated against because of their under-preparedness which was the result of an unjust political dispensation. Under-prepared students were to receive the educational help they needed in addition to enjoying the benefits of the same full university programmes (with accreditation) that their more privileged fellow students were following. The English course had to provide for the language needs of the students within a

fully-accredited course which would be accepted as a first-year equivalent on campus.

The requirements outlined by the Department of English and Classical Culture became more and more difficult to achieve as the researcher's knowledge of the students and their needs grew. Students could not cope with the literature component because their language proficiency was so low. Students on campus were required to write full-length essays in response to literary prompts for their final examination. The researcher's students were scarcely capable of a full paragraph (*vide* nos 1 and 2 in Appendix A).

It would be difficult and even impossible for the majority of students on the CPP to pass this required final examination (*vide* 4.6). The focus of a literature programme, and hence assessment as well, is on the 'literariness' of a text where plot, theme, character, narrator and setting are studied. Learners were required to analyze and interpret prose fiction, poetry and drama as well as the reading and interpretation of these texts (Hawkey & Rezk 1991:84). The learners on the CPP programme did not show evidence of an understanding of literary conventions nor were they able to formulate critical responses to literary prompts. Their work consisted mainly of either retelling of the content or simple plagiarism where passages were copied from their prose fiction networks (*vide* 4.5.1, *vide* Appendix A 8a, 8b and 8c). Learners' writing difficulties are discussed in more detail in 6.1.5.1.

After reconnaissance of the problem, the planning phase of the first cycle follows. The planning phase of cycle one is documented below.

### 6.1.4 Planning

Having explored and verified the research problem and clarified the expectations of role players, the researcher was faced with the task of carefully planning a programme of intervention which would be appropriate and viable within the given context. The following factors formed the focus of this phase, viz. determining the outcomes or objectives of the course, identifying possible constraints and selecting course materials. The teaching approach had been identified as a result of the insights gained from the literature review, viz. a combined CLT approach and form-meaning input processing approach through CI (*vide* 2.2).

#### 6.1.4.1 Step 1: Determining the outcomes of the programme

Establishing outcomes/objectives proved a daunting task in the light of the fact that the requirements of several role players had to be considered. Not only did the outcomes have to accommodate the requirements of the Unit for Strategic Services and the Department of English, but in South Africa, every programme of learning is obligated to comply with the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework. The resultant outcomes described below were those established for the first cycle of action research. They were adapted and changed as the action research spirals and phases progressed.

The course outcomes/objectives were based on the framework provided by the National Qualification Framework and the literature outcomes were prescribed by the Department of English (*vide* SAIDE report pp.42-43 in Appendix C).

These outcomes/objectives were:

- The ability to use reading strategies for a variety of academic texts, viz. reading with a purpose, activating background knowledge, surveying the text by skimming and scanning, summarizing and synthesizing the contents of various texts;
- The ability to apply cognitive approaches to reading such as analyzing, comparing, categorizing, summarizing, forming hypotheses and testing them;
- The awareness of what reading is and the development of a metacognitive approach to reading: the student will be able to think about reading and the processes and strategies he/she is using while reading;
- The ability to deal with academic writing, viz. writing of a topic sentence, how to order ideas, write a rough draft, revision and writing of the final version; and
- The ability to express ideas clearly in writing, connect ideas in a paragraph and select ideas which are connected and rewrite them coherently.

The outcomes for the literature component were:

- To be able to read short stories, novels, poetry and drama with greater understanding: to be able to understand what the writer is saying through the characters and events;
- To be able to discuss or write about short stories, novels, dramas and poetry in a way that demonstrates insight into the respective genres;
- To be able to identify and discuss the elements of fiction, viz. narrator, character, plot, theme, setting and diction;
- To be able to read poetry carefully to promote greater understanding of this genre and also to discuss and write about selected aspects of poetry

in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the typical features of this type of text; and

- To be critically aware of the ideas and concerns conveyed through drama and what features distinguish drama from prose fiction or poetry.

Having established the outcomes of the course, it was necessary, as reflective practitioner, to anticipate possible constraints to achieving the outcomes of the programme and to think proactively about overcoming the constraints.

#### **6.1.4.2 Step 2: Identifying possible constraints**

The researcher felt that the underpreparedness of the learners would present a problem and, hence, the duration of the course needed to be extended to meet their needs. These are discussed more fully in the section below:

##### **6.1.4.2.1 The Learners**

Initial classroom observations and data gathered in Step 1 (*vide* 6.1.2.2), indicated that learners were underprepared for tertiary studies through medium of English. This could prove a serious obstacle in the way of achieving the outcomes required for the course. (Outcomes are outlined in the SAIDE report in Appendix C pp. 42-43). Seen in the light of the White Paper (July 1997) directives (*vide* 1.1), the language proficiency of these students had to be addressed so that measurable progress "toward improving quality and reducing the high drop-out and repetition rates" could be achieved. The target group needed academic literacy as this is the communicative context in which they were functioning at tertiary level, thus, a programme of systematic training of academic reading and writing skills needed to be established (Blue 1993:11, Eskey 1993:224).

A programme of learning would have to include the contextual support and opportunity for automatization necessary to facilitate proficiency (*vide* 2.1.1).

This would include the development of reading and writing strategy training as integral to a programme of learning so as to ensure the contextual support needed by students with low language proficiency.

Learners entered the programme with some instrumental motivation, the challenge for the programme developer was to stimulate learner interest and motivation, so that these could facilitate their language learning.

The prior learning (*vide* 2.3.5) of these learners pointed to learners who had been scholastically deprived. If prior learning was to be factored into the proposed programme of learning, then the needs of these learners had to be considered in more detail and then accommodated in an appropriate programme of learning. Their lack of preparedness, in the skills needed to succeed at tertiary level, should be systematically addressed, viz. academic reading, academic writing, critical thinking and study skills. Student lack of preparedness required careful consideration of the teaching approach selected for this group. A combined *teaching approach* should be taken, viz. input processing in combination with a communicative approach (VanPatten 1996). This teaching approach should be supported with CI so as to provide learners with sufficient opportunity to practise and develop fluency and accuracy. Learners should be engaged in a programme of learning allowing maximum opportunity to negotiate meaning interactively to facilitate SLA. In cycle 1 of the action research, the START and THINK WRITE texts were used for the academic literacy component. These texts lend themselves to a co-operative learning approach, and reading and writing strategies are explicitly taught so as to facilitate automatization. The START programme represented a means of presenting students with comprehensible input in that the passages were graded.

#### 6.1.4.2.2 Time constraints

The time scheduled for the English class was four hours weekly: two two-hour sessions were held on weekday afternoons. The literature would be presented through detailed study guides (Appendix B no. 2). This was consistent with a resource-based learning method (*vide* 1.4) and the guide paced students through their prescribed literary texts. Class sessions would be devoted to basic reading and writing skills training. It soon became clear that the time allotted for the course would not be sufficient to achieve the rather prolific outcomes demanded. The following input made the time constraint evident:

- Learners were struggling to read the texts in the modules/study guides (classroom observation and discussions with learners and facilitators alike revealed this problem);
- Weekly meetings were held with facilitators as part of the in-service training of staff involved in teaching the course. These meetings were documented in a journal and especially the problems raised were documented. A glance at the journal entries confirmed that learners did not have adequate language proficiency to cope with literary language (*vide* 4.6). The following are examples of two of these journal entries:

#### Example A:

*27 February 1997*

- 1. Facilitators are concerned about students' evident lack of reading skills .*
- 2. Learners are not working on their Being Here modules as spot checks in class sessions were evidence of this. Possible reasons for this could be students' low language proficiency, lack of self-confidence, inability to*

*organize their time, dependence on the lecturer, lack of study opportunities after class hours. (We discussed requesting a venue from the Bloemfontein Technical College to accommodate students after hours).*

3. *Students were not listening to the audiotape provided with the study guide and persistently requested transcripts from the facilitators. (The idea behind the audiotapes was to improve their listening skills and the tape contained additional information about the prescribed texts not included in the study guides. Students did have access to tape recorders).*

### **Example 2:**

*13 March 1997*

1. *Facilitators request assistance in contextualizing language skills.*
2. *Students are not coping with summarizing and synthesizing as required in the START reading programme.*
3. *Their written assignments (on the texts) evidence no writing skills transfer from the literacy skills training component of the course.*
4. *Facilitators suggest that more time be requested for English from management.*

The above problems persisted throughout the year. These problems were addressed in different ways in the last two cycles of the action research, for example, in cycle two some of the literature was abandoned and the learner:teacher ratio decreased. In the third cycle the literature was abandoned altogether and replaced with a programme of extensive reading described in 6.3.

As the course outcomes required a programme of academic reading and writing for the target group, suitable materials had to be found for this component of the course.



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#### **6.1.4.3 Step 3: Selection of learning materials**

Materials that provided ample opportunity for skills practice, strategy training, comprehensible reading, co-operative tasks and activities which focused students' attention on specific forms, would be regarded as suitable.

The following available materials were reviewed for classroom use before deciding on the START and THINK WRITE programmes:

- Murray, S. and Johanson, L. 1989. *Write to Improve: a Guide to correcting and evaluating written work*. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Murray, S. and Johanson, L. 1990. *Write to Learn: a Course in writing for academic purposes*.
- Murray, S. and Johanson, L. 1992. *Read to Learn: a Course in reading for academic purposes*. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Olver, F.M.M., Steenekamp, S.M., van Aarde, H.P. 1994. *Start well, End well: a Guide for English Language Users to Improve Proficiency in Usage*. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.

- Orlek, J. 1995. *Language Skills for life: a Telip English Enrichment Coursebook*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.
- Rodseth, V. & Johanson, L. & Rodseth, W. 1992. *Think Write: a writing skills course for student teachers and business people*. Johannesburg: Hodder and Stoughton.
- *START: Strategies for Academic Reading and Thinking*. 1995 Centre for Cognitive Development. Cape Town: Shuter and Shooter.

#### **6.1.4.3.1 Reasons for selecting the START AND THINK WRITE texts**

The decision to opt for the START and THINK WRITE texts was a collaborative one, involving all the facilitators as well as lecturers from the Applied Language section of the English Department. The following were the main reasons for initially choosing these two texts for the literacy training component:

- The START reading programme is based on the recognized SQ3R reading strategies and has been adapted for a South African audience;
- The programme has 4 levels and learners can pace themselves to the next reading level;
- The reading passages feature a range of disciplines such as English, History, Economics, Geography, Environment Science, General Science, Biology and Mathematics. This would serve to increase learners' general knowledge and, at the same time, provide opportunity for practising their reading strategies;
- The teaching approach taken is a communicative one where students work in pairs and the language skills are taught within an integrative framework; and
- Basic reading strategies are taught systematically and explicitly. Strategies include purpose, activate background knowledge, survey reading, study

reading for comprehension, summarizing and synthesizing. By means of a thorough instruction of strategies, the teacher is able to build students' abilities to construct meaning, remove obstacles in the way of text comprehension and enable students to read critically (Stoller 1994:38).

The THINK WRITE text provided a systematic, procedural approach (clear step-by-step guidelines) to the teaching of writing with each unit of learning providing plenty of opportunity for learners to practice their writing skills. Each of the units focuses on cohesive devices needed to hold writing together and this is done systematically and focuses explicitly on various cohesive devices and when to use them. This would provide the embedded contextual support necessary to facilitate proficiency (*vide* 2.1.1).

#### **6.1.5 Act**

During the action step, various smaller steps were taken to implement the course.

##### **6.1.5.1 Step 1: Facilitators appointed and trained**

Facilitator training was an important component of the implementation of the course. Initial training lasted a full morning and it was decided that training should be on-going with regular weekly meetings. This resulted in the immediate resolution of problems and encouraged facilitator participation in decision-making and ensured quality teaching and learning. The initial training was done by the co-ordinator and Vic Rodseth (the author of the selected classroom texts). Rodseth demonstrated the use of the two texts selected for the language skills component of the course, viz. START and THINK WRITE. A step-by-step approach was taken here, for example, a unit in the THINK WRITE text was selected and by means of a demonstration, facilitators were introduced to the following classroom method:

- Learners wrote their own paragraphs which were then peer-marked, revised and rewritten;
- Revision of their writing was done in a plenary feedback session using a few example paragraphs. These samples, selected randomly from the class, were retyped on transparency and projected by means of an OHP. The paragraphs were revised in collaboration with the whole class. The idea here was that students actually assisted in the marking of the work of their classmates. The feedback then became accessible to the whole class and provided another means of using error correction as a means of facilitating SLA. Thus, through detailed feedback, the learner IL system was guided to evolve closer to the TL through instruction which engaged the learner and focused attention on the difference between their own IL and the TL (Ellis 1994:352 and *vide* 3.6).

The co-ordinator trained facilitators in the following classroom techniques which were consistent with the teaching approach selected for this course, viz. co-operative learning (pair work in particular) and how to manage the course orientation session.

Facilitators were also trained by SAIDE in monitoring student learning. SAIDE recommended several monitoring methods. Methods such as attendance checks, spot checks of progress in study guides, student perceptions of learning questionnaires which were compiled by the co-ordinator. Assessment procedures and classroom practice were also covered in SAIDE training. The SAIDE training was organized by the Unit for Strategic Services.

The CPP classes were divided into 5 groups of more or less 36 students in each class and a facilitator was assigned to each group. The classes were (and still are) presented off-campus at the Bloemfontein Technical College. This venue was selected during negotiations with community leaders, tertiary

institutions and university negotiators. It is easily accessible to students and the decision on the choice venue formed part of the collaboration with the Bloemfontein Technical College.

Facilitator training was on-going throughout the three cycles of action research as a means of ensuring good teaching and learning (*vide* 6.1.2.1). Facilitators met on a weekly basis and a journal was kept of these meetings. This journal and the meetings became a useful resource to the researcher and most decisions concerning the course were taken collaboratively at these meetings. These meetings formed part of the data-gathering for this study (*vide* 5.8.1.2). The content of these meetings was documented in a journal kept by the researcher and information gained in this manner, informed the action research process.

#### **6.1.5.2 Step 2: Decision on students' writing assignments**

In the light of the reconnaissance of the problem (*vide* 6.1.2.1.2, 6.1.2.2, 6.1.2.3, 6.1.2.4, 6.1.2.5, 6.1.2.6), it became clear that students would have great difficulty responding to literary prompts in the form of complete essays. This was expected of the full-time students on campus and, because it was a course requirement of the Department of English, would have to be adapted for the target population.

After much deliberation with colleagues in the Applied Language Studies section of the English Department, as well as discussions with Rodseth, it was decided to request that students on the course be required to respond in short paragraphs to the literary prompts/tasks given in the study guides/modules. The idea was that they should be expected to respond in smaller units of writing before moving to full essay answers as was. Their writing skills training focused on the paragraph as it was hoped that this might assist in the transfer of writing skills (*vide* the assignment on "The Wind

and a Boy" at the end of the study guide on *Being Here* p. 26 in Appendix B no. 2). As demonstrated in the assignment on *Wind and a Boy*, the assignment prompt was aimed at guiding the student in how to answer the assignment (*vide* Appendix B2 p.26).

### 6.1.5.3 Step 3: Writing of study guides

The writing of the study guides was on-going and was done at the same time as the implementation of the course (*vide* an example study guide in Appendix B No 2 on *Being Here*). The researcher did not consciously apply design principles. It was only after a research review had been completed that the researcher was able to identify tacit assumptions made during the writing of the study guides. The study guides were written in a lock-step manner, which meant that information was given in steps ranging from basic to more complex. Each step was accompanied by an activity which learners completed. Each activity was provided with feedback to ensure that learners knew what was expected of them. Aims and objectives were clearly stated and the achievement of these objectives was evaluated in an end assignment, which was marked and scored.

These guides were written during the first cycle of the action research cycles and did not comply with the principle of CI. The researcher implemented the action research study and simultaneously implemented the English programme. It was only as the literature review progressed that the researcher gained the insight regarding the importance of CI for SLA. This will be discussed in Chapter 7 when the limitations of the study are outlined. An example of the resultant mismatch was, for example, that the first activity on p.1 assumed that learners had a basic understanding of how to use a dictionary and that they would comprehend dictionary citations. The activity also assumed that learners would be able to use the terms (character, irony, metaphor, motif), once they had understood their meanings based on the

dictionary definitions. The guides assumed a threshold level of language proficiency which the learners did not have at that stage and, therefore, the guides were not good teaching mechanisms. This problem would have to be addressed in the next cycles of action research. The problem was alleviated when the literature component was abandoned in cycle 3 of the action research.

A complete and comprehensive guide to the marking of the first assignment was given to facilitators (*vide* Appendix A no. 4). This guideline would form the basis for all future marking of assignments.

#### 6.1.6 Observe

The following data were collected during the course of the first year and constituted the observation and monitoring of the programme during the first cycle:

- Results of the literature assignments (*vide* 6.1.5.1);
- Students' perception of learning gained from a questionnaire compiled by the co-ordinator (Appendix A no. 5 and 6);
- Questionnaire to all facilitators (Appendix A no. 7);
- SAIDE evaluation (*vide* Appendix C);
- Examination results (*vide* graph Fig. 6.2); and
- Evaluation report of the unit for Research into Higher Education (*vide* Appendix C no. 2).

This information informed the process of action research in that the insights gained guided the identification of problems that would be addressed in the planning phase of the next action research cycle.

### 6.1.6.1 Literature assignment results

As the literature component formed the main part of the assessment for the course, it was important to observe the results of these assignments so as to inform the planning of the next phase of action research.

Only 22% of students passed the first assignment on *Being Here*. All facilitators were requested to give a breakdown of the pass rate on each of the assignments (*vide* Appendix A no. 12b for an example of a facilitator's record). Samples of student answers to the assignment are included in Appendix A no 8a, 8b, 8c. Student B (Appendix 8a) demonstrated very little grasp of paragraph writing skills. In spite of nearly 3 months of skills training, the learners still demonstrated that writing skills were not transferred to the literature assignment writing. The learner (Appendix A no. 8b) demonstrated very little use of cohesive devices, used no references, introductory sentences nor concluding sentences. His answers seemed to be a mere "retelling" of the story and did not tie up with what was required by the prompt.

The above findings were representative of the whole group. This was one of the problems that were raised at several facilitator meetings (*vide* 6.12.3, *vide* journal excerpts). Both journal excerpts evidenced this concern. All assignments were marked and the results processed. Facilitators made notes of errors and these were discussed in facilitator meetings. This was done to find ways of using the errors as learning input to improve SLA.

The assignment question was set as a guided question: *Discuss the characters, giving thought to the methods of characterization that Bessie Head uses to present them (for example, their appearance as described by the narrator, the repetition of the word 'special' with regard to them, the significance of their names, their own words and actions and what other*



*characters say about them*). Students could answer the question by following the guidelines given in brackets.

Most learners were unable to respond to these guidelines in the assignment question (*vide* 8a, 8b and 8c in Appendix A).

Student C (8b) did follow the subject-verb-complement structure, for example, "Sejosenyé was a loving and caring people, more especially when coming to children". Given that "Was" is a copulative verb, what follows after 'was' is a subject complement. This structure is an acceptable SVC, but the word 'people' is an inappropriate slot-filler as it is a plural noun and cannot refer to the person *Sesjosenje* which is a singular proper noun. The adverbial clause "when coming to children" may cause some difficulty. The subject (he) is missing, so is the use of the auxiliary and present participle.

Again, the student did not follow the prompt carefully and he did not organize his thoughts according to the cues given in the guided question, for example, the question aimed at guiding the student through the components with guiding words and phrases such as, *appearance, repetition of the word 'special', words and actions of the character* and then, *what other characters say about them*. None of these ideas were addressed in the answer. Many of the students responded to the quote in the same way as the student cited above.

Student D (8c) demonstrated long, run-on sentences (no punctuation or connecting words) and a very sketchy understanding of what is required by the assignment, for example, "The central idea is the western life can destroy the traditional life if it is not used correctly, for example, Friedman used a bicycle which brought him to his death". Although she correctly saw the *bicycle* as representative of western life, she did not explain the connection, nor did she explain what she meant by "not used correctly". She merely

retold one or more incidents in the story without connecting to the question asked. Her answer did not relate to the focus on characterization in the set question.

#### **6.1.6.2 Students' perception of learning (vide Appendix A nos 5 and 6 for examples)**

As part of the observation of learning, the facilitator compiled a questionnaire to assess students' perceptions of their own learning. This survey revealed the following:

- students demonstrated a dependence on the lecturer (Example 5 question 1);
- students openly asked for more help (vide Appendix A no. 6);
- they did not seem to understand that they were required to use the study guides on their own at home;
- no student mentioned the literature component - this may be as a result of an error in the questionnaire which did not specifically ask for such a response;
- 69% of students felt that their reading and writing skills had improved, but their literature assignment answers did not evidence a transfer of writing skills from the skills training component of the course (vide 6.1.7.6.1).

#### **6.1.6.3 Facilitators' questionnaires (vide Appendix A no. 7 and 9)**

Emancipatory action research derives its strength from the participation of all role players. The facilitators were important role players in the action research process and their input was (and still is) regarded as one of the crucial driving forces in the process of improving the teaching and learning in the programme.

Facilitator responses to questionnaires regarding teaching approach, course content, assessment, volume of course material, duration of course and guidance given to them, revealed the following:

- Facilitators requested more assistance on the marking of assignments. This resulted in another workshop to discuss (once again) the assessment strategy and the marking guide was discussed with them once more (Appendix A no. 4);
- Facilitators were a little discouraged that students were not able to write coherent sentences and were not actually integrating their writing in spite of all efforts on their part to achieve this. Students were not writing coherent paragraphs with a topic sentence, subordinate sentences and connecting words. These were taught in the writing component of the skills training session. The second facilitator's answers (*vide* Appendix A no. 9) echoed the researcher's own growing feeling that the course should be spread over two years;
- Facilitators felt that the reading and writing skills component should carry more weight as this was a problem area for students. This request complies with a course implementation principle, viz. that the weighting of reading and writing components of a language programme should be based on students' proficiency levels (Bamford & Day 1998:35). Students did not have threshold reading and writing competence. The literature assignments assumed a basic ability to write coherently and the students simply did not have this ability;
- Learners, according to the facilitators, were not coping with the study guides (*vide* Appendix A no. 9). The content and method used to compile the guides assumed communicative competence. The students did not have communicative competence and, therefore, the content of the study guides militated against the principle of CI; and
- Assessment should include a reading and writing component, viz. a skills component should be scored as well. During the first cycle of action

research, only the literature assignment answers were scored for assessment of progress.

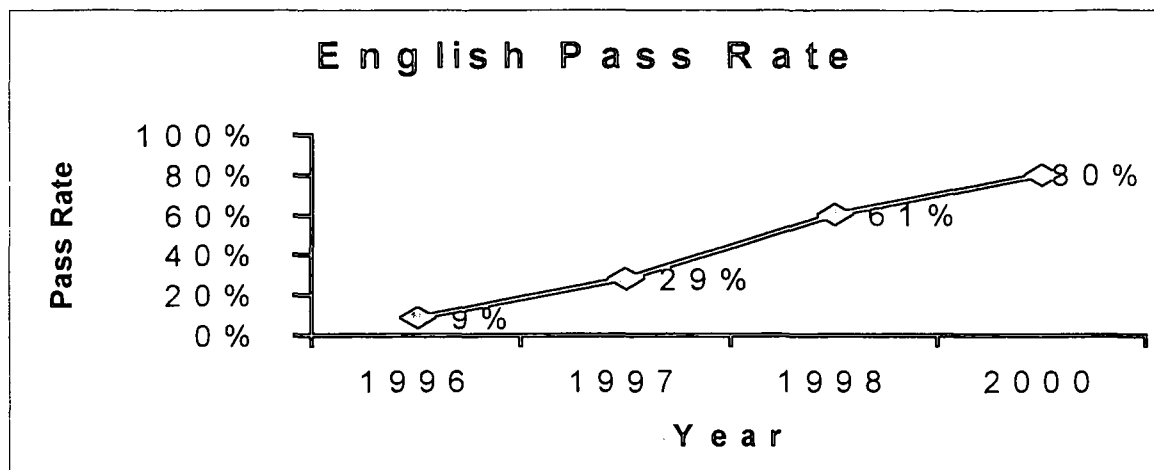
In sum, the next cycle of action research would have to address the learners' lack of reading and writing proficiency more aggressively through intensive reading and writing programmes and continuous assessment of these skills so as to develop automaticity (*vide* 2.1.1).

#### **6.1.6.4 Evaluation of the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (*vide* Appendix C)**

The South African institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) was asked by the university to monitor and evaluate the first year of course implementation. This thorough evaluation of every component of the course formed the framework for the reflection phase of this first cycle of research. This evaluation was systematically done by a reputable team of experts from another institution, whose main interest was to assist in improving the bridging course. They evaluated every aspect of the course from outcomes, assessment strategies, materials, and teaching approach to classroom practice. (The report is included as Appendix C). For a summary of their findings, *vide* Appendix C pp. 56-57.

#### **6.1.6.5 Examination results**

The final examination results of the first cycle of action research were a crucial measurement of the success or failure of the teaching and learning (*vide* Fig. 6.2).

**Figure 6.2: Examination results**

In 1996 English was presented off-campus as a means of bridging students into university. The course was a literature course and lecturers from campus went to the Bloemfontein Technical College and lectured to the students. Thus, a traditional teaching approach was taken, viz. the lecture method. No assistance was given in the form of study guides or literacy training. Only 9% of the students managed to pass. In 1997 the Career Preparation Programme was started. A resource-based learning approach was advocated. A literacy skills training programme was then included for those students who selected English as an option.

The pass rate went up from the previous year (1996) when no basic literacy training was done. This may indicate that the intervention in the form of basic skills training was making some positive difference to the students' learning. The pass rate went up significantly in the next year (1998). The literature component was decreased and more teaching time was devoted to basic literacy training. The course had now become a semester course spread over one year. Students could complete the second semester the following year on campus. The emphasis on basic academic reading and writing skills, and the smaller literature component, may account for the increase in the pass

rate. The pass rate rose to 80% in the following year. This year marked the introduction of a reading component in the form of graded readers as well as an integrated classroom approach to the teaching of academic reading and writing skills. Emphasis was placed on the process of writing academic texts. The components of the expository essay were explicitly taught. This year also saw the abandoning of the literature component altogether.

#### **6.1.6.6 Evaluation report of UHRE**

As yet another means of quality assurance, the Unit for Strategic Services asked the Unit for Higher Education to monitor and evaluate the CPP programme in its first year (1997). The specific aims of this evaluation were:

- To provide information so that the programme may be enhanced; and
- Use student feedback as a mechanism for improving the teaching and learning.

Several monitoring mechanisms were used, viz. workshops, class visits, questionnaires (which were completed by both students and facilitators alike), interviews and a review of assessment procedures in each subject. This evaluation included the administration of the programme as well. A brief summary of the conclusions and recommendations appears in Appendix C2 pp. 22-24.

#### **6.1.7 Reflect**

During the reflection phase of the research, the researcher reflected on various components of the course such as the following:

- Outcomes of the course;
- Materials used;
- Structure of the course;
- Teaching approach;

- Resource-based learning approach;
- Assessment strategies;
- Literature components; and
- Monitoring processes of the course.

#### 6.1.7.1 Outcomes of course

As detailed on page 41 of the SAIDE Report (Appendix C), the main obstacle to achieving language competence with this group of students was the large literature component which made it difficult to concentrate on the more pressing need of developing communicative competence. In spite of a detailed marking system, which aimed at plotting students' progress in their literature assignments, there seemed to be very little evidence of progress. Examples of the mark sheets used by the facilitators for each student are included in Appendix C1 p. 58 and 61 of the SAIDE report. Each facilitator kept a copy of this mark sheet and compared the mark sheets for each assignment to check whether students were actually learning from the feedback and not repeating errors (*vide* Appendix A nos 10 and 11).

The mark sheets served a threefold purpose, viz. to keep the lecturer informed of students' progress, to make students aware of their own progress and to raise students' consciousness of the requirements of a literary response. The mark sheets were a means of continuous assessment and of encouraging students' learning as stipulated in the implications of the research review. In spite of all this facilitator-input and record-keeping, the final examination proved that students' literary essays had not improved much (*vide* 10a in Appendix A. Two samples of student mark sheets are included in Appendix A no. 10a and no. 11). These answer sheets were randomly selected. As evidenced by the examples included, very little writing skills transfer is evident (*vide* 6.1.7.6.1.) The facilitator in example 1 requested that the student use cohesive devices, pointed out that the student was not synthesizing, that the student was simply copying from the book, and

that the student did not understand the literary prompt. The facilitator in example 2 pointed out that the student had not interpreted the prompt correctly. The student was experiencing problems with grammar and syntax, and the student had quoted from the text without integrating the quotes, and that the student did not know how to write an introductory sentence to a literary essay. These examples were typical of the errors made by the whole group. Student writing is discussed in more detail in 6.1.7.6.1.

The supervisor of this study and the researcher wrote a letter/report to the (then) Head of Department and the Head of Strategic Services to report on the researcher's experience with this group of students and to request that the requirements be adapted to accommodate the needs of the students. A suggestion was made that more realistic outcomes be required of these students and that their real needs be addressed, viz. language proficiency. If these students were to make any progress, then more time had to be allocated to their pressing need for academic literacy skills. An extract from this report is quoted on p 41 of Appendix C.

As documented in the SAIDE report, and backed by the researcher's own convictions based on several sources (student questionnaires, their expectations of the course, journal entries, and discussions with facilitators), very few students linked English competence with achievement in their other subjects. They were well aware, however, that English was necessary in a broader sense, but did not link their achievement or lack of achievement in their other subjects with their ability to use the language of instruction. Students rarely mentioned the literature component or its outcomes. They all felt that the main aim of the English course was to improve their English language skills. This tied up with their expectations articulated at the beginning of the year and also pointed to their instrumental motivation for choosing the English course.



### 6.1.7.2 Materials

In an attempt to address students' lack of grammar knowledge, a grammar study guide was prepared.

- **Grammar Guide:** A grammar module/study guide was prepared to pace students through some of the structures, which they found difficult (the structures were selected based on the information gleaned from the mark sheets). The underlying principle here was to use learner errors as a means of developing SLA through focusing learner attention on the difference between their own production and the TL. This form of intervention was not successful as the students viewed it as yet another study guide to work through at home and many simply disregarded it. This may be because no marks were awarded for demonstrating knowledge of the content of the grammar guide. This was established through brief class tests based on the content of the guide. The majority of the students failed these class tests and felt that this was because all their time went into the literature study guides and assignments which counted towards their term scores. Thus, the grammar guides did not form part of the assessment of the course and may be the main reason why students were not taking them seriously. This intervention was intended as a means of contextual support, but it was not successful. There may be two reasons for the lack of success of the grammar component. The second reason may be that the grammar module formed a separate unit which was removed from the content of their other class work. In other words, it was not contextualized. Learners may not have perceived the intervention to constitute meaningful input and the grammar did not constitute "real operating conditions" (rocs) as the structures were separated from their other class work. Here again, the researcher was only later, in reflection, able to identify the tacit assumptions made by the approach used in compiling the grammar modules.

Facilitators were asked to question students in class sessions. Their responses were not documented, but discussed in a facilitators' meeting. There seemed no way of ensuring that the students actually worked through the guide other than additional testing in an already full programme or else working through the guide in class.

□ **Study Guides on literature**

Step by step study guides were prepared to pace students through their setwork books (*vide* guide for *Being Here* in Appendix B no. 2). Audiotapes were prepared to accompany each study guide and contained information that was not repeated in the study guide. The idea here was to give students the opportunity of practising their listening skills. A short content test proved that students were not listening to the audiotapes and this was not because they did not have access to tape recorders. The content of the tapes was not guided and merely presented additional information organized in a question-and-answer format.

Spot checks in class revealed that students were not working on their literature study guides at home. Facilitators were again requested to call a few (randomly selected) students in after class to explain why they were not working on the modules/study guides at home. The reply was unanimous, the study guides were "too difficult" and they wanted the facilitators to go through them in class, in detail. The teaching approach selected for this target group was not strictly adhered to in the compilation of the study guides. The activities were not based on input processing instruction as the researcher compiled the first guides before a thorough research review had informed the compilation process. The guides assumed a basic communicative competence, basic vocabulary knowledge and ability to use the dictionary. In short, the guides did not represent CI for this target group.

- **Tutorial letters:** Tutorial letters were prepared after each assignment and given to students (*vide* Appendix A no. 27). Tutorial letters contained information on the errors made by students in their assignments with examples and general usage tips. Students did not seem to take in the information in the tutorial letters as the same errors were repeatedly made in their assignments. This suggested one or a combination of three factors:
  - Students were simply not reading the tutorial letters;
  - Their low reading proficiency made any "extra" reading impossible to do; and
  - They read the letters, but were simply unable to incorporate the required stylistic, language, comprehension and organizing requirements because of their low language proficiency. It was becoming clear that the materials would have to be adapted to more appropriately meet the needs of the students and that new materials would have to comply with the principle of CI (*vide* 3.6).

A complete list of the texts used in the course appears on pages 40 - 41 of the SAIDE report (Appendix C).

**6.1.7.3 Structure of Course:** This is outlined on page 41 of the SAIDE report (Appendix C)

**6.1.7.4 Teaching approach**

The teaching approach for the course was outlined and submitted to the SAIDE evaluators and appears in their report on page 46 (*vide* Appendix C).

In sum, an approach based on the weak view of CLT combined with input processing and CI forming the basis of the course.

#### **6.1.7.5 Resource-based learning approach**

It became evident that students were not working on the literature modules/study guides as was intended (*vide* 6.1.7.2). They were not using the study guides independently to guide themselves through the literature and grammar.

They repeatedly requested the help of the facilitators and seemed to expect the facilitators to work through every page of the study guide in class (*vide* p. 48 of the SAIDE report Appendix C). Soon facilitators were using class sessions to help students through the literature and were not attending to the basic literacy as was initially planned. This meant that the resource-based approach would have to be adapted or abandoned in favour of a classroom approach or students should be "eased" into working independently using a combined approach. The goal of facilitating learner autonomy was evidently not being achieved. Thus, independent work, which was done at home by the students, had to comply with the principle of CI so that they would not struggle to complete the independent tasks. This might encourage independent learning at home.

#### **6.1.7.6 Assessment strategies (*vide* also SAIDE report: pages 50-53 of Appendix C)**

The assessment strategy for the course was outlined in a draft document and was given to each facilitator. It was discussed during the course of a weekly meeting and their input was incorporated in the final document. The document covered assessment procedure, weighting of the different components, scoring procedure, methods of continuous assessment, use of

mark sheets and procedure and scoring of assignments. The following two sections detail the results of reflection on assessment of student reading and writing.

#### 6.1.7.6.1 Assessment of writing skills

Intensive assistance was given to students in the form of support devices such as mark sheet, guided assignment prompts, detailed memorandums, sample answers in the study guide, shorter assignment answers and classroom guidance. In spite of these support mechanisms, the students were still demonstrating the following errors in the final examination. The most salient problems, pinpointed by the facilitators, appeared to be related to reading and writing skills:

- **Pronoun reference**, for example, "Xuma comes from city not know the place knowing no one he was alone until he meet Leah. Xuma comes from the north he comes from the city to look for a job. Leah introduce *herselve* to Xuma and tell *her* that she has a shebeen and she is not married therefore Xuma find very strange to woman to sell beer and he is not married". *Her* is a reference to the male Xuma and *he* is a reference to the female Leah, while *Herselve* is spelled incorrectly. This example was lifted randomly from an exam response to a question on the novel *Mine Boy*. The student refers to Xuma (male) as *she* and omits the pronoun in the first section of the first sentence.
- **Orthographic signals in the texts**, e.g. punctuation marks, italics, quotation marks, colons and semi-colons (*vide* the example given above). Students wrote short, disjointed sentences with no commas to guide the reader.

- Students seemed to stick doggedly to a word's meaning that they know, ignoring contextual clues that suggested that a re-evaluation was needed. Miscomprehension results, for example, students 'read' *plants* for *planet* in a reading passage and were not able to interpret the contextual clues suggesting that the topic was not about *plants* but *planets*.
- Confusion of and non-usage of **articles** (*vide* example given above, *the* is omitted in the first section of the sentence).
- **Textual organization**, viz. introduction with thesis statement leading into paragraphs with a topic sentence and subordinate sentences (*vide* Appendix A 10a and 10b). There is no evidence of a thesis statement or any form of introductory sentence. The student does not contextualize, viz. mention, the name of the story or the particular scene to which he is referring.
- **Low reading comprehension**. The mark sheets assessed reading comprehension (*vide* p.58 of the SAIDE report in Appendix B). The mark sheet in Appendix A no.10b is representative of the type of errors made in the literature component as far as comprehension is concerned. The facilitator wrote: *You were supposed to tell me which methods of characterization the author uses to tell us more about the characters.* The student did not answer the question asked.
- **Lack of vocabulary and schema** for test interpretation, viz. students did not understand task words such as analyze, discuss, compare. Students did not know or disregarded the task words and merely retold the story regardless of the task word and its implications.
- **Little or no sense of audience** (*vide* Appendix A no. 1). The student writes "please do not be short tempered" which constitutes inappropriate

academic communication. The researcher thought that this student may have been referring to a prior learning experience in his articulation of course expectations in that he may have experienced an impatient, irritable educator in a previous learning situation.

- **Run-on sentences**, for example, "The prophets is a lier because he try to pretend to be a priest but it is not a priets and he tells mangubane and other woman that he father was a priest of Roman Caotholic church and he is a lier because the priest of Roman Catholic does not get married". This example was lifted from a script in the final examination. There are no commas, semicolons, inappropriate use of connectives, repetition of the word *lier* which is mis-spelt and the sentence is incoherent with regard to content.

#### 6.1.7.6.2 Assessment of reading skills

The reading skills were being tested by means of multiple-choice questions which consisted of four or five options per item, and the student was required to mark the appropriate choice. These answers were machine marked. As pointed out in the SAIDE evaluation (*vide* Appendix B p.53 of the report) this method of assessment did not constitute effective evaluation of their reading skills for the following reasons:

- the level of the reading passages given in the tests and exams differed from the level experienced by the students in their classroom reading. The classroom reading was based on the START texts, which were at lower intermediate level, whereas the passages given in the exam were at advanced level. This was due to the requirements set by the Department of English that students be examined at the same level as students on campus;

- specific reading skills were not being systematically assessed nor were the results used to inform classroom content and materials design (*vide* SAIDE report p.56). This was perhaps due to the researcher's own lack of knowledge about the assessment of reading skills during the first cycle of action research; and
- reading assessment was done, in the examination, by means of optical sheets. This was to alleviate the marking burden. As mentioned in the SAIDE report, this was not the best way of assessing the reading of this group as the passages were not contextualized and learners were not thoroughly trained in the answering of multiple-choice questions.

As a result of the above insights, it was becoming clear that the literature component was problematic in that students were not coping with the demands of a literature programme.

#### **6.1.7.7 Literature**

Detailed assessment strategies and devices to assist students in producing written responses to the literary prompts were not really improving their ability to respond appropriately. Again, there appeared to be little skills transfer from the language component of the course to the literary component (*vide* 6.1.7.6). Reflection on student reading and writing revealed this lack of skills transfer as another serious obstacle preventing SLA. More teaching time needed to be spent on explicitly teaching the steps in the academic writing process. More time needed to be spent explicitly teaching reading strategies and approaches to academic texts. Appropriate language development for academic purposes occurs over a long period of time, more especially when the target group demonstrates such a low language proficiency (Van Lier 1996:43).



### **6.1.7.8 Examination results**

The results are represented by the graph (*vide* Fig. 6.1 p. 33). The results represented on the graph for 1996 are results achieved before the CPP was started. These students were taught off-campus, and on passing, they would be allowed to continue their studies as full-time students the following year. These students received no additional language support and the same teaching approach was used as for the full-time, on-campus students, i.e. the lecture method. It seems evident from the graph that the additional student support mechanisms may have contributed to the improved pass rate in 1997. In spite of the improved pass rate, the low marks achieved on the literature section were demotivating to facilitators and students alike. This was noted in the SAIDE report (*vide* p. 54 of Appendix C). Monitoring mechanisms were reviewed for reflection purposes in cycle 1.

### **6.1.7.9 Monitoring**

All the monitoring mechanisms used on the programme are listed in the SAIDE report (*vide* Appendix B pp. 12-13). These mechanisms were put in place to ensure quality and keep a thorough record of students' progress, but it became clear that fewer labour-intensive methods would have to be found if we were to maintain the goodwill of the 5 facilitators.

The monitoring mechanisms were all screened by SAIDE and their feedback on their evaluation appears on pp. 54-55 of the report (*vide* Appendix C).

### **6.1.7.10 Summary of difficulties in Cycle 1**

Cycle 1 of the action research cycles demonstrated the following main difficulties:

- Learners were not transferring the reading and writing skills to their literature assignments. Students demonstrated little understanding of the strategies and processes involved in reading and writing academic texts;
- Learners were experiencing difficulty with the prescribed literary texts, especially poetry. The comprehension barriers encountered by students in their decoding of the literary text militated against the principle of comprehensible input (*vide* 3.5.4);
- Learners needed more time to develop their reading and writing proficiency;
- Assessment needed more thought in that the language and literature components should perhaps carry different weightings;
- Orientation to the resource-based learning aspect of the course had to be carefully and thoroughly done; and
- Class time should be devoted to easing students into the use of the study guides as students were experiencing difficulty working through them.

The conclusions and recommendations suggested by the SAIDE report (*vide* pages 56-57 of Appendix C) were carefully considered and implemented in Cycle 2 of the research project.

## 6.2 CYCLE 2

The second cycle of the research started with certain adjustments based on the reflections on feedback received during the observing and reflecting phases of cycle 1. The insights gained in the observing and reflecting phases shaped the (re-) planning phase of cycle 2.

### **6.2.1 (Re-) planning**

In the re-planning of the course the following adjustments were made:

#### **6.2.1.1 Duration of the course**

After deliberation with the Department of English and Strategic Services, it was decided to present the course over two years. English 191 would be presented as a one-semester course over one year and part of the CPP bridging programme, and the second half of the course could be completed by successful students on campus. The course would become two 16-credit modules offered over two years.

#### **6.2.1.2 Learner/facilitator ratio decreased**

The learner/facilitator ratio would be decreased so as to ensure more individual attention to each student and lighter marking loads for facilitators. Instead of 36 and 37 students per facilitator, each facilitator would have a maximum of 25 students per class. This implied that one more facilitator would be needed for the following year.

#### **6.2.1.3 Literature component reduced**

The main reason for reducing the volume of literature was to provide more time for basic academic literacy training and to enable us to spend more time on activities which would improve learners' language proficiency.

The following literature was jettisoned:

- instead of 12 poems only 6 would be done;

- only 4 short stories from *Being Here* would be done instead of eight;
- Peter Abrahams's book *Mine Boy* would be removed from the English 191 and be presented in English 192;
- The revised literature component was the following:
  - Four short stories from *Being Here*;
  - Six poems from the *Lonely Art*;
  - *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder; and
  - *Master Harold and the Boys* by Athol Fugard.

#### 6.2.1.4 Language Skills

The *THINK WRITE* and *START* programmes would form the basic resources for the language component with additional interesting passages from magazines and newspapers supplementing the *START* passages (*vide* Appendix A no. 18).

A different dictionary was selected for the students. The South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary was abandoned in favour of The Cambridge International Dictionary of English (CIDE) for the following reasons:

- The CIDE was specifically designed for the foreign language learner of English;
- The references are clear and simple with clear guides to the meaning of words without being circuitous;
- Each entry is directed to the core meaning of the word by means of a guide word, e.g. bear [animal]  
bear [carry];
- Each entry is accompanied by a range of information and illustrations which make meanings clear for second language users;
- Sample sentences are given of how the word can be used;
- The instructions on dictionary usage are clear and well-illustrated; and

- A full section is devoted to a concise, clear description of the parts of speech which learners of English should find most useful.

The dictionary is rather cumbersome to transport and students who travelled as far as Botshabelo (40km) daily, were expected to encounter difficulties; however, the researcher and the facilitators, decided on a system whereby students would take turns bringing their dictionaries and sharing in small groups.

Hereafter the "replanned" course was implemented.

### 6.2.2 Act

In this phase of cycle 2, thorough orientation was done with students over a period of two weeks (8 hours). In addition, the facilitators' expectations were spelled out and students were given the opportunity to articulate their expectations of the facilitators. In spite of this thorough preparation, student expectations were very similar to those expressed the previous year, but they did have a better understanding of their own commitment to the course. Unfortunately, the researcher did not keep examples of their responses. This orientation simulated a kind of contract or mutual commitment and learners were part of the participatory process that is advocated by action research.

The next step was to appoint facilitators (as facilitators are appointed on a yearly basis) and new staff were oriented informally by the researcher. Each facilitator was given a guide to study at home. The guide contained detailed information on the following:

- Timetable for the year;
- Contents of course and materials used;
- Monitoring procedures;

- Assessment strategy; and
- Teaching approach.

Each section of the guide was discussed at a facilitators' meeting and facilitators' comments noted and included where applicable. The last two phases of the second cycle were characterized, firstly, by data-gathering (observe) and then, reflection on that data so as to inform the planning of cycle 3.

### **6.2.3 Observe and reflect**

The following data were collected for observation and reflection on the programme:

- Results of all tests and literature assignments collected from each facilitator (*vide* Appendix A no. 12 b for an example of one facilitator's documentation of test and assignment results);
- Student-perception-of-course questionnaire (*vide* Appendix A no. 13 for an example);
- Facilitators' evaluation of course (*vide* Appendix A no. 17 for an example);
- Examination results;
- Mark sheets; and
- Samples of written work.

#### **6.2.3.1 Test results**

In spite of modifications indicated in the planning of this phase, the pass rate on assignments and language tests did not improve significantly from the previous year. A comparison was made during a facilitators' meeting (*vide* Appendix A no. 11c for a facilitator's report from phase 2 of action research).

A possible reason for this is that reading and writing skills were still not being transferred from the skills component to the literature component.

### **6.2.3.2 Student perception of learning**

As indicated by the two samples (*vide* Appendix A no. 13 and no. 14), learners were not working on their English on a daily basis. They still continued to see the main aim of the English course as that of improving their proficiency and that literature was merely a means to an end. Learners expressed gratitude (*vide* Appendix A samples nos 13 and 14) for the teaching and learning. The students' eagerness to learn and their motivation to become more proficient were evident in every single questionnaire.

Learners expressed the perception that their reading and writing skills were improving, but their written work did not substantiate this perception. Learners responded that the elaborate mark sheet system was assisting them to monitor their progress, but reality revealed that they were repeating the same errors in their assignments. Their positive responses to the questionnaire may be attributed to the fact that students knew that they were part of an experiment. This may have inhibited their responses or they simply did not want to express anything negative about the course. They may have been pleased with the personal attention and would therefore not complain and rather compliment the researcher.

### **6.2.3.3 Facilitators' evaluations**

These evaluations revealed much the same as the previous year (*vide* reflection in Phase 6.1.6 above). A few more problems were, however, raised and observed by all facilitators, viz.

- students became bored with the monotony of the *THINK WRITE* and *START* programmes. This was discussed at a facilitators' meeting and all facilitators felt that the monotonous repetition of the same procedure every day was the main reason for this;
  
- more reading should be encouraged which meant reading of material other than their textbooks which students were struggling to read. A facilitator (Appendix A no. 17) summed up this insight succinctly: "Students who really struggle with the work should be urged to read as many books as possible-nothing works better. Optional book reports should be welcomed" (Strauss 1999). The underlying principle that plenty of reading, at a level where the student is comprehending, facilitates SLA is discussed in section 3.5.4. This principle of sufficient CI, coupled with input processing in class sessions, has become a guiding principle in the teaching and learning of this target group (Bamford & Day 1998). On reflection, this principle was not being fully implemented as students needed more reading input to facilitate their SLA.

The same facilitator made some enlightening comments on her perception of the students' reactions to gender issues. She states that "language is such a powerful tool, I (the facilitator) think it is imperative that facilitators should use politically inclusive language (even though this is not done in *THINK WRITE*) and encourage students to do the same" (Appendix A no. 17 p. 1). She felt that many male students had "reactionary" views on gender issues and that the women were silenced as a result of this. Facilitators' evaluations were summarized and discussed at one of the weekly meetings. The suggestions from this meeting were documented in the researcher's journal.



#### **6.2.3.4 Mark sheets**

Facilitators all agreed that these were labour intensive and were not necessarily effective. Students were not monitoring their own progress as was intended because they were repeating the same errors in subsequent assignments. Examples of these were discussed at a facilitators' meeting and the facilitators were unanimous regarding this finding. Unfortunately, the examples were not preserved for inclusion in the appendix. (Some of the coordinator's documentation was lost because it was given to someone attached to the URHE who was compiling a report on the CPP programme. She left the institution and the researcher was not able to retrieve the documentation).

#### **6.2.3.5 Samples of written work**

The two samples (Appendix A no. 15 and 16) were drawn randomly from the class and represented one weak sample and a better sample. These samples were taken at the end of the year when students had completed a full year of basic literacy in classroom sessions. They had been taught to organize their ideas by using techniques such as brainstorming and mindmapping. It is clear that both students demonstrate little understanding of the mindmap as an organizational tool and it seems as if they merely went through the motions and had not integrated the tool as a means of sorting main ideas and subordinate ideas.

Sample 1 (Appendix A no. 15) looks like the spokes of a bicycle wheel and this is a good example of what the majority of students did with their mindmaps.

It was becoming clearer that an entirely different approach was required if we were really to help these students learn to read and write in an academic context.

#### **6.2.4 Summary of main difficulties experienced in cycle 2**

Facilitators were complaining that students were bored with *THINK WRITE* and *START*. These texts were discussed in a facilitators' meeting. We considered abandoning the *THINK WRITE* for the following reasons:

- The repetition of brainstorming, mindmapping and the writing of topic and support sentences every week was boring;
- The researcher realized that student boredom might have been the result of facilitators' lack of teaching methodology and lack of teaching skills. This was difficult to evaluate other than through the learners' questionnaires and they gave positive feedback on all the facilitators for reasons mentioned in 6.2.3.2;
- The paragraphs were not contextualized and a different topic was given each week. This was artificial and did not really constitute meaningful, real-world activity. A theme-based approach to the reading and writing activities, where activities are springboarded from academic reading passages, would have been more meaningful;
- Students needed to know how to write in a wider academic context (*vide* 4.6);
- Some students were still struggling with sentence structure and needed more practise in the academic writing processes. More opportunity for training academic writing skills would have to be made in the programme. The researcher and the facilitators were not sure that *THINK WRITE* was really assisting them. A collaborative (facilitators and researcher) decision

was taken to introduce students to the authentic tertiary communication process, viz. read first, then think, then plan, draft, revise, rewrite, revise and then only present the final copy;

- An adapted approach to the teaching of writing was needed. An approach was needed which would encourage the development of communicative competence and would focus on academic language performance. Such an approach would better reflect the teaching approach selected for this course (Grabe & Kaplan 1996:224 and *vide* 2.1.1); and
- Students did not seem to have a sense of audience. (*vide* Appendix A no. 16). This is an example of student writing. The student writes, *Furthermore, this drink (beer) is going to get you in a bad shape like now many people said you are having a spussa face.* The student is not addressing an informed, intelligent reader and uses a colloquialism or argot in his written description of the effects of alcohol. Evidence of this abounded in their written work which meant that we would have to expose them to different genres of writing so as to develop a sense of "writing for an audience" as audience is "essential to the creation of text and the generation of meaning" (Grabe & Kaplan 1996:207).

The same problems of lack of transfer (inability to use the tools of academic writing, such as, write a thesis statement in the introduction and construct paragraphs) and difficulty with reading study guides and literature tests still persisted.

### 6.3 CYCLE 3

The researcher took all the above critiques and feedback into consideration when the planning was done for the next cycle. The literature review on academic reading and academic writing, and an approach to accelerating SLA

through a programme of extensive reading, formed the basis of planning for the next phase.

### 6.3.1 (Re-) planning

The planning of this cycle represents the most radical shift in teaching and learning approach since 1997. The researcher drew on the research findings discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this study (*vide* 6.1.2.1). The obvious benefits of an intensive in-class and extensive out-of-class reading programme became an option. Not only does research (Bamford & Day 1997; Hafiz & Fodor 1989; Mangubhai & Elley 1981) support such an approach, but one of the facilitators (*vide* 6.2.3.3) echoed the researcher's own growing conclusions. These were the following:

- An intensive classroom reading programme had to be presented. A programme which integrated reading (focusing on textual features) and writing skills, and which would provide opportunity for the practice of listening and speaking skills. An integrated approach to the training of language skills was essential. The focus of the programme would be the achieving of outcomes relating to the academic reading and writing skills component. Thus, the programme outcomes had to be adapted in that outcomes pertaining to a literature component would be dropped;
  
- An eclectic teaching approach, which included content-based and task-based learning, should be taken when teaching reading and writing skills. This would facilitate development of procedures and strategy-training while improving language and encouraging content knowledge (Carson *et al.* 1997:376);

- Classroom content and tasks should model real-world academic tasks, viz. first, reading; then, writing based on the collation of information, gleaned from comprehensible reading input;
- Writing skills needed in the academic context should be specifically taught, viz. the process of think-plan-draft-revise-write-edit and rewrite, should be practised;
- A programme of language through academic literacy should focus on the symbiotic relationship between academic reading and academic writing. In other words, reading-based writing tasks should be the focus (Hudson 1998:49); and
- A real-world extensive (out-of-class) reading programme, based on the principles outlined in Bamford and Day (1997:7), needed to be established): "The primary consideration in all reading instruction should be for students to experience reading as pleasurable and useful. Only then will they be drawn to do the reading they must do to become fluent readers. And only then will they develop an eagerness to learn new skills to help them become better readers".

The goals envisioned for the extensive reading programme for learners on the CPP programme were:

- To encourage students to develop a positive attitude towards reading through the use of graded readers where they are able to read at a level that is comprehensible to them;
- That students should gain confidence in themselves (*vide* 2.3.5);
- To encourage and foster their motivation to read (*vide* 6.1.2.1);

- Provide them with the opportunity to read without, "constantly stopping to look up unknown or difficult words in the dictionary" (Day & Bamford 1998:158);
- Provide opportunity to increase their word recognition ability;
- Provide materials and opportunity for students to read at their own rate for their chosen purpose; and
- Encourage students' ability to choose appropriate reading matter for their own interests and language ability (Day & Bamford 1998:158).

As outlined in section 4.4.3 in the section on academic writing skills, much evidence existed to support the notion that writing skills, spelling and overall linguistic competence in the second language improve significantly if students read. Krashen (1993:80) expresses this conclusion succinctly, when he states that reading "is the only way we become good readers, develop a good writing style, an adequate vocabulary, advanced grammar, and the only way we become good spellers (1993:80).

#### **6.3.1.1 Training of facilitators**

In the light of the above and research described in Chapters 3 and 4, a brief outline of the goals, characteristics, rationale, benefits and monitoring procedures of a reading programme was compiled and given to all stakeholders (*vide* Appendix A no. 3). These were facilitators, administrators and the Head of the Department of English. A workshop was organized for all facilitators during May 2000 to introduce them to the new programme.

#### **6.3.1.2 Pilot study**

The introduction of a reading programme (in-class intensive reading coupled with out-of-class extensive reading) took the form of an experiment. The aim was to test whether a reading and writing skills programme could improve the

reading rate and reading comprehension of learners, and whether such a programme of intensive reading and writing skills training would impact on the examination results. The experimental group would read passages taken from newspapers and magazines. Reading activities based on the principle of input processing would be devised. These would encourage learners to process textual features. An example of such a reading passage, and relevant activities, is included in Appendix A nos 23-26. These passages would represent the in-class intensive reading programme. The extensive out-of-class programme would include the reading of graded readers by students. Students would be required to read two books per week and then write written responses to their reading. In other words, reading-based writing tasks were given (*vide* Appendix A 29a and 29b). Students were given clear guidelines for the writing of these responses.

Two classes would start with an extensive and intensive reading programme and two other classes would serve as control groups and would continue with the 'old' programme, which was literature-based. Test and examination results would be monitored and documented. Both groups (experimental and control) were tested at the beginning of the year for reading rate and reading comprehension and again at the end of the year. These tests were taken from the SRA Laboratory 3b (Power Builders). The levels used were 5.0, then up to 7.0 (*vide* Appendix A no. 22). Learners were given 5 passages of varying levels and each passage had nine items testing various reading components. One passage was used in the testing of their reading rate (*vide* Appendix A no. 21). This passage was taken from the SRA 5.0 reading level and represented the lowest reading level used in the testing.

The test was taken down in the following way. All learners were asked to read a passage at their normal reading rate and then to jot down the time it took them. When all learners had completed the reading, they were asked to complete the comprehension questions on the back of the page. They were

requested to complete the questions without rereading the passage (*vide* Appendix A no. 21).

### **6.3.1.3 Difficulties**

Several objections were raised by some stakeholders (the then head of the English Department and the Director of the CPP programme) to the establishment of such a programme of extensive, out-of-class reading:

- The cost of buying the graded readers;
- The control of books would be difficult;
- The opportunity for students to browse and select books at a time suitable to them would be difficult to establish; and
- It would be difficult for administrative staff, who were already overworked, to control the books.

### **6.3.1.4 Procedures**

The Unit for Strategic Services and the Department of English pooled financial resources to assist with the buying of the books for the two classes on the reading programme. A meeting with administrative staff and the director of the CPP programme, led to the reorganization of work allocation in the CPP office. A person was identified to handle the control of the graded readers. She agreed to receive students on three afternoons a week from 14h00 to 16h30.

A very simple log-book control system was devised. Each title was allocated to a page and columns demarcated the date taken out, date returned and student's signature. Times for book selection were communicated to students. Students in the experimental groups were given a thorough orientation and were told that they were to be part of an experiment and that their wholehearted participation was crucial to the success of the experiment.



Students were informed that if they did not return a book, the cost of that book would be added to their class fees. It should be noted that this graded reader system has been running for two years now and only two books have been lost.

The two classes on the reading programme would follow an intensive reading programme during class sessions and we would prepare the materials ourselves for these sessions (*vide* Appendix A no. 18a for a sample). Reading and writing skills would be integrated. This would be achieved in the following ways:

- Topical reading passages would be selected for reading in class;
- Activities focusing on features of the text, for example, the use of quotation marks, anaphoric and cataphoric referencing (*vide* Appendix A 18, question 6);
- The use of pronouns;
- The differences between fact and opinion;
- The authority of the writer;
- Pre-reading and post-reading strategy training;
- Vocabulary building;
- A post-reading, writing activity which would assist students in synthesizing what they have read (*vide* Appendix A no. 18 for an example of a post-reading/writing activity);
- An expository essay topic would be formulated based on the reading passages given in class. Learners would have to read the passages and use the arguments in these to formulate their own expository essay. This was done as a process, viz. brainstorm in pairs, plan outline of essay in class, write rough draft at home, rough draft is peer marked and errors discussed with partner. Then they go home and write the essay and bring it to class again so that a classmate can edit it. Students are given clear guidelines for peer marking (*vide* Appendix A no. 28). Then only is the

final copy written and handed in as part of the continuous assessment;  
and

- Reading reactions would be written by students, based on their reading of graded readers. Clear guidelines would be given for the writing of these reactions (*vide* Appendix A no. 29).

The teaching approach would focus on input processing and on specific strategies for reading and writing, which would provide students with the contextual support necessary for SLA.

### **6.3.2 Act**

The programme was implemented as outlined above and the following steps were also implemented.

#### **6.3.2.1 Graded readers used**

Graded readers were acquired based on what was available and the rather comprehensive guide provided by Day and Bamford (1998). The Heineman Guided Readers (HGR) and the Oxford Bookworm series were selected. Several titles (3 or 4) from each of levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 were acquired to provide learners with a variety and range to choose from.

#### **6.3.2.2 Reading reaction sheets**

Reading reaction sheets were prepared so that students could report on their reading (*vide* Appendix A no 19). Students were given clear guidelines as to how to write their reading reactions (*vide* Appendix A no. 19b). Students planned and wrote rough drafts first. These were brought to class and peer marked. The reactions were then revised at home before handing in for marking. These reactions were marked and scored. The mark formed part of the continuous evaluation.

### 6.3.2.3 Intensive reading passages

The intensive reading passages were taken from newspaper articles in the Mail and Guardian newspaper (*vide* Appendix A – page 18a and 18b). The activities focused on pre-reading activities. Activities related to cohesion in text construction were the focus. The sentences of a text “are related to each other both substantially and by cohesion; and it is characteristic of a text that the sequence of sentences cannot be disturbed without destroying or radically altering the meaning” (Halliday & Hasan 1989:28).

### 6.3.3 Observe

In observing the third cycle of the research, the following data were used:

- reading test results (*vide* 6.3.1.2);
- reading reaction sheets of students; and
- examination results (*vide* Fig 6.4).

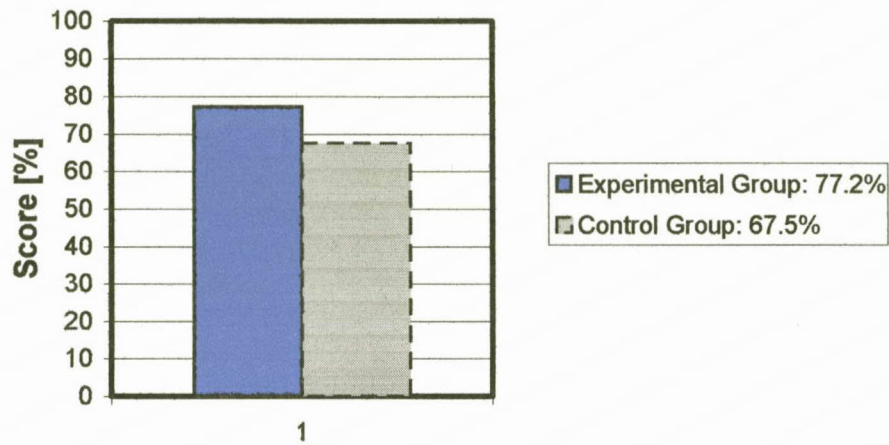
### 6.3.4 Reflect

Reflection was based on the results of the above data. The results are displayed in the graphs (Fig 6.4 and Fig 6.5):

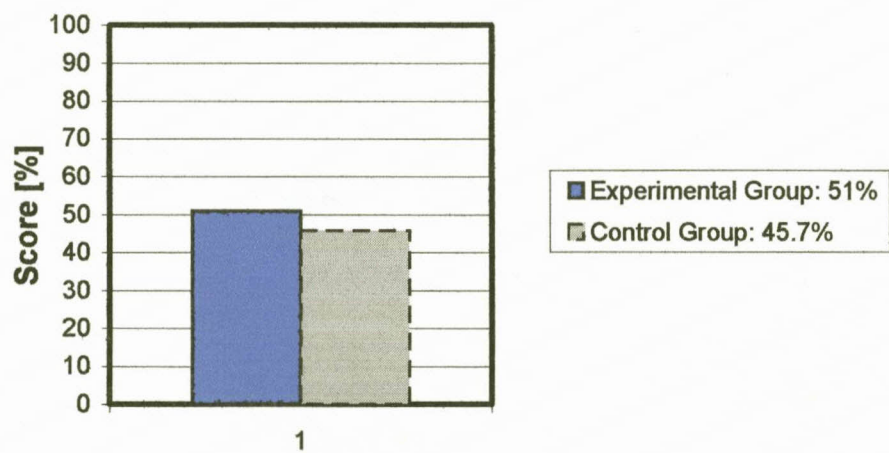
**Figure 6.3: Reading Rate Text**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Number of students</b>	<b>Reading rate</b>
<b>Experimental group</b>	48	136 w.p.m
<b>Control group</b>	48	102 w.p.m

**Figure 6.4: Reading Comprehension Test**



**Figure 6.5: Examination results**



The reading rate and the reading comprehension of the experimental groups showed higher scores than the control groups who had not been exposed to an extensive out-of-class reading programme. This improved reading comprehension and reading rate of the experimental groups could be attributed to their programme of extensive and intensive reading and writing. The control groups were not exposed to a programme of extensive, comprehensible input, but were reading the prescribed literary works.

### 6.3.5 Examination results

The experimental groups scored a higher percentage on their examination (*vide* Fig. 6.4) than the control groups. It should be mentioned that the students were given ample time to complete the three reading passages that were given in the examination. They were given three hours to complete three passages consisting of 1200-1300 words each. This may explain why the control groups fared rather better here than in the tests given a month earlier. The results of this small experiment seemed to indicate that the extensive reading and intensive (in-class) reading did perhaps serve to improve the reading abilities of the experimental groups. Much more testing, however, needs to be done.

The control groups were also exposed to in-class intensive reading practice focussing on textual features. This may be another explanation for the fact that there was no real significant difference in the examination results. The differences in examination results were not subjected to statistical analysis to establish whether these were statistically significant. The main reason for this omission was that the researcher wanted to conduct a more comprehensive experiment in the next action research cycle. These findings would then be statistically analyzed.

### 6.3.6 Summary of main difficulties experienced in cycle 3

The literature component was no longer in the programme and this constituted a substantial improvement in the teaching and learning of this group as documented above. The in-class intensive reading passages were proving to be problematic. They were labour intensive to put together and, in spite of much help from internet sites which provide passages for teaching purposes, it still remained very time-consuming to select passages and devise appropriate language activities based on the passages. The passages were randomly chosen and often did not lend themselves to practising textual features and reading strategies in a systematic way. The researcher would like to use the passages in combination with a book such as J. Pakenham's *Making Connections* (1994). The book is published by Cambridge University Press and is a systematic approach to the teaching of reading skills and strategies and has an excellent academic vocabulary section. The book aims at developing academic reading skills. It provides writing activities as well, thus, the reading/writing symbiosis is incorporated in the activities.

The text would be used in class sessions in conjunction with reading passages from other sources. This would comply with the principle gleaned from the research on SLA and second language learner characteristics, viz. the use of a variety of interesting and authentic classroom materials to broaden learners general knowledge, sustain motivation and expose learners to a variety of genres (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191, Crookes & Schmidt 1991:488). The differing proficiency levels of the students would be accommodated in the graded reader programme of reading. The students' levels of proficiency would be tested at the beginning of the next year. Students would start the graded reading programme at their individual level of proficiency. They would move up a level as the year progressed, thus ensuring reading development.

The fact that different genres would be used may encourage the development of a sense of audience (which was documented as a problem in the previous action research cycle). The researcher still has to address this problem in students' writing. This could be done by giving learners a variety of response options to the writing of their reading reactions. As is the pattern of this research, these decisions will have to be made in collaboration with all participants, and thorough planning will have to precede acting, observing and reflecting. The process of improving the teaching and learning is on-going.

It is important to distinguish between the core business of action research and thesis action research. Thesis action research is concluded at this point, but the core action research is continuing into a new cycle and will be on-going as the programme develops.

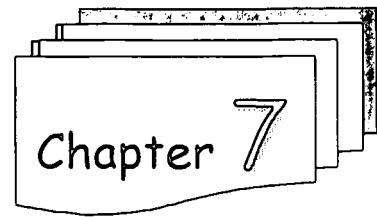
#### **6.4 CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, it appears from the above, as well as research findings documented in 6.1.2.1, that learners on the CPP programme can benefit from an extensive reading programme supplemented with in-class intensive reading where textual features are the focus.

The results of this experiment are by no means conclusive and the re-planning phase of the next cycle will include plans for testing both the reading and writing skills of students who take English as well as a control group who do not take English. The results of this testing will assist in the next cycle of action research in that it will provide some means of gauging the success of the academic reading and writing skills programme which is in place at this point. The action research is on-going and the course will be refined as the process continues.

The next chapter will cover the researcher's recommendations regarding the development and implementation of a language course for low-proficiency tertiary learners. These recommendations will deal with course design, materials design, teaching styles and instructional procedures, facilitator training and assessment. Suggestions for future research will also be made in the next chapter.





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## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of the Career Preparation Programme (CPP) is to provide underprepared students from previously disadvantaged scholastic backgrounds access to tertiary study. Access to tertiary learning is provided through a skills training and content programme aimed at lifelong learning. The problems, experienced by this group of students which prevent their access to higher learning, are complex and rooted in the socio-historic background of education in South Africa. Not only are they underprepared in that their low study skills and academic literacy skills will not ensure success at tertiary level, but their chosen language of learning is not their mother tongue. These learners choose English as a medium of instruction and their access to tertiary learning is hindered in that their level of proficiency in English is low. Thus, the barriers to access for these learners are twofold, viz. gaining language proficiency while, simultaneously acquiring the academic literacy necessary for lifelong learning. The purpose of this chapter is threefold, viz. to summarize the aim of this study, secondly, to present the findings in the form of guidelines for classroom practitioners dealing with low-

proficiency tertiary learners and finally, to conclude with recommendations for future research.

## 7.1 PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement and evaluate a language course for low-proficiency tertiary learners. The intended course aimed at meeting the proficiency needs and improving the academic literacy of the students on the CPP programme. The following course objectives guided the researcher in the process of achieving the main aim:

- To design a course which would enable learners to acquire academic communicative skills;
- To establish a course that would meet the requirements of the Department of English and Classical Culture;
- To reflect critically on every step of the development and implementation process so as to improve the teaching and learning;
- To implement the changes and developments brought about by the process of critical reflection;
- To ensure quality enhancement through improvement of teaching and learning within existing constraints of time and cost;
- To facilitate the professional growth of the researcher and facilitators involved in the teaching through a process of emancipatory action research;
- To enable learners themselves to participate in the learning process;
- To design or select appropriate classroom materials based on insights gained from the literature review of second language acquisition, second language learner characteristics, and to explore international instructional trends; and
- To select appropriate teaching methods based on a literature review of SLA, international instructional trends and learner characteristics and needs.

The achievement of the above objectives need to be discussed briefly in the next section.

Initially, it was intended that the course include a literature component which, as a result of this research, was abandoned in the second cycle of action research. The course, as it currently exists, is an intensive skills training course aimed at teaching the academic communicative skills needed by the target group in the academic context. The course has been approved by the Department of English and Classical Culture as a full 32-credit, academic course. The accreditation formed an important objective for the course as this was one of the requirements negotiated between community leaders and the university. Action research presented itself as a useful vehicle for researching the development (unfolding) of the programme over a period of four years. The researcher was integrally involved in the whole process as course designer/facilitator/teacher and researcher. The very nature of the reflective action research cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, required that critical reflection occurred with every step of the process. Every phase of the three cycles described in this study, signalled changes, adaptations and further development of the course. These changes were a direct result of the critical-reflective stance taken by the researcher in her role as reflective practitioner in action research.

One of the goals of action research is to ensure quality enhancement through improvement of teaching and learning within existing constraints of time and cost (*vide* 5.2). The fact that critical reflection occurred throughout the implementation process as well as the fact that several participants gave their input, ensured that quality change was implemented. A variety of data-gathering techniques ensured triangulation which, in turn, validated each adaptation or change that was implemented. Another goal of action research is to facilitate professional growth of the researcher and other teaching staff (facilitators). The researcher had, initially, only a vague idea of the needs of

tertiary second language learners and an even vaguer knowledge of how to address these needs meaningfully. This study provided a systematic means of studying the problem in detail and allowed for growth as the process unfolded. The facilitators on the programme were participants in the process and every step of the unfolding was discussed with them. They were requested to complete questionnaires at regular intervals and their recommendations were noted and served as impetus for change. The facilitators themselves were regarded as valuable role players in the research process.

Learners themselves were aware that they were participants in the research process. They, too, completed questionnaires gauging their perception of their own learning and each change was communicated to them as participants in the process. During the final cycle when the classes were divided into an experimental and a control group, the research was explained to them and they were thoroughly oriented regarding the graded reader system and the researcher explained why their co-operation was necessary.

Throughout the process the importance of selecting or designing appropriate learning materials was a key focus. Each of the cycles represents an attempt to achieve the use of appropriate classroom materials and teaching methods. The academic literacy course started with the use of the START and THINK WRITE texts then changed to teacher-designed activities (CBI) based on newspaper articles and finally, as it exists now, the use of a good academic skills training text. The graded readers form an integral part of the existing teaching programme and these readers are carefully selected each year. Finally, the teaching approach, classroom methods and materials were selected with current international, instructional trends in mind.

The CPP programme and hence, the English course, form part of a transformation process at the University of the Free State. Action research

presented itself as a means of professional development, quality enhancement and organizational learning (*vide* 5.2). The findings of this research have led to the development of an academic literacy course with the following broad goals, viz. to develop the ability to read academic texts with good comprehension and critical attention; to develop thinking and study skills and to develop the ability to express information and ideas clearly, relevantly and logically in expository writing.

## 7.2 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

One of the problems of this type of research is that the core business of developing and implementing a course and the actual action research itself creates a tension. On the one hand, the core business has to have priority and at the same time, the research process aims at enhancing the core business. The researcher experienced this tension as a limitation and some valuable data were omitted as a result of this tension. An example of this was a thorough comparison of learners' assignment results from cycle 1 as compared with cycle 2 of the research. In retrospect, the researcher would have designed and implemented the programme and embarked on the research only after the programme was in place. This would have ensured a more thorough measurement of learner progress in each phase of implementation. The study guides that were written in the first year of implementation were not learner-friendly for the target group due to the lack of insight and knowledge of the researcher. The actual action research process was not yet fully in operation and the literature review had only just begun.

As a result of the above tension, the researcher relied on qualitative and quantitative research done by another researcher (Strydom 1997b) as a means of data-gathering for this target group. The researcher should have been able to gather data unique to the study of this very specific problem,

such as a thorough language proficiency test before learners started the programme. As a result of this study such a test is now in place. In spite of the limitations, this study offers much in the way of guidelines or implications for language practitioners.

### 7.3 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR LANGUAGE PRACTITIONERS

Several useful guidelines for the development of a language course at tertiary level emerged from this research. The development of a language course entails course design, materials design, teaching style and instructional procedures, facilitator training, assessment and monitoring. These guidelines encompass the following key issues, viz. *prior learning* (vide 2.3), *learner proficiency* (vide 2.1.1), *learner motivation and interest* (vide 2.3.2), *comprehensible input* (vide 3.5.4), *learning context* (vide 2.1), *learning strategies* (vide 2.3.4), *extensive and intensive reading* (vide 4.4.2), *teaching approach* (vide 2.2), *language and literature teaching* (vide 4.5), *materials* (vide 4.6 and Chapter 6), and *research methodology* (vide 5.1). The following recommendations are derived from the findings of this action research and may be used as guidelines for any language practitioner wishing to develop and implement a language course for low-proficiency learners:

- *Prior Learning*. Learners who come from a scholastically disadvantaged background may not have acquired the English language proficiency levels necessary to function successfully in their SL in an academic context (vide 2.3.5.). This implies that any programme of language learning should start from the learners' current level of proficiency with developmentally appropriate input (vide 3.5);
- *Learners' levels of proficiency* should be tested prior to the programme of learning so that the weighting of reading and writing components are based on the learners' proficiency needs (vide 4.6);

- *Assessment* should be done on a continuous basis to ensure frequent feedback and enable learners to monitor their own feedback;
- Regular *monitoring* of students' class attendance and test results should be done to identify possible problems or to encourage where necessary;
- Provision should be made for a thorough exchange of learner/lecturer *expectations* for the course. An official session should be convened where each expresses their expectations of the other (Oxford & Ehrman 1993:191);
- Thorough course *orientation* should be done to ensure that learners understand the relevance of the course components and their relevance to the motivational needs expressed by the learner group (Oxford & Erhman 1993:191);
- SLA should be facilitated within the relevant *learning context* and focusing on the language skills which are immediately useful to the learner, viz. academic reading and writing skills (*vide* 2.1.1). Academic texts and tasks should be used to replicate real-life operating conditions (rocs). In other words, students should be acquiring SL through communicative tasks needed in their present context, viz. academic context;
- Reading and writing *strategies* should be systematically taught. Strategies which the proficient reader and writer take for granted would be made explicit to the low-proficiency learner. These strategies provide the learners with the contextual support needed to ensure that *proficiency* is facilitated; (*vide* 2.1.1);
- Classroom *materials* should comply with the principle of comprehensible input where form is taught through meaning-bearing, information-gap activities (*vide* 3.5.4);
- *Extensive out-of-class* reading based on learners' choice from a variety of graded readers is an internationally recognized approach for facilitating SLA (*vide* 4.4.2);

- *Intensive in-class* reading and writing should be taught where the symbiotic relationship between academic reading and academic writing is a focus in classroom activities (*vide* 4.5);
- *Materials* used for the intensive-in-class reading programme should focus on specific discourse features such as anaphoric and cataphoric references, articles, pronouns and other discourse markers;
- *An eclectic teaching approach* using content-based as well as task-based learning may facilitate SLA in an academic context (*vide* 4.4);
- Language skills should be taught in *an integrated* manner using CI coupled with a communicative approach combined with form-based input processing;
- Academic reading and writing skills should be *specifically taught* in an integrated systematic manner;
- *A teaching programme of literature* should not be combined with a programme of language learning if learners have not attained a level of language competence which ensures their familiarity with literary conventions (*vide* 4.6).
- *Materials* should be selected to stimulate learner interest and motivation as these factors impact on classroom language learning; and
- *Emancipatory* action research provides the developer of a language programme for low-proficiency learners with a useful means of qualitatively reflecting on practice through theory and solution-driven implementation. Action research provides a systematic process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

#### 7.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was concerned mainly with the overall development, implementation and evaluation of a programme of language learning that would effectively address low proficiency at tertiary level. Thus, focused, small-scale research at micro level, such as researching the specific discourse



features that cause tertiary learners some difficulty, was not included and may be seen as a limitation of this study. Therefore a follow-up study is recommended where specific features of discourse are isolated for investigation with a view to improving teaching and learning for low-proficiency tertiary learners. An investigation, for example, into learners' comprehension and use of sentence connectors such as *however*, *furthermore*, *finally* and the co-ordinates *and* and *but* could prove useful. The same may be done for a host of discourse features.

A second recommendation emanates from what the researcher perceives as another limitation of this study, viz. to establish exactly what these learners find difficult in English academic texts. In this study students' perception of overall learning was an important data-gathering mechanism and their input was accounted for in the planning phase of the action research cycles, however, students' input can be meaningfully used in an investigation into specific, academic textual difficulties. Students should be used as informants in determining precisely what they experience as difficult in a text (Cohen & Fine 1978:55).

Learners could be asked to read an academic text in English. They could be interviewed afterwards and asked three types of questions, viz. macro, micro and vocabulary related questions. This research could lead to reaching very pertinent, specific conclusions as to the kind and nature of the learners' difficulties with an English academic text. A study on the difficulties experienced by the students on the CPP programme would be a valuable contribution to the insights of language practitioners and content teachers alike, in that these insights could shape classroom practice and help to ensure effective tertiary learning.

An additional small-scale investigation, spurred by this study, is currently in progress. Students who chose English as a subject were given an English

proficiency test and so were a control group who elected to study Psychology and Sociology as subjects. These latter students had no form of English language intervention. Both groups will be tested at the end of the current academic year and the results compared. The overall academic scores of both groups will also be compared. The results of this investigation will assist in informing the planning of the on-going action research spiral.

## **7.5 CONCLUSION**

In sum, this study attempted to research the process of developing, implementing and evaluating a programme of English language and literature learning for a group of low-proficiency learners in a university alternative-access programme.

The aim of the study was twofold, viz. to find ways of improving their language proficiency and to provide them with the academic literacy needed to access tertiary learning. Given their low-proficiency level and their underpreparedness, the literature component was abandoned to provide adequate time for a thorough academic literacy course so as to meet the learners' needs appropriately.

The methodology selected for this study was action research as it provided a means for the researcher to develop and reflect critically on every phase of course implementation which, in addition, provided a valuable in-service experience (Cooper & Ebbutt 1982:325). Finally, the findings of the study have led to the establishment of useful guidelines for language practitioners dealing with low-proficiency at tertiary level. The concluding chapter indicates limitations of the study and identifies possible future research. This study was an attempt to find meaningful answers through educational research firmly rooted in the daily practicalities and difficulties of a transforming higher education system in South Africa.



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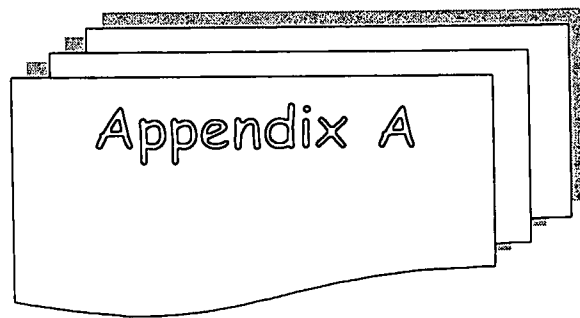
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DANIEL SETLAE

1

- \* I like to have good understandi of my facilitator (please do not be short tempered)
- \* Always we must start on time

\* Thank you

I will be happy to work with you

## Extensive Reading Programme

### GOALS

Improved global reading comprehension skills.  
Positive attitude toward reading in English.

### CHARACTERISTICS

Students read large amounts of self-selected, linguistically accessible literature.

Students are willing to read large amounts because self-selection caters to individual interests and linguistic accessibility allows for the reading to be relatively fluent and effortless.

### RATIONALE

Many students are unable to read with good comprehension because they struggle with word by word translation. Every reader has a limited cognitive capacity (sometimes called attentional resources or working memory), and when that capacity is fully used with word- and sentence-level decoding, then inadequate cognitive resources remain for higher-order reading skills, such as global integration, inferencing, evaluating, synthesizing, and so on.

Therefore before students can employ global reading skills, they must first develop reading fluency; and this is done via acquiring a large sight vocabulary. In other words, once students develop a fluent reading automaticity (of both word recognition and lexical access), they will then (and only then) have the available free cognitive resources needed for the higher order reading processes.

Research has demonstrated that this automaticity cannot be acquired solely via intensive reading courses. The best (and perhaps only) way of developing fluent reading is through large amounts of real reading. Thus by encountering vocabulary over and over again in varying and comprehensible contexts, a student develops a deep familiarity that leads to lexical automaticity, and reading fluency, and global comprehension.

### MONITORING

Students keep a weekly (day by day) reading log.

In addition, students will write a Reading Reaction for each book read. This reaction is not a "book report", but rather a personal reaction to the book (What they liked or disliked, Which character they identified with or found unrealistic, How they would change the story or what further information they would now like to know, and so on).

### BENEFITS

Improved reading comprehension, increased reading rate, significant vocabulary development, a positive attitude toward reading, and improved writing ability.

To sum up what I've said so far, marking should be **CONSTRUCTIVE**, not **DESTRUCTIVE**. To be able to mark constructively, you need to have a clear idea of what you are looking for in an answer. You will be in a better position to evaluate you students' work if you draw up a model answer for every question before you begin marking.

To help you work out model answers for the various questions that make up the assignment on 'The Wind and a Boy' from Being Here, there will be a think-tank session in January in which tutors will get together to pool their ideas under the guidance of the OLDEAP course leader. In preparation for the session, you should read the story several times and give thought to the questions.

As you mark, you'll find that marking is not only a means of evaluating and correcting students' work, but also often a learning process, because students sometimes come up with ideas that you hadn't thought of yourself. If a student manages to make any **RELEVANT** points that you haven't included in your model answer, you should give him or her a bonus point for originality and insight.

All good wishes.

ARLYS VAN WYK

PS: Marking in pencil is recommended because in the first place it shows up clearly in contrast to the ballpoint inks used by students, and, secondly, it leaves you free to change a comment or a mark if you need to.

appearances, actions, situations or whatever contribute to conveying the central idea. This involves the processes of selection and structuring, since the student's answer should not only exclude anything that is not directly relevant to what is asked, but should also be structured logically around the question. **NB:** Questions involving the word 'discuss' cannot be answered in point form.

Q: What is the next step in preparing a model answer to use as a guide when you mark the assignments on 'The Wind and a Boy'?

A: Turn to the story and look for the narrator's descriptions of Friedman and Sejosenye, as well as for passages describing their own words and actions or giving other characters' comments about them. Also look out for the word 'special'.

Q: What information can you find about Friedman in the story? (**TIP:** Underline any relevant words or passages in the story in pencil as you find them and make a note of page references relating to any key words in the question, e.g., appearance, actions, repetition, etc.)

A: 1. The omniscient narrator's words in the opening paragraph on p 40 suggest that there is something special about Friedman by comparison with his friends.

2. His appearance as described on pp 41, 42 and 46 continues the idea that he is special; note the repetition of 'special' and 'beautiful' – how many times is each of these words used to describe Friedman? By emphasising Friedman's beauty and specialness in this way, the author not only makes his death more tragic but also conveys her central idea, namely, that certain kinds of so-called progress, such as the preoccupation with speed and status represented by the driver of the truck that kills Friedman (pp 46, 47), destroy what is beautiful and special in life.

3. The reactions of the village people to him during his different phases -- as a small child (p41), as a naughty young boy (pp 42 - 45) and as a teenager (pp 45-46) -- also suggest his specialness.

4. His own words and actions show that he is special. To begin with, he makes the best wire cars! In addition, the phrase 'king of kings of all the small boys in his area' (p 41) tells us that he is a leader, even though during his naughty phase he often leads his friends into mischief. As he grows older, however, he wants to be like Robinson Crusoe in Sejosenye's story (p 44), rescues the mice that come into their hut during a storm (p 45) and is very helpful to

style – she lives in a hut (p 45), cooks on an outdoor fire round which she gives Friedman his moral education in the form of the stories known as *ntsomi* or *tsomo* in Xhosa and Setswana respectively (p 45 - 46) and lives on her lands till her crops are harvested (pp 42, 45). Her life is also closely interwoven with that of the village; she goes to weddings, visits her friends (p 41) and is the subject of village talk (pp 41, 42, 46).

Q: What methods of characterisation has the author used?

A: In addition to the omniscient narrator's description of their appearance and character, Bessie Head has presented Friedman and Sejosenyé to the reader through their words and actions, the implications of their names, the comments and reactions of other characters to them and the repetition of the word 'special'.

Q: How are you going to allocate the six marks allowed for question one, bearing in mind that you now have more information than any student will give you?

A: Allocate two and a half marks each for Friedman and Sejosenyé (five marks in total), giving half a mark for every point the student makes about them that you, from your own work on the story together with the information you gain during the workshop, know to be valid. For example, if a student makes five valid points about each character, he or she will so far have scored two and a half marks per character, which equals five out of six for question one, while a student who makes two valid points about Friedman and three about Sejosenyé will only have scored two and a half out of six. Award the sixth mark for the general impression that the answer makes on you in terms of the student's spelling, grammar, ability to write full sentences, organisation of material and knowledge of methods of characterisation. NB: In their first few assignments very few students will actually deserve this mark.

## QUESTION TWO

Q: How many sentences does question two consist of?

A: Three :  
 1. 'in the course ... live.'  
 2. 'Describe its characteristics ... thematic contrast to village life.'  
 3. Does Sejosenyé's story ... in any way?'

Q: What is point made in the first sentence of question two? Try to rewrite the sentence in your own words.

A: In the story Bessie Head describes Friedman and Sejosenyé's village and its way of life in detail.



Q: Which passages describe the lifestyle of Sejosenyé's youngest daughter and the driver of the truck that kills Friedman?

A: We learn about Sejosenyé's daughter and her lifestyle in the first half of paragraph three on p 41 and the last sentence of paragraph three on p 45, and about the driver of the truck and his lifestyle on pp 46 and 47.

Q: In what respects does the lifestyle of Sejosenyé's daughter and the driver of the truck differ from the kind of life lived by Sejosenyé and the people of Ga-Sefete-Molemo ward?

A: Give special thought to the following words and phrases: 'some casual mating she had indulged in', 'a town', 'some hundred miles away', 'a job as a typist', 'wanted to return to her job almost immediately', 'handed the child over', 'that was that', 'could afford to forget him' (p 41), 'sent him money to purchase the bicycle' (p 45).

The fact that Sejosenyé's daughter indulges in 'casual mating' tells us that she is promiscuous and irresponsible. Her irresponsibility can also be seen in her attitude to Friedman. She'd rather get back to her job and town life than look after her newborn baby, which suggests that she's selfish and materialistic as well as irresponsible. The words 'that was that' and 'could afford to forget him' indicate how she blots Friedman out of her mind once she's given him to her mother; in the next fourteen years the only thing she does for him is to send him the money for the bicycle he's riding when he's killed. Satisfying her own desires and living in the modern world is all that matters to her; she has turned her back on the traditional African way of life and its values.

In most respects the driver of the truck is very similar to Sejosenyé daughter. She's in a hurry to get back to town as soon as possible after Friedman's birth; he's in too much of 'a hurry about everything' to bother to take driving lessons (p 47) and in spite of not having a licence is 'speeding' along the main road when he hits Friedman (p 46). Both of them put material things before people. To her, the status of being a typist in town is more important than caring for her baby son; to him, the status of driving a vehicle is more important than the safety of other people on the road. To sum up, Sejosenyé's daughter and the driver of the truck are both irresponsible and materialistic. Their callous, irresponsible actions and materialistic values define them as representatives of the selfish individualism that often goes hand in hand with a rush towards so-called progress for the sake of personal

A: Setting. The question asks the student to show how the picture Bessie Head gives of the village and its surroundings in the story (pp 40, 43, 45) contrasts with the picture she gives of the truck that kills Friedman (p 46) and how the contrast between these two pictures in turn relates to the contrast between the two different sets of lifestyles in the story.

Q: Which words, phrases and passages in the story depict the village setting?

A: p 40 : 'first hard rains of summer', 'out of the village into the bush'  
 p 42 : 'lands'  
 p 43 : 'the outdoor fire'  
 p 44 : 'fields', 'trees', 'wind'  
 p 45 : 'huts', 'lands, which were some twenty miles outside the village', 'a pathway through the empty bush'  
 p 46 : 'winding, sandy pathways or the village ward', 'the goats stood and

Taken together, these details create a picture of a rural African village, the appropriate setting for Sejosenyé and what she stands for in the story.

Q: Which words, phrases and passages in the story create the settings in which Bessie Head presents Sejosenyé's daughter and the driver of the truck and their way of life?

A: 1) Sejosenyé's daughter  
 p 41 : 'a town a hundred miles away', 'job as a typist'  
 p 45 : 'a town far away'

These details associate her with modern urban life, showing how she has distanced herself literally and figuratively from her mother, her son and her roots.

2) the driver of the truck

p 47 : 'small green truck speeding', 'the truck caught him on the front bumper, squashed the bicycle and dragged the boy along at a crazy speed', 'the driver of the truck had neither brakes on his car nor a driving licence'

The man responsible for Friedman's death is a member of 'the new, rich civil-servant class whose salaries had become fantastically high since [Botswana's] independence'. The truck, a powerful, brightly coloured modern vehicle, makes an appropriate setting for him. At the same time, in view of its speed (note the repetition of the word), bumper impact, lack of driver control, lack of brakes and the way it ends Friedman's life, it also serves as a symbol of how progress in irresponsible hands can become a destructive force.

**QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CPP AND RBLCPP**

**1. PERSONAL DETAILS**

- 1.1. GENDER                    MALE        1  
                                  FEMALE    2X
- 1.2 AGE                      21
- 1.3 HOME LANGUAGE        ENGLISH        1  
                                  S.SOTHO        2X  
                                  OTHER (SPECIFY) 3

**CLASSES**

1. Do you experience any problems with the classes in general? Do you have any suggestions on how contact sessions can be improved?

Yes, by discussing any which I do not understand

2. Do you think that the START Programme has developed your reading skills? Explain.....

Yes, because I have problem answering comprehension

3. Do you think that the Think Write Programme has developed your writing skills? Explain.....

Yes, it was difficult for me to do topic sentence, character so on

4. Is it easy for you to use the modules?

Yes

5. Are you part of a study group that works on course material after classes?

X  
YES / NO

6. Does your lecturer explain clearly what students are required to do in the course.

X  
YES / NO

7. Does your lecturer present the work interestingly and stimulatingly?

X  
YES / NO

8. This is a resource-based learning course. What is your own responsibility in this type of course?

My responsibility is to attend classes, participate as far as to perform very well

9. Do you work on English at home every day? YES / NO

X  
YES / NO

7b

Assessment: Perhaps a more elaborate marking guide for the assignments would be useful; in other words, how strictly to mark language, syntax or interpretation errors. Maybe it would help if two or three examples of an experienced lecturer's evaluation of a student's assignment were sent to the new facilitators, so that they can see how to set their standard.

Volume of material. Arlys, perhaps I'm by nature a restless, hurried soul, but I (entirely by my own fault) got through the work weeks before the end. Pupils were becoming bored and I had to scrounge around for interesting material to keep them busy and interested. That is when I let them write one of the Grade 10 second language English tests I had set for my pupils at school, and to everyone's amazement they did pretty badly in it. This made me wonder whether the students wouldn't benefit from a little bit of formal grammar, since their syntax as well as concord especially, needs a little polishing.

Well, that's it. I hope I have made some sense. Basically everything went just fine and I enjoyed my class tremendously (they also seemed to have fun).

## Student C

Assignment: "THE WIND AND A BOY"

5. In this story, even though Sejosenye is also a main character, it is clear that the boy Friedman was the major centre of concern. Here, the author was trying to tell us something about Friedman junior. The main idea was to highlight the great loss experienced by the <sup>community of</sup> Ga-Sefete-Molimo. This was brought about by the accidental death of the boy Friedman, who was mostly admired and regarded as a king of the kings by the villagers. From his birth, Friedman was like a miracle, because his life changed as if over a night. He was active, speed and bright, and his death approached in the same speed, in much a horrific way. The choice of an omniscient narrator was regarded as being suitable by the author, in the sense that the story could be well observed from the start up to the end. The only person who could relate the entire events, in a clear and accurate manner was an omniscient narrator. This is because at the end of the story, the only person who could present this story in a fair manner, without taking sides, was somebody who judged the whole issue from a distant <sup>the</sup> village was made to talk by the birth of the boy Friedman, the way in which his granny, Sejosenye, looked after him. And at last, the death of Friedman, the loss of memory experienced by Sejosenye, and her death.

## COURSE EVALUATION BY FACILITATORS

### Eng 101

Kindly complete the following evaluation form: don't spare anyone. Be as frank as you can. Thank you.

Please evaluate whether the outcomes of the course have been achieved by giving your comments on each of the following components of the course.

Just a reminder of the course outcomes:

- o To develop reading skills, including surveying the text by skimming and scanning, summarising and synthesizing, and cognitive approaches such as analysing, comparing, categorising, etc.
- o To develop writing skills including academic writing and essay writing.
- o To develop listening skills.
- o To develop speaking skills.
- o To develop the techniques of brainstorming and mindmapping.

Literary outcomes: Students should be able to

\* demonstrate that they are able to handle the procedure for answering literary assignments. (Problem solving).

\* demonstrate that they are able to interpret task words.

\* identify and discuss elements of fiction

\* read poetry, drama and prose fiction carefully and demonstrate an understanding of the distinguishing features of each type of text.

### Teaching approach:

I feel that, especially in the beginning of the year, students should be led more gently to an understanding of literature. They find the modules that they have to work through themselves as intimidating.

### Skills and content:

Think Write and START are excellent to develop reading and writing skills. These skills should be applied to their literature as well.

SECTION B  
LITERATURE

"The man wore like a prophet but truly speaking he is not a prophet. He wore like a prophet so that people can trust him. Also he says that he had put out a tokoloshe, a priest do not use hebst.

7 "The author use the appearance, words and actions of this man to show that this prophet is not yet a prophet, because he said that his father was a priest of Roman Catholic Church.

Question 2

2.1. In defence of poetry.  
2.2 Author Mafika Gwala. ✓ 2  
2.3. "Poetic" is the beauty.  
"unpoetic" is, evil, bad, not beauty.  
unpoetic the author had try to expose the bad things which is make by the white to the black people. 6

2.4. "Tell me." Is when the author express her feeling; about oppression.

"Brother." Means friend. Her she want help from the black people who are going to read this poem. Because of the bad treatment of the whites to the blacks. Because of apartheid  
2. stem. 2

$$1\frac{1}{2} + 0 + 1 = 2\frac{1}{2} / 20 = 13\%$$

ibingile - you have not used your own words to say what Sejosenye and Nedman were like. This paragraph is not cohesive enough.

the quotation you have used does not support the statement you are trying to make. There is not introductory or concluding sentence in your paragraph. I want to see your own style emerging. Do not simply write down lines and lines from the book.

I struggle to understand what you write. Look in your grammar book for advice on word order. Expose yourself to English.

Q2 - you were supposed to tell me which methods of characterization the author uses to tell us more about the characters. You will have to work very hard!



## Most common language errors in CPP assignments

1. "Up to so far" is frequently used to mean "thus far".
2. The use of "tos" (appropriate in Black English as a colloquialism) to mean "very".
3. Confused usage of the articles. Sometimes the article is omitted altogether.
4. When a sentence begins with "because", the second simple sentence is often without a verb. This is not the case when "because" is used *between* the sentences.
5. Use of the infinitive (to) with a past tense verb.
6. Over usage of the past tense, e.g. "did not went".
7. Confusion of "in", "at", "on".
8. "Tittle" for "title".
9. "Whites/Blacks people" or simply "Black" as plural.
10. "By then" to mean "consequently".
11. "Stay" meaning "sit". (Mother tongue interference since one word is used for both meanings in Nguni and Sotho languages).
12. "Sam ..... he", or "The prophets .... they" within the same sentence.

Career Preparation Programme.

English.

We are interested in your response to the course you have done in English.

Please complete the questionnaire .

1. Why did you select English as one of your subjects?

As I was a child I liked to master English but couldn't and told myself that from that day onwards I will work on my English till my last breath And to communicate well with other people and to also improve on my English level. Ta!

2. What did you hope to learn in the course?

More on grammar and literature.  
How to write an assignment.  
Improve my writing skills.

3. Were your expectations met in the course?

Most of them Yes.  
Especially when coming to my lecture. "You"

**Career Preparation Programme.****English.****We are interested in your response to the course you have done in English.****Please complete the questionnaire .****1. Why did you select English as one of your subjects?**

I Choose this Subjects in order to improve my English <sup>and</sup> writing skills. And know my Verbs correctly.

**2. What did you hope to learn in the course?**

How to Speak English ~~to~~ very well.

**3. Were your expectations met in the course?**

My expectation in this course I can write a good English so that I can be able to express my self next year.

Palesa Seputhi

19986630a

Poverty is one of the main causes of crime

Brainstorming

- \* Murder
- \* Rape
- \* Theft
- \* Car-hijacking

- \* House-breaking
- \* Prostitution

Mind-mapping



Poverty is one of the main causes of crime

Poverty is one of the main causes of crime. Because people are so poor, they tend to disobey the law and do crime. In other words, they see crime as a means of survival, whereas on the other hand it's harming them and their country. In addition to the crimes committed everyday, the rate of crime increases. Therefore, people loose hope and blame the government for not doing its job properly, whereas the people and the government must work hand in hand to put an end to crime.

you might end up being unable to stop.  
you are not stopping to drink those types of  
drinks. Furthermore, ~~the alcohol~~ <sup>the alcohol</sup> is going to  
get you put you <sup>(notice and)</sup> in a bad shape <sup>for instance even</sup> like how many  
people <sup>friends or acquaintances might remark on your changed appearance and</sup> said you are having an  
<sup>start to shun you</sup> ugly face because you drink too much and never want  
to stop drinking. Because of drinking you  
are going to get ill and that can cause  
damage to your <sup>liver</sup> lungs and <sup>and other organs like</sup> also to you  
<sup>your heart and kidneys.</sup> ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> is not good for yourself to  
smoke <sup>or</sup> and drink heavily.

My advice would be to  
~~But now what I can say is that stop~~  
drinking and smoking because this can  
harm or damage yourself.

you keep repeating yourself.

you could have commented on  
the other aspects of the family  
or job situations or of society in  
general, where the ramifications of  
the problem can be felt.

$\frac{4\frac{1}{2}}{10}$

CPP Course evaluation  
Helene Strauss

male centered (*Being Here* the only exception ). We could perhaps in future consider doing something like Sindiwe Magona, Buchi Emecheta, Farida Karodia, or Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. I know I'm rambling, but I do believe the chauvinistic attitudes in this country need to be addressed if we want to get to the root of our rape statistics. We as educators are in the perfect position to make a difference.

### Guidance

No problem.

### Assessment

Students often do not look at the marking sheets attached to their assignments. The importance of looking at this has to be reinforced incessantly. Students could perhaps be asked to write corrections of one or more of their assignments in future.

Individual contact with students is very important. The facilitator should try to see every student at least once during each writing session.

Problem areas should be addressed in class and students should perhaps be asked to write a test on the common mistakes made in assignments. When preparing for the literature exam at the end of the year, students could perhaps be asked to prepare certain main themes at home and present it to the class. This will ensure that they do spend time on their English, and it will help them come up with questions regarding the prescribed work before it is too late.

### Volume of the material

Just right.

### Duration of the course

This year my students are quite good and one year is more than enough for them. Some students, however, do need more time.

### Any other comments

I cannot think of anything. I hope I've said enough.

Eve Thompson, a lawyer and director of the South African office of the United States Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, has written a letter to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) condemning the incident and demanding that Haasbroek, as well as police "who attempt to steal from law-abiding citizens", be heavily penalised in order to maintain the rule of law and respect for police services. Thompson says it is unconstitutional to deny a person bail on the basis of their race, nationality, ethnicity or gender.

Rosebank commanding officer Captain Steven Moodley expressed his regrets and apologised for the alleged rude behaviour of some police officers and said it would not be tolerated. It was not the duty of police officers to determine whether suspects should be granted bail; that was the job of a magistrate. A departmental investigation is in process.

Paragraph	
1	What is surprising in sentence one?
2	Where does "there" refer to in "They have been working there for two years"?
3	Who does "them" refer to in "... the alleged attackers demanded money from them"?
4	<p>Why are quotation marks around "police officers"?</p> <p>What does "which" refer to in "... after which one of the alleged attackers ran away"?</p> <p>Who does "the three" refer to in "According to the three, ... "?</p>
5	How much money in total did the traders give the police for bail?
6	<p>What does "the incident" refer to in sentence one?</p> <p>Why does Eva Thompson believe it is important to penalise the police?</p>
7	<p>What does "it" refer to in "... it would not be tolerated"?</p> <p>What does "that" refer to in "... that was the job of a magistrate"?</p>

What words does the reporter (Connie Selebogo) use in this article to show that she is just reporting what other people have told her, not what she has seen with her own eyes? [three words]



### **Post-Reading: Discussion**

Divide class into pairs and have them discuss a couple questions.

After about 5+ minutes, shift the discussion to the whole class.

Possible discussion questions for "Traders arrested after reporting crime":

Are there foreign traders in Bloemfontein (Welcome, etc.)?

Do you think that this sort of thing happens to them here?

Do foreigners bring any benefits to SA?

Do foreigners bring any problems to SA?

Are there too many foreigners in SA?

Should SA encourage or discourage foreigners from coming into the country?

What should the police do about foreigners?

### **Post-Reading: Writing**

Sometimes a writing assignment emerges from the reading passage.

Possible writing assignments for "Traders arrested after reporting crime":

Write a paragraph on the topic "Foreigners".

OR

Write a letter to the Police Commissioner, Mr. Jackie Selebi, to express your opinion on what the police should do about foreigners.

## Reading Reaction

Name Frankenstein Tobile MawriDate 12-04-2000Title of Book FrankensteinAuthor Mary ShelleyI read ALL / 54 pages of the book.

## My rating of the book:

1  
Bad!2  
Fair3  
OK4  
Good5  
Great!

## My feelings about the book:

The book is ~~not~~ not the greatest, but it's one of those books when you start reading you can't put the book down. It is a very sad story that you do not know who to feel sorry for. The character I liked was "Jane" she was a very kind person who adopted very well with the Frankenstein family. I loved the way she was cool even though she knew she was going to die. I love the way she put it in the book "In the prison Justine waited quietly for death. ~~For her kindness~~ The payment for her kindness was death. The character I disliked was "Victor Frankenstein". I hated the way he toyed with nature. It's not a crime to be curious, but we must all remember that nature was not meant to be toyed with. God did no mistake in keeping other things a secret. For example the secrets of life. Victor toyed with nature and suffered consequence dragging his entire family with him. The part I would change is when Justine was ~~tried~~ convicted and killed for a murder she did not commit. Anyone who deserves to be convicted is "Victor". I find it unbelievable ~~the fact~~ that other people except "Victor" ~~did~~ did not take action against the monster, it's like in the book the people ~~were not~~ did not even know that the monster existed. Otherwise it's not a bad book.

- 1 Unless you live in Australia, you may never see a live platypus. Besides, it's hard to believe they are real when you do see one.
- 2 A platypus looks like an animal one might invent as a joke. About twenty inches long, it has a flat, egg-shaped body with soft brown fur. Its tail is strange—short and broad like a paddle. Its four legs are short. Each foot has five strong claws. But there is webbing between the claws, just as on a duck's foot. The webbing on the front feet reaches past the tips of the claws. This makes the feet into big flat paddles.
- 3 It doesn't have a neck to speak of. Its head is more or less round, and its ears just can't be seen. Its nose and mouth form a huge, flat beak, like a duck's bill, below two small eyes.
- 4 A platypus is also called a duckbill. (It's easy to see why.) And it lays eggs!
- 5 In spite of all this, it gets along quite well. It lives in the banks of streams where it finds food. Here is where those big webbed front feet really help. As the platypus swims and dives, they do most of the work. The rear feet also help out. The tail does the steering.
- 6 And that big beak isn't so silly. When the platypus dives for food, it uses the beak as a shovel to dredge the mud and small stones at the bottom of the stream. The beak has a fold all around its edge. This is a sort of fence to keep the platypus from getting into soft mud up to its eyes.
- 7 As it shovels up tasty worms, bugs, and shellfish, the platypus stores them in its cheeks until it comes out of the stream to eat. A platypus has no teeth. It grinds up food with its hard gums. Of course, it shovels up and swallows a good deal of mud, too, but this seems to do no harm.
- 8 Platypuses use their strong claws to dig long tunnels into their homesites. To fool enemies, the platypus hides its door with twigs and grass. Sometimes it digs alleys that branch away from the main tunnel. A foe that is chasing it keeps going down these alleys and comes to a dead end each time. To make things worse, a platypus will throw a dirt roadblock on the tunnel that leads to its den. Then its enemy thinks this is just one more dead end. At that point the foe may just give up and leave.
- 9 The platypus's eggs are small with tough shells, like snakes' eggs. When the babies hatch, they are small and weak. They live on their mother's milk for about four months. Then they go out and find their own food.
- 10 While the female platypus is bringing up its young, it eats huge meals. Once a man watched a mother eat, in one meal, about four hundred worms, three hundred beetles, and thirty-eight small crayfish.
- 11 This flat, furry animal with a duck's face might be called odd or ugly, but never ordinary!

Remember to check your time: \_\_\_\_\_ min. \_\_\_\_\_ sec.



## QUESTIONS

### Section A

Circle the letter of the best answer for the following questions:

- 1      When we measure distances between stars, we use  
A space-miles  
B light-years  
C astro-meters
  
- 2      When Hipparchus made the first catalog of stars, he listed them in order of  
A size  
B color  
C brightness
  
- 3      The only real difference between the sun and the stars is  
A distance  
B size  
C color
  
- 4      The author uses the example of the ticking watch to show how  
A long it takes light to get anywhere  
B how vast are the distances she speaks of  
C far light can go in a thousand years
  
- 5      Hipparchus didn't list any stars after the *sixth magnitude* because that's all  
A he saw  
B there were  
C he had time for
  
- 6      How bright a star looks depends partly upon  
A how close it is  
B the season of the year  
C Both A and B
  
- 7      When we look at the stars, we are seeing the past because their light  
A was seen by people long ago  
B started toward earth many years ago  
C Neither A nor B

Margaret Carlson

# Death, Be Not Proud

Nothing is as certain as the pace of executions in Bush's Texas



GEORGE W. BUSH HAS AT LEAST ONE DISTINCTION as Governor: since he took office in 1995 his state has seen more executions—119—than any other. Just as he was beginning his presidential campaign in 1998, the case of convicted murderer Karla Faye Tucker came up for review. Religious leaders from Pat Robertson to the Pope pleaded with Bush to spare Tucker. Like Bush himself, she had found Christ in midlife. He could have issued a 30-day reprieve and signaled to the parole board that Tucker should be granted clemency. He didn't. Although he said he was anguished by the decision, in an interview in *Talk* magazine, writer Tucker Carlson described Bush mimicking the woman's final plea for her life. "Please," Bush whimpers, his lips pursed in mock desperation, "don't kill me."

Swaggering past the death house still works in Texas, where crowds gather outside the Huntsville death chamber to cheer on the executioner. But lately more Americans, including some Republicans, are questioning how just the practice is. Governor George Ryan of Illinois, a conservative Republican, halted all executions in his state on Jan. 31, after concluding the system was "fraught with error." Thirteen people scheduled for death in Illinois had been exonerated. Three of them were freed after a journalism class at Northwestern University proved someone else had committed the crimes. One of the three came within two days of dying. Of 12 others who were executed, one is now believed to have been innocent. That was enough for Ryan. "Until I can be sure with moral certainty that no innocent man or woman is facing a lethal injection," he said, "no one will meet that fate."

After Ryan's action, Bush said he has no such qualms. "Everybody who's been executed [in Texas] is guilty of the crime of which they've been convicted," he said, adding that all the convicts had had "full access to the courts."

But that just isn't so. Death in Texas, where there are about 450 capital cases pending, is swift. The postconviction review office was shut down five years ago, and there is no public-defender service to speak of. Judges, most of them supporters of the death penalty, tend to appoint poorly trained and poorly paid lawyers. Rarely is there money for investigators. Justice is so blind that some defense lawyers can sleep undisturbed at trial: George McFarland's lawyer dozed throughout his in 1991, yet his verdict was upheld. Bad lawyering is so notorious in Texas that the legislature, not

known for coddling criminals, last year unanimously passed a bill to modestly improve counsel for indigent defendants. Bush vetoed it.

While Bush stands out for his unblinking certainty, he is not alone in his enthusiasm for the death penalty. In the midst of soaring crime rates, squishy judges and lenient parole boards, politicians tripped over themselves to embrace capital punishment after the Supreme Court reinstated it in 1976. An Old Democrat could become a New Democrat by switching positions. Hillary Clinton recently showed her anticrime credentials by coming out for it in her Senate race.

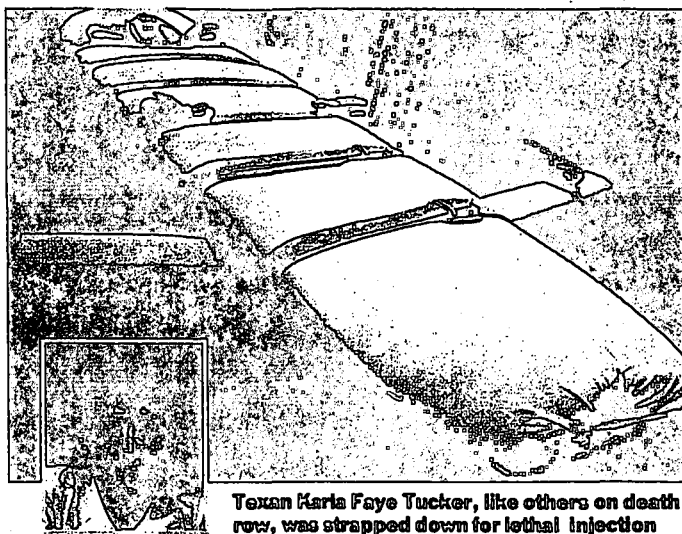
Americans still support the death penalty, but not with the ferocity they felt when it was an abstraction, or when softheaded judges were letting murderers walk on a technicality. Movies like *The Hurricane* and *Dead Man Walking*, as well as last week's episode of *The West Wing*, show the awful drama behind the practice.

People too have seen the guilty go free and innocent men get sent to death row. The country watched as O.J. Simpson, who many thought was the "real killer," got off with the help of expensive lawyers. Eighty-five once-doomed men who were fortunate enough to have their cases taken up have been saved from the death chamber, according to Yale's Steven Bright, who directs the

Southern Center for Human Rights. That number, he says, should shake the criminal-justice system to its core.

All this may not have slowed Bush, but others are taking a second look. The Roman Catholic Church, recognizing its prior inconsistency, now defends the life of the felon along with the life of the fetus. As crime rates have fallen, legislation has been introduced in six states that would put a moratorium on further executions. Last week Senator Patrick Leahy proposed a bill that would force states to provide competent counsel along with DNA testing in capital cases.

It is curious that Bush, who seems ambivalent about so many things, would be so unflinchingly sure of himself when it comes to carrying out the death penalty. He has chosen a parole board that has been known to spend as little as 15 minutes reviewing some cases. In Texas, where speed and efficiency are highly valued, allowing a moral struggle to slow down the process might be viewed as weak. But as Bush goes about the country campaigning for the presidency, showing a little doubt in the face of life-and-death decisions would lend weight to his claim to be a compassionate conservative. —With reporting by Hillary Hyman/Austin



Texas Karla Faye Tucker, like others on death row, was strapped down for lethal injection

LIAISON: BOB DANKINICH—CORBIS SYGMA

## Death, Be Not Proud – Vocabulary

Complete these sentences with the best vocabulary word:

- 1 The committee made a \_\_\_\_\_ decision to end the debate and everyone went home.
- 2 I have \_\_\_\_\_ feelings about paying so much for a new car.
- 3 The chairperson of the department \_\_\_\_\_ my suggestion to raise my salary to R100 000.
- 4 After winning the soccer tournament, John \_\_\_\_\_ down the street to his favourite bar.
- 5 Jill tried not to \_\_\_\_\_ in class, but it was a very hot day!
- 6 The judge said that a knife was a \_\_\_\_\_ weapon and sentenced Bob to 5 years in jail.
- 7 Saddam Hussein is a \_\_\_\_\_ troublemaker.
- 8 The doctor was quite \_\_\_\_\_, and my sister got well soon.
- 9 A \_\_\_\_\_ person feels sorry for the blind beggars outside the stores.

Complete this sentence: "George McFarland's lawyer dozed through out his \_\_\_\_\_ in 1991 ..."

Who do you think George McFarland was?

What do you think "vetoed" means in "Bush vetoed it"?

(a) accepted (b) refused (c) voted (d) elected

What does "it" refer to in "Bush vetoed *it*"?

5 What prefix means "against"?

What does "it" refer to in "Hillary Clinton ... her support for *it* ..."?

6 Why does the writer use "italic" print for *The Hurricane*?

What "practice" is being referred to in "... the awful drama behind *the practice*"?

7 Was O.J. Simpson found guilty or innocent?

What number is Steve Bright referring to in "*That* number ..."?

8 What does "this" refer to in "All *this* may not have ..."?

What word means "criminal" in sentence two?

What is the writer talking about when she says that the Roman Catholic Church defends "the life of the fetus"?

### Post-Reading Questions

1 If someone is against the death penalty, what points can he give to support his position? (Look for at least four points in this article.)

2 If someone is for the death penalty, what reasons can he give to support his position? (Maybe not in this article.)

3 Do you support the death penalty? Why or why not? If you support it, for which crimes should it be used? Should it be used for both men and women? Juveniles and adults? The mentally disturbed?



**TUTORIAL LETTER  
PROGRAMME**

**ENGLISH**

**RBL**

You are halfway through the course now and have an idea of your own progress. It is important that we point out a few general errors made in the assignments so far. Study the examples below carefully and make sure that you keep them in mind for your last assignment this year. **GOOD LUCK!**

**1. Texts and writers**

It is very important that you recognize the different genres and understand the features of the different texts. In other words, what does a poem look like and how is it different from a drama or a novel. Do not refer to a play as a story as so many of you did in your assignments. Do not refer to the poet as the writer or the playwright as the author. Use the correct literary terminology.

A play is written by a playwright.

A novel is written by an author.

A poem is written by a poet.

**2. CONCORD**

It is extremely important to use the procedures for paragraph writing as taught in your writing classes. The procedures advocated by Think Write will help you eliminate concord errors. Write your assignment answer in rough first, then revise it and only then rewrite it for submission. Underline all the verbs carefully and check whether the verb agrees with the relevant noun.

Many students are still leaving the -s off the third person, singular, present tense such as: The relationship stays\_ the same.

Sejosenje is the one who breaks\_ the rules.

Emily does not like George to be proud.

George feels\_ nervous in church.

**3. TENSES**

Students are still switching tenses in mid-sentence or mid-paragraph in their written assignments. If you begin a sentence or paragraph in the present, you must continue in the present; if you begin in the past, you must continue in the past. For example:

**Present**

"Farmers today work very hard. Machinery and labour are both expensive, and many poor farmers cannot afford them. Therefore, they must use their own labour to succeed. In the future, the situation will get worse because there will be greater competition for land. Farmers in previous decades did not have to cope with this intense competition. Today's farmers are unlucky in this respect."

-write to improve by Murray and Johanson.

You will note that different tenses are used in the same paragraph, but that the present tense remains the main tense for the paragraph. When writing about something in the future, then the tense to follow must be the future tense. The same applies for references to the past.

sentence: "The poet is using this type of spacing, punctuation and line structure to get his meaning to the reader." (Module 5 p. 7). The concluding sentence usually summarizes the main points of the discussion.

### QUOTATIONS

A very important aspect of essay, or assignment, writing is dealing with quotes from the text one is discussing. A quote must be placed in inverted commas and, after the second quotation mark, a page reference must be given between brackets. Here follow a few examples:

**Example 1.**

Friedman's mother is described as irresponsible since Friedman is "the result of some casual mating she had indulged in" (p. 41).

**Example 2.**

The fact that Friedman is special is also emphasised by the following words of the narrator: "for his age he was a boy who knew his own mind" (p. 41-42).

**Example 3.**

In "The Wind and a Boy" Sejoseny represents the old, traditional African way of life. This becomes evident through the descriptions of her as being a "real mother" and a "woman who could plough" (p. 40, 41).

Notice how, in each case, the quote has been integrated into the sentences of the student. If a sentence ends with a quotation, as in the above cases, the full stop is placed after the brackets of the page reference have been closed.

In Example 2 above the page reference shows that the quote starts on page 41 and ends on page 42.

In Example 3 two quotes are given in the same sentence. In such a case the page references for both quotes follow between brackets **only after** the second quote and they are separated by a comma.

When the passage quoted contains the direct words of a character it becomes necessary to use double as well as single quotation marks as in Example 4.

**Example 4.**

Because Friedman is regarded as special, he is often excused for mischief when he is actually guilty. Compare, for example, the following: "'Friedman isn't as bad as you,' the parents would reply irrationally" (p. 42).

When a very long passage is quoted the quote is separated from the rest of the answer by starting in a new line and indenting (look up the word in the dictionary) the quote. This is done to make it easier to see where the quote starts and where it ends. In this case **only** are the quotation marks omitted (left out). For example:

**Example 5.**

The narrator of "The Wind and a Boy" describes Sejoseny as follows:

## REVISING AN ESSAY WITH A CLASSMATE

### Read the Introduction

Label the Thesis Statement

Thesis

Is the Thesis Statement clear?  
(If yes, explain it in your own words.)

Do the other sentences in the introduction lead up to the Thesis Statement?  
(If yes, explain how they lead up to it.)

### Read the Body

For each Paragraph:

Label the Topic Sentence

TS

Label each Supporting Sentence

SS

Label each remaining sentence as a Questionable Sentence  
(You don't understand the sentence, or  
You don't see the relevance of the sentence to the paragraph.)

?

Is the Topic Sentence connected to the Thesis Statement?  
(If yes, explain how it is connected.)

How does each Supporting Sentence support the Topic Sentence?  
(Is it an explanation, an example, a description, a comparison?)

After reading the whole essay:

Is the essay well organised?  
(If yes, explain how it is organised.)

Is every sentence clear and easy to understand?  
(If yes, you should be able to explain each sentence in your own words.)

Does the essay convince you?  
(If yes, why does it convince you? If no, why does it not convince you?)

Is there any information or idea that the writer could add to the essay?

## Reading Reaction: Some Questions for the Second Part

Did you enjoy the story? Why or why not?

Was there a part of the story that you enjoyed the most or found most interesting?

Was there a part of the story that you disliked or found confusing?

Which character did you like, admire, or identify with?

Which character did you dislike?

Did the story remind you of any personal experience?

Did the story teach you any lesson about life?

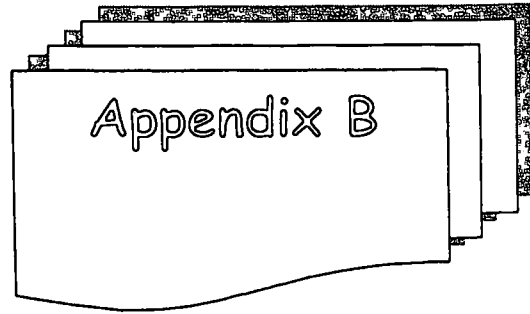
Would you change the story if you were the author?

Did you find the story believable/realistic?

Would you want to read another story by the same author?

**NB:** You cannot answer all these questions.

Choose one (or two) and answer it clearly. Explain your answer fully.



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Report on co-ordinator workshop.....	1
English Module 1 Prose Fiction .....	2

**NA AANLEIDING VAN 'N VORIGE VERGADERING GEHOU OP 25 NOVEMBER 1998, IS BESLUIT OM 'N VERDERE WERKSWINKEL TE HOU MET DIE OOG OP HANTERING VAN DAARDIE FAKTORE (20%) VERANTWOORDELIK VIR 80% VAN DIE PROBLEME.**

**WHAT SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC FACTORS MAKE THE EFFECTIVE INTEGRATION OF THE CCO DIFFICULT IN MY SUBJECT?**

**FACTORS: RESTRAINING FORCES**

1. Lack of reading skills
2. Technical terminology
3. Vocabulary (lack)
4. Concrete language by students inability to follow abstract thoughts
5. Cannot construct sentences and paragraphs
6. Cannot communicate orally (speaking skills)
7. Analytical & organizational language ability
8. Cannot write essays and reports
9. Interpretational language skills
10. Grouping of ideas in written work
11. Summarizing of main points from written material
12. Reading speed

**LANGUAGE RESTRAINING FORCES: 20/80 PRINCIPLE APPLIED**

1. Lack of reading skills
2. Vocabulary
3. Analytical and organizational language ability
4. Technical terminology
5. Cannot communicate orally

**LACK OF READING SKILLS – SOLUTIONS : 20/80 PRINCIPLE APPLIED**

1. A structured reading course (full year)
2. Built into course material (reading skills). Every activity should include a reading activity which can be evaluated

**WATTER FAKTORE T.O.V. DIE AGTERGROND VAN STUDENTE EN FASILITEERDERS HET 'N BELEMMERENDE EFFEK OP DIE IMPLEMENTERING EN INTEGRERING VAN DIE "CRITICAL CROSS-FIELD EDUCATION AND TRAINING OUTCOMES"?**

- verwysingsraamwerk van studente is swak
- ouderdom van studente (verskille)
- kultuurverskille
- skoolopleiding
- opleiding van fasiliteerder t.o.v. begrip vir student
- waardes

**SOLUTIONS – TRAINING OF FACILITATORS**

- 1. Continuous compulsory support & training
- 2. Continued, specific feedback
- 3. Sensitize facilitators to the very specific needs of the students

**WATTER FAKTORE GEE AANLEIDING TOT PASSIEWE LEER MET 'N GEVOLGLIKE BELEMMERENDE EFFEK OP DIE IMPLEMENTERING VAN DIE CCETO?**

- 1. Our modules do not always encourage active participation
- 2. Students cannot prioritize
- 3. Facilities at home are not conducive to study
- 4. Peer pressure
- 5. Lack of confidence
- 6. Not committed to study
- 7. Scholastic background bad classroom methodology
- 8. Demanding chores at home

**RESTRAINING FORCES REGARDING PASSIVE LEARNING : 20/80 PRINCIPLE APPLIED.**

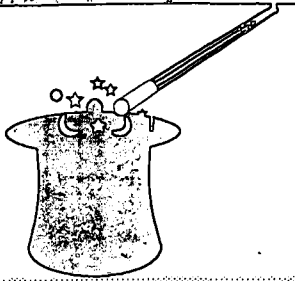
- 1. cannot prioritize
- 2. not committed to study
- 3. facilities at home are not conducive to study

**SOLUTIONS – COMMITMENT TO STUDIES**

- o regular assessment of "homework" of all students (peer assessment"
- o give students a vision of the career opportunities in your subject through practical examples
- o learning contract
- o refer students to counselor

**SOLUTIONS FOR PASSIVE LEARNING (PRIORITIZE)**

- o We ought to include problem solving (prioritizing) in our modules
- o Help students to think in terms of achieving goals
- o Learning contract
- o Give time and feedback on reflection in modules
- o Referrals to counselor

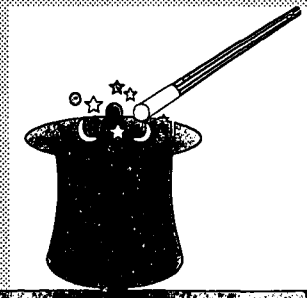


ENGLISH

MODULE 1

PROSE FICTION

BEING HERE





## INTRODUCTION TO PROSE FICTION

**NB :** YOU SHOULD WORK THROUGH THE INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL ON PROSE FICTION BEFORE BEGINNING YOUR STUDY OF THE PRESCRIBED WORKS. THE INTRODUCTORY MATERIAL CONSISTS OF THIS WORKSHEET AND SIDE A OF THE TAPE TITLED 'AN INTRODUCTION TO PROSE FICTION'; YOUR PRESCRIBED WORKS ARE BEING HERE, A COLLECTION OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN SHORT STORIES, AND MINE BOY, A 20TH-CENTURY SOUTH AFRICAN NOVEL.

The primary aim of the prose fiction course is to help you to read short stories and novels with greater understanding, so that you not only know what happens in them and how they end, but what the writer is saying through the characters and events that he or she describes. Secondly, the course aims to help you develop your ability to discuss or write about short stories and novels or selected aspects of them in a way that shows you understand them.

In any occupation it is necessary to master the relevant terminology. Student nurses have to learn the meaning of medical terms like 'coronary thrombosis' in order to be able to do their job properly, and law students must be able to use words like 'litigation' and 'sequestration' correctly. In the same way, you, as a student of English, need to acquire a particular vocabulary to enable you to read and write about works of literature with sensitivity and insight.

PLEASE FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS BELOW STEP BY STEP. WHEN YOU'VE COMPLETED THE FINAL STEP YOU WILL KNOW THE MOST ESSENTIAL LITERARY TERMS AND HOW TO USE THEM.

1. Look up each of the following 20 words in your dictionary and, if it will help you to remember them, write out the definitions.

character, fiction, imagery, irony, metaphor, motif, narrative, narrator, novel, omniscient, peripheral, plot, prose, realistic, romantic, setting, simile, story, symbol, theme

2. Listen to Side A of your tape titled 'An Introduction to Prose Fiction', which uses examples from the stories that you will be studying from Being Here to illustrate the various elements of fiction.

## MODULE 1 : SHORT STORIES

### UNIT 1

If you have worked through the study sheet on the elements of prose fiction and listened to Side A of your introductory tape, you are ready to begin reading the short stories selected for Module 1 of the English 115 prose fiction course. As mentioned before, your prescribed work for this section of the course is Being Here, a collection of Southern African stories compiled by Robin Malan, from which the stories you have to study for examination purposes are:

1. 'The Prophets' by Bheki Maseko
2. 'The Toilet' by Gcina Mhlophe
3. 'Gerty's Brother' by Ahmed Essop
4. 'The Bridegroom' by Nadine Gordimer

In addition, a set of questions has been provided on 'The Wind and a Boy' by Bessie Head so that, when you have completed your study of the four stories listed above, you can test your interpretative skills on a story that isn't discussed on Side B of the introductory tape. In fact, you should try to read as many of the stories in Being Here as possible.

☺ **NOTE** The more practice you give yourself in analysing literature the better you will become at it; as Gary Player said when he was asked whether some of his golfing successes weren't simply a matter of luck, 'The more I practise, the luckier I get!'

📖 **READ** You will find some help on pp x - xiii of the introduction, where Robin Malan discusses short stories in general, and also on pp 188 - 211, where he provides biographical notes on the various authors and points of discussion on the stories.

The stories set for examination purposes will be dealt with in the order in which they are given above; this is also the order in which they are discussed on Side B of your introductory tape on prose fiction.

#### ' SOME TECHNICAL TIPS!

1. To prepare yourself for your examination, develop the habit of answering each question in FULL SENTENCES.

**THE PROPHETS' by Bheki Maseko**

**READ** After reading 'The Prophets' carefully from beginning to end, glance over your mind map on the elements of fiction to refresh your memory and then write out answers to the questions below.

**QUESTIONS TO TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF 'THE PROPHETS'**

1. Who is the central character in 'The Prophets'? What kind of person is the central character? What methods of characterisation does the author use to present the central character to us? Does he, for example, describe the central character's appearance? Does he use the central character's words and actions to tell us something about her? (Look at the information that the author provides about the central character on p168 and draw conclusions from it; for example, the way she keeps checking on her money shows she's afraid of being robbed, while the fact that she's going to Ladysmith to perform cleansing rituals after her brother's death indicates that she's old-fashioned and traditional). What happens to the central character at the end of the story? In what respects do her age and personality contribute to what happens to her? How does the author arouse the reader's sympathies for her at the end?
  
2. Although the central character doesn't realise it, she is up against , or unwittingly in conflict with, certain other characters in the story. Who are these characters, and what are their intentions towards the central character? How does the author use their appearance, their words and their actions to make the reader realise that they are not what they pretend to be? Why do you think that the central character is fooled by them?

☺ NOTE ONCE YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE QUESTIONS, LISTEN TO THE DISCUSSION OF 'THE PROPHETS' ON SIDE B OF YOUR INTRODUCTORY TAPE AND THEN REWORK ANY ANSWERS THAT YOU ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH.

Now it is time to try your hand at a typical examination question such as the one below. The most important thing is to answer what is asked. Before you begin writing, first read through the QUESTION very, very carefully, underlining key words that indicate the aspects that you must focus on in your answer. Then read through the given PASSAGE just as carefully, underlining anything that relates to what you have underlined in the question.

✍ DO: A typical examination question on 'The Prophets':

- o Name the title and author of the story from which the passage below is taken. Placing the passage in its context in the story (in other words, showing where it fits into the story), discuss it in detail to show, firstly, in what respects the man described contrasts with the central character and, secondly, how the author uses the appearance, words and actions of this man to make the reader aware that he is not what he pretends to be. Explain how this passage ties up with what happens to the central character at the end. Also state what kind of narrator the author uses and why this kind of narrator is most suitable for this particular story. (20)

*Sitting next to MaNgubane was a fat young man dressed in a white overcoat. He wore his beard very long, which gave him a somewhat priestly look. MaNgubane felt uneasy when he squeezed his fat body between her and another old woman.*

*'Sorry, my people,' he said, smiling apologetically. 'I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. You can see for yourselves that things are bad. Before the train reached Germiston the young man had set the cubicle into a lively discussion. He was a prophet from Evaton where he was born 32 years ago. His father was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, but he himself decided to join the Zion Church because he had the holy spirit that gave him the power to prophesy.*

*'Right now I'm on a mission to Newcastle to kick out a tokoloshe that is giving the Khambule family sleepless nights. I want to give him a whipping that he will never forget. He'll never set his foot in that house again.' For emphasis he tapped his lap with his forefinger.*

This is what the question should look like when you have read it through carefully and underlined the key words :

- o Name the title and author of the story from which the passage below is taken. Placing the passage in its context in the story (in other words, showing where it fits into the story), discuss it in detail to show, firstly, in what respects the man described contrasts with the central character and, secondly, how the author uses the appearance, words and actions of this man to make the reader aware that he is not what he pretends to be. Explain how this passage ties up with what happens to the central character at the end. Also state what kind of narrator the author has used and why this kind of narrator is most suitable for this particular story. (20)

- o And this is what the passage should look like once you have underlined everything that relates to the question :

sort of priestly, but not really.

He looks like a priest, but appearances can be deceptive.

Sitting next to MaNgubane was a fat young man dressed in a white overscoat. He wore his beard very long, which gave him a somewhat priestly look. Ma Ngubane felt uneasy when he squeezed his fat body between her and another old woman. 'Sorry, my people,' he said, smiling apologetically. 'I don't mean to make you uncomfortable. You can see for yourselves that things are bad.

CHARACTERISATION - appearance: fat man dressed to look like priest

He chooses his victims - elderly people.

Before the train reached Germiston the young man had set the cubicle into a lively discussion. He was a prophet from Evaton where he was born 32 years ago. His father was a priest of the Roman Catholic Church, but he himself decided to join the Zion Church because he had the holy spirit that gave him the power to prophesy.

Fat man talk: about himself but his words reveal him to be a liar - Roman Catholic priests don't marry.

Fat man does not talk about Christian faith. he talks about superstition (i.e. he is not a real priest)

'Right now I'm on a mission to Newcastle to kick out a tokoloshe that is giving the Khambule family sleepless nights. I want to give him a whipping that he will never forget. He'll never set foot in that house again.' For emphasis he tapped his lap with his forefinger. The train rambled on. Vendors forced their way in and out of the compartments to sell their snacks. The friendly prophet joked good naturedly with the vendors. And he proved to be generous too; he bought apples for everyone in the compartment. And helpful; each time someone alighted at some or other station, he would help take the passenger's luggage on to the platform.

'I once went to Koloni to get rid of mpundla. This is an evil spirit sent by a person to someone to kill or frustrate another person by kicking him. This mpundula appears to the victim as a bird or a well-dressed gentleman but it is invisible to anyone else. The mpundula had already killed many members of the Majola family'  
The prophet paused awhile to munch a banana.

In this passage, therefore, Bheki Maseko indicates that the man is not a priest but a swindler or confidence trickster, which prepares for the outcome of events. Although it's not directly stated in the story, the reader realises that the man, who leaves the train at Newcastle, somehow passes on the information he's gained about MaNgubane to his partner in crime, who is also dressed to look like a priest, and who makes use of this information to dupe the unfortunate old woman and rob her of her money and luggage when she arrives at Ladysmith station. The irony is that she is robbed not by the pickpockets she was originally worried about, but by two respectable-looking men -- wolves in sheep's clothing -- whom she misguidedly trusts.


Maseko has used an omniscient narrator to narrate 'The Prophets'. This enables him not only to give the reader insight into MmaNgubane's mind and feelings, but also to show the reader things about the two men dressed to look like priests that MmaNgubane doesn't notice, because an omniscient narrator, by contrast with a first person narrator, is not a character in the story and, as the word 'omniscient' indicates, has full knowledge of both characters and events.

COMMENT : Do you see how the answer above deals step by step with every aspect of the question? After naming the story's title and author, it starts with the difference in personality between MmaNgubane and the fat man who sits next to her on the train, then explains how the author makes it clear that he's not a real priest and ends by showing how the act he puts on in the compartment is part of a polished swindling operation that leads to her being tricked and robbed by his accomplice on Ladysmith station. It also discusses Maseko's choice of narrator. And, as the question requires, it refers specifically to significant details in the given passage.

## UNIT 2

## 'THE TOILET' by Gcina Mhlophe

The exercise on 'The Toilet' is aimed at helping you consolidate what you know about the fictional elements of CHARACTER, NARRATOR, SETTING and TIME. Bear this in mind when reading the story and pay particular attention to how the various characters are presented, who is narrating the story and where and when the action takes place.

 DO: QUESTIONS TO TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF 'THE TOILET'

1. Basing your statements ONLY on the information to be found on p 117, answer the following questions about the central character :
  - o How old is she at the time she is referring to?
  - o What is her attitude to her family at this time, and her family's attitude towards her?
  - o Is she intelligent?
  - o What does she want to be?
  - o What internal and external problems is she facing?
  - o In what respects does she differ from Irene, her older sister?
  - o What kind of narrator does Gcina Mhlophe use? Refer to specific details on p 117 that show that it is this particular kind of narrator.
  
2. Analyse the description on p 121 of 'the Madam', Irene's employer, to show the kind of person she is. As mentioned on Side A of your introductory tape, repetition is always important, so it is worth noting that she is twice compared to a doll. -- What does the word 'doll' suggest to you? A doll, for example, is incapable of feelings, and the Madam is certainly acting in an unfeeling way towards the central character on p 121; you could also say that the Madam, with her tinted hair, painted nails and made-up face, is all dolled up; furthermore, her smile is shown to be as artificial as her appearance because it is contradicted by her actions. What can you assume about her attitude towards blacks from the fact that she speaks to her dogs in a nicer manner that she does to the central character?

DO : Sample questions on 'The Toilet'

The questions below are examples of the kind of assignment, test or examination questions you could be asked. Remember to underline key words in the question and passage (if a passage is given) before you begin writing your answer. As these three questions focus in particular on plot, narrator, character, setting and central idea, you might also find it helpful to listen to the sections on Side A of your introductory tape that deal with these particular elements of fiction. Bear in mind the marks allocated per question when writing your answer -- a question worth three marks should be a lot shorter than one worth 20!

- o Write a plot summary of 'The Toilet', showing how the central character starts off unsure of what career she should follow and ends up having found out. Indicate what the turning-point for her is in the story. (5)
- o Explain why a first-person central narrator is effective for the kind of story that Gcina Mhlophe tells in 'The Toilet'. (3)
- o Discuss the passage below to show how the author's presentation of character and setting relates to the plot and central idea of the story from which it is taken. Identify the story's title and author. (20)

*My elder sister worked in Orange Grove as a domestic worker, and I stayed with her in her back room. I didn't know anybody in Jo'burg except my sister's friends whom we went to church with. The Methodist church up Fourteenth Avenue was about the only outing we had together. I was very bored and lonely.*

*On weekdays, I was locked in my sister's room so that the Madam wouldn't see me. She was at home most of the time, painting her nails, having tea with her friends, or lying in the sun by the swimming pool. The swimming pool was very close to the room, which is why I had to keep very quiet. My sister felt bad about locking me in there, but she had no alternative. I couldn't even play the radio, so she brought me books, old magazines, and newspapers from the white people. I just read every single thing I came across: Fair Lady, Women's Weekly, anything. But then my sister thought I was reading too much.*

*'What kind of wife will you make if you can't even make baby clothes, or knit yourself a jersey? I suppose you will marry an educated man like yourself, who won't mind going to bed with a book and an empty stomach.'*



political system then in force? How does the author use him to provide a moral perspective?

2. What does Hussein's name, together with his residential area, tell us about him? Evaluate him as a person from his conversation with the shopkeeper in Gujarati (an Indian language) on p 48, his remarks about Gerty as he and the narrator drive home from the shop afterwards, his treatment of Gerty and Riekie while they are living with him, and the way in which he abandons them once he feels that his relationship with Gerty is putting him at risk.
3. How does the author use details of setting in paragraph one on p 48 to indicate the relationship between whites and blacks at that time? What can you assume from the sentence where the narrator states that Delarey Street cleaves Vrededorp in two, with blacks on one side and whites on the other? Does the name 'Vrededorp' seem ironic? From the information given on p 48, what political era in recent South African history is the author describing?
4. ☺ NOTE how often the word 'shop' is repeated in paragraph one. Shopping brings whites and blacks together, but only so that they can try to take advantage of each other; the whites go to the Indian shops in search of bargains, while the Indian shopkeepers sell them spurious bargains (look up the meaning of 'spurious' if you don't know it). Bearing this in mind, do you think that it's appropriate that the author uses a shop as the setting for Hussein's first meeting with Gerty? What does Hussein want from Gerty? Do Hussein and the shopkeeper regard her as a person or an item in a shop that can be bought and later discarded? How do you know?
5. What kind of mood or atmosphere is created by the night-time setting at Zoo Lake when the narrator picks up Riekie to put him in the boat? Is the mood appropriate to the narrator's feelings as he holds a white child for the first time in his life?
6. What is the significance of the setting in the second-last paragraph of the story, where the little white boy, Riekie, stands outside the gate of the lodgings in which he and his older sister Gerty lived with her Indian lover, Hussein, until Hussein felt himself at risk in terms of the Immorality Act and went away? Would you say that the author uses the locked gate here as a symbol of the kind of barrier between people that racist laws such as the Immorality Act tend to

*the shop. But then the shopkeeper switched to Gujarati and spoke to my friend. I heard him say that she was easy and would not give much trouble in removing her undergarments to anyone, but one had to be careful as there was the usual risk involved. Hussein replied that he was keen and wouldn't like to waste much time about the matter. I think the shopkeeper introduced him to her at this stage. Then I heard him telling Hussein that he was going to organize a dance at his place on the following Saturday evening, that he was going to invite Gerty, and that if Hussein was interested he could take her away from this place. All this he said in Gujarati, rather coarsely I thought.*

What is the 'whole dirty tide of worry and planning' that washes through his mind at intervals as he sits beside the camp fire the night before he leaves for Francistown to get married?

2. How does Nadine Gordimer use setting at the top of p 3, where she describes the interplay of light from the fires of the young man and his workers, to suggest the nature of the relationship between them? What does the repetition of 'house' and words associated with houses in the following passage from p 6 tell you about the young man's feelings for his camp?

*The long yelping of the jackals prowled the sky without, like the wind about a house; there was no house, but the sounds beyond the light his fire tremblingly inflated into the dark -- that jumble of meaningless voices, crying babies, coughs, and hawking -- had built walls to enclose and a roof to shelter.*

\* without = outside; hawking = clearing the throat noisily

3. The last paragraph on p 8 describes the young man listening to the music that one of his workers makes on a simple home-made instrument. What effect does the music have on him? Music, as you know, is often associated with the idea of harmony. With regard to this, it's worth noting that the young man and his workers are united, or in tune with each other, as they listen to the music together in silence under the moon; in other words, the music serves as a symbol of the harmony between him and them. What does Nadine Gordimer imply in the following sentence: 'But at last the music stopped and time began again'? Note the contrast between 1) the timeless moment of harmony between the young man and his workers under the moon and 2) the progression of time that carries him away from 'tonight' at his camp with his workers and towards 'tomorrow' when he will leave for Francistown to get married. Does the setting described in this paragraph provide an appropriate background and atmosphere for what takes place?

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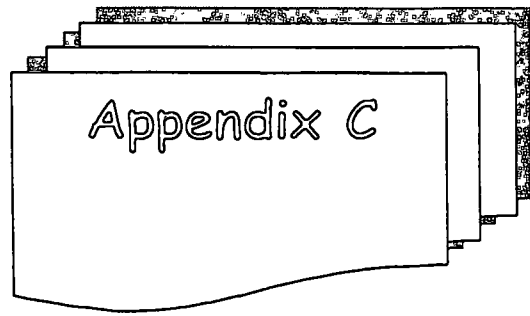
- without = outside; hawking = clearing the throat noisily

arrival of things such as progress and respectability. If you can get hold of 'The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky', you will find it interesting to compare the two stories.

- o What is the symbolic significance of music in this passage?  
How does it relate to the interaction between the young man and his workers at this point, and also to the central idea of the story? (20)

He thought for a moment that he would give them the rest of the bottle of brandy. Hell, no, man, it was mad. If they got the taste for the stuff, they'd be pinching it all the time. He'd give Piet some sugar and yeast and things from the stores, for them to make beer tomorrow when he was gone. He put his hands deep in his pockets and stretched out to the fire with his head sunk on his chest. The lyre-player picked up his flimsy piece of wood again, and slowly what the young was feeling inside himself seemed to find a voice; up into the night beyond the fire, it went, uncoiling from his breast and bringing ease. As if it had been made audible out of infinity and could be returned to infinity at any point, the lonely voice of the lyre went on and on. Nobody spoke. The barriers of tongues fell with silence. The whole dirty tide of worry and planning had gone out of the young man. The small high moon, outshone by a spiky spread of cold stars, repeated the shape of the lyre. He sat for he was not aware how long, just as he had for so many other nights, with the stars at his head and the fire at his feet.

But at last the music stopped and time began again. There was tonight; there was tomorrow, when he was going to drive to Francistown.



SAIDE evaluation of CPP programme .....	1
URHE evaluation .....	2

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AN EVALUATION OF THE  
PILOT PHASE OF THE  
RESOURCE-BASED  
LEARNING CAREER  
PREPARATION  
PROGRAMME

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Prepared for the Strategic Service of the  
University of the Free State by the South  
African Institute for Distance Education

Final Report, March 1998

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Tessa Welch (Project leader)  
Christine Randell (Project team member)

## English

In order to present a picture of the curriculum and monitoring of the English course during the pilot phase in 1997, the information from the subject coordinator obtained during three interviews<sup>1</sup> is used as a framework for the description of the work done under the following headings:

- Course profile
- Outcomes of the course
- Materials
- Teaching approach
- Assessment
- Student Progress
- Monitoring
- Plans for next year

Supporting documentation is provided where necessary as appendices to this report. The facilitators' views<sup>2</sup> supplement the information provided by the coordinator under the above headings. The experience of students gleaned from guided questionnaire and focused interview<sup>3</sup> provides a further perspective. The evaluator had access to the modules prepared, and commented on one of them in some detail in draft stage. She also surveyed the audio tapes. However, no full evaluation of the modules was conducted. The evaluator also looked at the set of assignment questions, a sample of facilitators' comments on students' assignments and some sample assignments. Finally the conclusions drawn from observations of contact sessions in September and October are integrated into the section on Teaching Approach.

In the conclusion to this report, the evaluator presents a number of recommendations for the future drawn from the various perspectives presented.

### COURSE PROFILE

Please note that, although this subject was offered in resource-based learning mode to 387 students in the (face-to-face) Career Preparation Programme, this report considers only 181 students enrolled for English on the so-called Resource-Based Learning Career Preparation Programme.

Number of students:	181
Number of staff:	1 subject coordinator 4 facilitators (including the subject coordinator)
Numbers of student groups:	Each facilitator had one groups of about 45 students
Contact sessions:	Two sessions of two hours every week
Materials:	Pocket Oxford Dictionary

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<sup>1</sup> Initial interview 10 May 1997, followed by an interview during June, and a final interview on 14 October. At the end of the third interview the coordinator was requested to fill in a self-evaluation sheet, and some of the information in this report is drawn from this.

<sup>2</sup> Interview of two of the four facilitators on 16 October 1997

<sup>3</sup> Held on 15 October 1997

2. To develop the ability to discuss or write about short stories, novels, dramas and poetry in a way that demonstrates insight of the respective genres.
3. Be able to identify and discuss the elements of fiction, viz. narrator, character, plot, theme, setting, diction.
4. Read poetry carefully and precisely to promote a greater understanding of this genre and also to discuss and write about selected aspects of poetry in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the typical features of this type of text.
5. To write about and discuss drama in a way that demonstrates an understanding of the typical features of this literary genre.
6. To encourage a critical awareness of the ideas and concerns conveyed through drama and what features distinguish drama from prose fiction or poetry.

The modules, tapes, and assignments are designed to assist students to develop these abilities.

*Most students* felt that the main aim of the English course is to improve their language skills. A few of them linked competence in English with ability to manage other subjects. Only one, however, felt that the aim of the English facilitators was to make them capable of independent study. It is also interesting that outcomes related to literary understanding did not feature in the students' responses. Perhaps this was because they saw the literature as self-study, but it is more likely that they saw literature in a second language user way, merely as a means to an end - that of developing proficiency - and not as an end in itself.

The students were able to express competence in English in some detail - they referred not merely to reading, writing, listening and speaking skills, but to specifics such as sentence and paragraph construction, synonyms and antonyms and use of connective words. They also included thinking skills as one of the skills developed in English, thus showing the influence of the START course.

#### *Summary*

The list of outcomes for the English course is comprehensive with regard to English language and literature, although, for a resource-based learning course, there needs to be some reference to the importance of developing the students' ability for independent study. The fact that the students do not refer to the literature outcomes is problematic as at least half of the course is devoted to ensuring that the students acquire skills in reading and analysing literature.

Another important point that will be referred to below is that the outcomes should be linked much more carefully to the broad assessment strategy. Although this appears to be done in terms of the literature assignments, it is not done adequately for the language, and needs to transfer into both the language and literature examination as well.

## MATERIALS

The students worked through START and *ThinkWrite* in the contact sessions during the year, but they were expected to work through the literature modules on their own. They received the literature (setbook, module and audio tape) in a package at various stages in the year.

*According to the subject coordinator*, the *ThinkWrite* and START courses worked well this year, and provided the opportunity for the students to develop most of the language knowledge and skills that they needed. The module on Grammar prepared by the subject coordinator was therefore not really necessary.

The dictionary was too small to be helpful to the students. Those students that bought a Thesaurus in addition on the advice of the subject coordinator, improved at a much faster rate as a result.

The literature modules were initially supposed to be prepared by lecturers in the English department, but the subject coordinator found it most effective in the end to work from notes prepared by the lecturers. The coordinator had to prepare the modules according to the emphases required by the lecturers (such as the emphasis on teaching the difference between the various genres). On some issues, however, she was able to negotiate: in the teaching of poetry, the emphasis was on the meaning of the poems, rather than on the complications of such issues as rhythm and metre.

According to the subject coordinator, one of the highlights of the material she prepared was a mindmap on the elements of fiction. This accompanied a taped lecture/discussion on the elements of fiction on the audio tape on 'Being Here', but it was also put on transparency and used by facilitators throughout the year as a reference point. The second highlight was the choice of the novel *Mine Boy* which the students really enjoyed.

*According to the facilitators*, students like the idea of grammar. They also definitely see the value of *ThinkWrite*. Many students felt that the START programme is boring, because the same methodology is adopted in every unit. Of the literature, the novel *Mine Boy* was the students' favourite, and they liked both plays prescribed. Although the students liked the poetry, the facilitators found it very difficult to teach.

*The evaluator* looked at the relationship between the materials for literary study for one sample module - Being Here. The module (photocopied), is a study guide - it tells the student how to study the prescribed work, guides the student in how and at what points to listen to the audio tape, and provides supporting graphic material (mindmap of elements of prose fiction), provides questions to test mastery of literary terms, tells the student which of the short stories in the prescribed work to read, gives the students some tips for writing about literature, provides self-test questions on the stories (with no direct answers - students are referred to the audio tape to reflect on the accuracy of their answers), sample examination questions with some guidance given on question answering technique as well as model answers. (In modules where there is no

## TEACHING APPROACH

The subject coordinator described the broad approach to the teaching of the subject as follows:

The START programme and the *ThinkWrite* course .... are structured in a way that encourages pair work. Both programmes are couched in a system of cooperative learning and take a mediated systems approach in that the mediation involves both the materials and verbal mediation, viz. questioning, guiding, discussing, explaining which is provided by the tutor.<sup>7</sup>

As only one of the facilitators had had teacher training, the subject coordinator took her training and development role very seriously. She said:

This was the most difficult aspect of my job, as there is not a culture of tutor training in the English Department. This programme [the RBL Career Preparation Programme] has vastly changed that, and where my approach was tentative at first, I regard this as one of the most important aspects of the success of the programme.<sup>8</sup>

She had initially assumed that post graduate students knew how to teach, but she discovered in the course of the year that they needed to be closely guided as far as classroom practice was concerned.

In addition to individual consultations around specific problems (covered in the monitoring section below) she approached facilitator training in the ways listed below:

1. A full day workshop at the beginning of the year.

In this workshop Vic Rodseth, the author of the START and *ThinkWrite* courses presented the approaches to be followed with these books. There was also input on student learning styles, as well as on cross-cultural communication .

This evidently worked well, although the input on cross-cultural communication was not particularly useful.

2. Setting a pattern for the contact sessions.

- a) The following outline for each *ThinkWrite* session was given:

- o Feedback on written work marked.
- o Brief revision.
- o New input.
- o Writing practice based on new input.

Facilitators were advised to spend at least ¼ hour on students actually writing. Each student was to do a piece of writing each week, five of which would be corrected by the facilitator each week. Gradually, students would be introduced to peer assessment.

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<sup>7</sup> Van Wyk, Arlys. 1997, *Proposal for the 1997 Course for CPP and NCPP*

<sup>8</sup> Comment from self-evaluation sheet filled in on 14 October 1997

Even though, according to the outline provided, facilitators were to spend only one session introducing each literature module, the subject coordinator read aloud nearly the whole of *Master Harold* in class as well as whole sections of *Mine Boy*. At the beginning of the year, students were not working through the modules on their own, but when facilitators became aware of this, they set aside a period of time in class once or twice to observe students as they worked through the materials, and to encourage them to work on them more consistently. Judging from the increase in the number of questions towards the end of the year as well as their ability to do a test exercise, it was clear that students had got the message that they were supposed to be working on their own.

*According to the facilitators*, they appreciated the training given by the subject coordinator:

When problems crop up I've always consulted with the subject coordinator.

There was a lot of support that I as a facilitator received ...in the form of training sessions, tutor meetings, personal contact with the coordinator of the course, personal 'conversations' with other facilitators, etc.<sup>10</sup>

They, like the coordinator, reported problems with getting the message across to the students that they had to work through the modules on their own. One of the facilitators commented as follows:

I find that the students still largely expect a lot of the work to be done for them. The nature of our course (their independent working with the modules) forces students to work on their own, but I think that quite a few just feel daunted by the idea or are too passive to do this. It's been difficult motivating them to work on their own.<sup>11</sup>

*According to the students*, the contact sessions are the heart of the course. The main aim of the English course is expressed as being the improvement of proficiency in English, and the main vehicle for this improvement is seen as the contact session - 10 of the 14 responses about which methods the students felt that they learnt best from referred to the contact session experience or work done in contact sessions.<sup>12</sup> Attendance at contact sessions is even listed by a student as a requirement for success in tests and exams. Only one student refers to learning on his own as the best method, and this is because he is critical of his facilitator. In addition, the response to the difficulty with the poetry is that the facilitators do not teach the students how to read

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<sup>10</sup> From the facilitator self-evaluation sheet filled in on 16 October

<sup>11</sup> Facilitator self-evaluation sheet filled in on 16 October 1997

<sup>12</sup> In the student feedback on the administrative systems (see full report in the chapter on Administration), the students said that they would prefer English to be in the mornings, not so long on Tuesdays, and with a break in the middle of the two hour session. This seems to indicate that they see contact sessions as the key to their performance - rather than independent work. The response should be to increase their understanding of the importance of independent work, rather than tinker with the timetable.

and if any direct teaching of literature is done, perhaps it ought to be designed around 'breaking the poetry barrier'. The major challenge, though, has been in encouraging the students to become independent learners. The efforts at self and peer assessment have been successful, students need to experience the importance of their independence from earlier in the year.

## ASSESSMENT

The broad assessment strategy for obtaining the year mark is:

Literature Assignments

Being Here

Lonely Art

Our Town

Mine Boy

Reading Test

There will be an end of year examination in which 50% of the paper will test the work done in the START and *ThinkWrite* courses (including some detailed language knowledge) and 50% will test grasp of literature.

The reading test was a multiple choice comprehension test, computer marked.

The procedure for marking of assignments was as follows:

- The subject coordinator worked out a detailed memorandum<sup>14</sup>.
- In one of the weekly meetings, this was discussed with the facilitators.
- Aside from awarding marks in accordance with the memorandum, the facilitators were required to write detailed comments for the information of the students<sup>15</sup>.
- Copies of the assignment comments were made and kept (in the coordinator's office) and when facilitators marked the following assignment, they were able to look at previous comments and assess student progress.
- On occasions, the subject coordinator also wrote a tutorial letter to the students to point out major common problems and to encourage them with clear statements of what is required of them<sup>16</sup>.

*According to the facilitators*, the method of providing feedback has been effective:

There's been a marked improvement in written work from the first to the last assignment.<sup>17</sup>

However, they have been worried about standardization of marking. Despite the detailed memoranda, they feel that facilitators mark according to different standards.

*The students* are aware that, as far as assignments are concerned, they have to develop a certain technique - analysing and answering the question, writing a proper introduction and conclusion, using connectives, quoting correctly and so on.

*The evaluator* reviewed the four assignment topics<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix A for an example

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix B for a copy of the sheet for commenting on assignments

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix C

<sup>17</sup> From facilitator self-evaluation sheet

A few observations about the quality of the commenting:

- Detailed language points were generally very well made across the facilitators.
- One of the facilitators tended to overuse the word 'poor' in comments about the students' work - this tends to be demotivating for students.
- There was unevenness in amount of commenting across facilitators.
- There was irregularity amongst facilitators in categorization of comments under the four headings. The boundary between language and style is understandably not clear, but there is considerable less understandable confusion under the categories 'comprehension' and 'synthesis'. The following examples (drawn from the comments on the Mine Boy assignment by various of the facilitators) refer:

*Comprehension*

Look up the words 'quite' and 'quiet' and note the difference in meaning.

At times awkward language usage is a barrier to communication.

*Synthesis*

When you talk about a novel, do not say 'our' novel. Use the article 'the'.

Your assignment looks as if you handed in a rough draft. This is not acceptable. Write an introductory and concluding paragraph for an essay.

Please read your tutorial letter carefully - you are still not sure of your referencing style.

Transfer your *ThinkWrite* skills to this type of writing as well.

*The evaluator* spent some time looking at the reading test. The test was an attempt to reduce marking and do a multiple choice approach. However, this is seldom successful as a method of gauging comprehension skills unless the students have been carefully trained to answer multiple choice questions *in a test environment* and the passage selected is contextualised properly for the students.

The approach adopted in the test is, in fact, at odds with the START approach. The emphasis in the START reading course is on collaborative approaches to making meaning in a variety of different ways. The visual as well as the merely verbal aspects of the text are included as clues to meaning. The approach involves the students activating background knowledge and asking predicting questions of the text. A multiple choice test based on a standard written text cannot possibly test the range of skills developed by the START approach, and does not reward students for having developed understanding of reading process. A reading test should be devised which tests more closely the first three outcomes of the course as stated above:

1. Development of reading strategies for a variety of academic texts, viz. reading with a purpose, activating background knowledge, surveying the text by skimming and scanning, summarising and synthesising the contents of various texts.
2. The development of cognitive approaches to reading such as analysing, comparing, categorising, summarising, forming hypotheses and testing them.



(reported on in full in the chapter on Administration), the students requested more tests so that they 'can gauge themselves for the exams, otherwise they will fail in the exams as they are already failing assignments'. They complained about the marking method and the strictness of the marking, 'because English is not the students' mother tongue', and they requested better preparation for assignments.

#### *Concluding comments*

The effect of low marks on the motivation of the students needs to be taken seriously. Efforts need to be made to boost their confidence, particularly initially. The student request for more tests should be interpreted as a desire for positive feedback early on. Perhaps strategy of extensive teaching towards the first assignment might be a good one to adopt.

The students have, however, improved in the course of the year. Aside from the poetry which is always problematic, especially for second language students, there is a steady increase in the pass rate for the literature assignments. The poor results should not only be seen in the light of the placement test results. They should also be seen in the light of the range of abilities the students are expected to develop.

## MONITORING

According to the subject coordinator and facilitators, the monitoring system consisted of the following elements:

1. Weekly meetings.

These served training, administrative and monitoring functions and dealt with issues like book control, the programme of work, marking, information from the Strategic Service, equipment, and difficulties and concerns about students.

2. Assignment mark sheets and comments on assignments (referred to in detail above).

3. Attendance registers.

The attendance registers were useful in book control. On an occasion, a student claimed that he hadn't receive a book. When the facilitator checked the attendance register on the day on which the book had been handed out, she found that the student had been in class and must have received a book. The student was obviously taking a chance because he had lost his book. In addition, the attendance registers helped pick up particular student difficulties such as that of a student who was a policeman and could never attend a particular session in the week because he was working.

4. Dealing with individual problems.

There was a complaint from the students that one of the facilitators was treating them like 'preschoolers'. The coordinator had to explain that even though the students did not always behave independently, they were adults; she suggested that there be a policy of calling the students by their surnames as a way of training oneself to recognize them as adults.

Another problem was that one of the tutors was not giving adequate written feedback on the assignments. This was picked up when the coordinator asked for copies of the assignment comments.

5. Checking of the extent to which students are working through the module.

The coordinator also plans to link the work done in *ThinkWrite* and the START approach to reading to the work done in the assignments.

The only major change to the materials will be the replacement of the Pocket Oxford Dictionary with a more comprehensive dictionary for second language students.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that the literature modules prepared by the coordinator for self-study were used by the students for independent study, particularly as the year proceeded. However, there was considerable strain involved in preparing the modules while facilitating and managing the course. The texts selected for improving students skills in reading and writing for academic purposes were consistently used by the facilitators across the various classes throughout the year. The degree of success achieved through the writing lessons based on *ThinkWrite* was impressive.

This coordinator had the largest number of facilitators under her supervision, and took her facilitator training and support role very seriously. This was appreciated by the facilitators. Her approach could be developed into a model for other coordinators in charge of large numbers of facilitators without teaching experience.

The other strong point of the course was the way in which assignment marking was managed. Various tools used in this approach are included in the appendices to illustrate the approach for the benefit of other coordinators.

The following are recommendations for improvement.

### OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

- ⇒ Outcomes as stated in the documents describing the course should be linked much more carefully to the broad assessment strategy. Writing skills and outcomes for literature appear to be assessed thoroughly through the assignments and the examination, as well as informally through the paragraph writing, but reading, listening, and speaking skills seem only to be assessed informally. Some thought needs to be given to the redesign of the reading test and end of year examination in the light of the outcomes.
- ⇒ The effect of low marks on the motivation of the students needs to be taken seriously. Efforts need to be made to boost their confidence, particularly initially. Perhaps a strategy of extensive teaching towards the first assignment or two should be adopted.

### MATERIALS

- ⇒ The subject coordinator's plan to link the work done in *ThinkWrite* and the START approach to reading to the work done in the assignments is supported. This will assist transfer of skills to the literature and probably lead to improved marks on the assignments.
- ⇒ The role of the audio tapes, their relationship to the modules, and student perceptions and use of them need to be addressed.

## MARKING SHEET

### 1. SYNTHESIS

- grouping of ideas together
- using own words
- integration of theory and story
- cohesion

### 2. STYLE

- use of quotation marks
- introductory sentence and conclusion
- use of words from book without referencing
- not to separate paragraphs with headings , but aim for a cohesive paragraph

### 3. LANGUAGE

- all language related aspects

### 4. COMPREHENSION

- did the student answer the question
- did the student understand the task, for example, could they discuss when asked.
- did they interpret the story correctly
- did they understand the module
- were they able to pinpoint the theme

character Johannes/J.P. Williamson that we, the reader, gain insight into the cruelty of urban life and work. (15 marks)

**Guidelines for marking**

The above constitutes all the possible facts and deductions that could be made from the question. Students will not be required to give all of the above to pass. Students are expected to indicate that they know what to do when the question asks them to discuss. There are certain logical steps of argument required by the question.

Who is Johannes and where do we first meet him.?

Why is he also called J.P. Williamson and how does his dual name reinforce the theme?

Where does Xuma meet Johannes and what role does he play in Xuma's life especially his introduction and survival on the mines.?

Some mention must be made of the theme of urbanisation and that survival in the city or on the mines requires a different set of rules than those Xuma knows from his rural background.

The term urbanisation must be used in such a way that it is clear the student understands it- even better if the student provides a brief explanation.

The student must give clear examples of how Johannes' names, appearances in various incidents, actions in various situations reinforces the theme. One or two examples that are relevant will suffice.

**Mark allocation**

As was unanimously decided at the last tutor's meeting that we will award 10 marks for content which means the following:

Synthesis: grouping of ideas together  
using own words

demonstration of integration of theme with story. (4 marks)

Style: Referencing. Here we will have to be very strict and take off one mark for every referencing error.

Introductory sentence and good concluding sentence. (3marks)

Language: A maximum of five marks may be subtracted for language and syntax errors.

Comprehension: Did the student demonstrate an understanding of the question

Did the student actually understand and apply the task word "Discuss"

Did the student make acceptable deductions from the story.

Did the student understand the theme. (3 marks)

In short, if there is any sign of interpretation and insight into the theme and how the character reinforces the theme and there is an attempt at logical ordering of ideas, then pass the student! If the student simply retells the story without an attempt at interpretation then that student cannot be passed.

You are halfway through the course now and have an idea of your own progress. It is important that we point out a few general errors made in the assignments so far. Study the examples below carefully and make sure that you keep them in mind for the rest of your assignments this year. **GOOD LUCK!**

### 1. Texts and writers

It is very important that you recognize the different genres and understand the features of the different texts. In other words, what does a poem look like and how is it different from a drama or a novel. Do not refer to a play as a story as so many of you did in your assignments. Do not refer to the poet as the writer or the playwright as the author. Use the correct literary terminology.

A play is written by a playwright.

A novel is written by an author.

A poem is written by a poet.

### 2. CONCORD

It is extremely important to use the procedures for paragraph writing as taught in your writing classes. The procedures advocated by **Think Write** will help you eliminate concord errors. Write your assignment answer in rough first, then revise it and only then rewrite it for submission. Underline all the verbs carefully and check whether the verb agrees with the relevant noun.

Many students are still leaving the -s off the third person, singular, present tense such as: The relationship stays the same.

Sejosenje is the one who breaks the rules.

Emily does not like George to be proud.

George feels nervous in church.

### 3. TENSES

Students are still switching tenses in mid-sentence or mid-paragraph in their written assignments. If you begin a sentence or paragraph in the present, you must continue in the present; if you begin in the past, you must continue in the past. For example:

#### Present

"Farmers today work very hard. Machinery and labour are both expensive, and many poor farmers cannot afford them. Therefore, they must use their own labour to succeed. In the future, the situation will get worse because there will be greater competition for land. Farmers in previous decades did not have to cope with this intense competition. Today's farmers are unlucky in this respect."

-write to improve by Murray and Johanson.

You will note that different tenses are used in the same paragraph, but that the present tense remains the main tense for the paragraph. When writing about something in the future, then the tense to follow must be the future tense. The same applies for references to the past.

### 4. Assignment answers.

4.1. Many students still start their assignments without contextualizing their answer. This must be done in the form of a topic sentence with supporting sentences which give specific examples or details. This means that you must make clear in the first sentence from which section of the text you are drawing your answer. For example, the question on **OUR TOWN** could be answered in the following way:

The developing relationship between George and Emily is presented as a flashback. The Stage Manager turns our attention to the recent past and we see how George and Emily reveal their true feelings for each other in Mr Morgan's Drugstore.

The above answer indicates that the student knows which section of the play is relevant for the answer and also explains that the term flashback is clearly understood within the context of the play. We know immediately that the student is going on to comment on what happened in the drugstore and how it is relevant to the question asked. If you are given a passage from a text, you should contextualize in the following way:

"The story from which the passage is taken is 'The Prophets' by Bheki Maseko. The passage comes from the beginning of MaNgubane's train journey from Johannesburg to Ladysmith, where she is going to perform the customary rituals required to cleanse her brother's children after his death."

The above introduction clearly places the required incident in context of the story from which it was taken. (You will find the question and the rest of the answer on page 10 of your module on **BEING HERE**.) It must be clear to the reader that you know the play/novel/short story and that you know exactly which section or sections of the text are relevant for your answer.

4.2. Many students fell into the trap of making general statements which they did not substantiate with a quotation from the text or an example to support the general statement. For example, one student wrote: "Emily and George became mature people." It was not clear why the student used this as an argument or on what incident in the play this conclusion was based. The following is an example of a substantiated statement: The Stage Manager introduces the idea of general human experience in Act 2. For example, before George and Emily's flashback scene, he asks the audience to remember when they first fell in love. The general statement could also be substantiated by a direct quotation, for example, "But before they do it I want you to try and remember what it was like to have been very young" (p. 60). This indicates clearly that you have based your general argument on a close reading of the text, in this case the play **OUR TOWN**.

4.3. All your written assignments should be introduced by a good topic sentence or a sentence which contextualizes your answer (vide 4.1). Keep in mind the criteria for a topic sentence as advocated by your writing text book **THINK WRITE**. It is also important to conclude your written work with a good concluding sentence. For example, after a discussion of the structure of the poem "Banoobhai", one could conclude the discussion with the following

## English Assignments for 1997

### A. Short Stories Assignment

1. Read 'The Wind and a Boy' carefully and then answer the following questions, supporting your observations with quotations from or references to the text. Remember to put quoted passages in quotation marks and to provide a page reference in each case.
2. The impressions that we form of Friedman and Sejosenyé are very important for our understanding of the story. Discuss both characters, giving thought to the methods of characterization that Bessie Head uses to present them (for example, their appearance as described by the narrator, the repetition of the word 'special' with regard to them, the significance of their names, their own words and actions and what other characters say about them).
3. In the course of the story Bessie Head builds up a clear picture of the village community in which Friedman and Sejosenyé live. Describe its characteristics, especially the habits and way of life of its people, and suggest in what respects the lifestyle of both Friedman's mother (Sejosenyé's daughter, who lives in a distant town) and the driver of the truck that kills Friedman provides a thematic contrast village life. Does Sejosenyé's story about Robinson Crusoe relate to this contrast in any way?
4. Discuss Bessie Head's description of 1) the village and its surroundings and 2) the truck that kills Friedman to show how she uses setting to reinforce this central contrast.
5. Re-read the last two sentences of the 'The Wind and a Boy' with the rest of the story in mind and suggest what the central idea is. Why do you think that she has chosen an omniscient narrator as being most suitable for her purposes? How does she make village talk, particularly on pp41 and 46, contribute to conveying her central ideas.

### B. Poetry Assignment

#### London by William Blake

Explain, in the context of the poem as a whole, the reference to the soldier and the palace in the third stanza. If you followed what was said about the chimney-sweeper and the church in question 5 above, you can answer this question.

### C. Drama Assignment

#### Our Town by Thornton Wilder

The central focus of Act 2 is the developing relationship between George and Emily. Comment on the way in which this is presented and what this episode tells us about human experience.

### D. Novel Assignment

#### Mine Boy by Peter Abrahams

Xuma's relationships with various people are central to his growth and development. Through these relationships themes are developed. Discuss the character Johannes/J.P. Williamson and how he is used to reinforce the central theme of urbanisation. What does Xuma learn about life on the mine through Johannes?

## GROUP 2

### *Theme: Reading of a play*

Learners had brought to class their own copies of the play currently being studied. The facilitator asked individuals to take parts and read the play aloud. She asked questions and learners responded. She also gave examples to explain various points in the play.

## GROUP 3

### *Theme: Reading of a play*

The learners were sitting at their desks, each with their own copy of the play. The facilitator sat on a table in front and started by giving the background to the story and explaining the story to the learners. The facilitator then started reading the play, and the learners followed in their books.

## GROUP 4

### *Theme: Reading of a play*

The atmosphere created in this reading lesson was relaxed - the facilitator was sitting on her chair, close to the learners. The learners took turns to read from the play and dramatized the events. The facilitator took part as well, as one of the readers. In the mean time the facilitator explained some parts and continually invited comment from the learners. They were enjoying the story and laughing heartily at some expressions. They could even interpret the feelings of some characters, e.g. they could tell when a character was cross or had bitter feelings.

After reading the play, the class reviewed it. The facilitator invited summarising comments from the learners. They were then invited to see a professional production of the play in town the following Monday.

## GROUP 5

### *Theme: Feedback on writing exercise from ThinkWrite*

This lesson was along the same pattern as that for Group 1.

After the initial taking of the register - students being referred to by their surnames, and the facilitator clearly familiar with all the students' names, the syntax exercise was introduced and repeated twice. Students were asked to focus on a sentence on the overhead projector transparency, then write down what they remembered when it was turned off, and then correct it themselves when it was turned on again. The facilitator directed the attention of the students to the purposes of the exercise, and when they had finished marking their own work, she asked around the class to get a sense of the progress individual students were making. [In a discussion afterwards, the facilitator said that when the students started doing this exercise, they could not do it at all, but their memory for sentences in English and their knowledge of syntax had improved considerably, so they were now mostly able to write out quite complex sentences].

The second part of the lesson was spent correcting paragraphs the students had written previously. First, the facilitator revised with the students the criteria for a good paragraph (following the criteria that they had worked through out of ThinkWrite). Then, the facilitator projected sample paragraphs on the overhead projector and,

A FINAL REPORT ON A JOINT-VENTURE BETWEEN  
THE UNIT FOR REASEARCH INTO HIGHER EDUCATION  
(URHE) AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE FOR  
DISTANCE EDUCATION (SAIDE) ON THE MONITORING  
AND EVALUATION OF A THE RESOURCE-BASED  
LEARNING CAREER PREPARATION PROGRAMME  
(RBLCPP) - 1997

"I AM TAUGHT" SHIFTED TO "I LEARN"

Drafted by  
Khathatso Evelyn Khabanyane  
UFS - URHE

12 December 1997



### Comments

The learners seemed to enjoy being fully engaged in the lesson; they were participating actively and freely, asking the facilitator time and again to come to their groups and help them with problems.

## 4. ENGLISH

Four groups of English were visited:

### Group 1

*Lesson: Syntax*

The facilitator started by greeting the learners and uttering some welcoming expressions that made the learners feel at home. Such small happenings at the beginning seemed to prepare the learners for the start of the lesson; at this stage they already showed some interest in the lesson. The facilitator then marked the attendance list. At this stage the facilitator made the learners realise that she actually knew them, by calling them out by their names while she was also looking at them at the same time.

Before the lesson started she made sure that they knew what they were going to do and that they were understanding the procedures that would be followed when the lesson started.

The learners had to be able to focus their attention and to concentrate well in order to re-write the sentence they would have seen on the screen. The overhead projector was used to display a complex sentence which the learner had to write down after it was turned off.

After this short exercise the learners were asked to keep their progress sheets until the next time.

The facilitator used the chalkboard for explaining the words that needed explanation. The overhead projector was also used to show the paragraph that exposed the learners' mistakes in the assignment that the facilitator had just handed back to them. The learners corrected the mistakes as they appeared on the screen.

### Group 2

*Lesson: Reading*

Each learner was having a drama book for the lesson. The facilitator was asking individuals to read in turns, each reading the words of a specific player in the book. The facilitator was asking questions and learners were answering them. The facilitator also gave some more examples in connection with the play.

### Group 3

*Lesson: Reading - Drama*

The learners were sitting in their desks, each with a drama book in his/her hand. The facilitator was sitting in front of the class on a table, also with a drama book in her hand.

When this reading lesson was conducted the facilitator started by giving the background of the story by explaining to the learners what the whole book is all about. The facilitator read through the story and made some explanations while the learners were looking at their books and listening attentively.

## 2. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE REPORT OF A WORKSHOP

### 2.1 Record of attendance:

- It was suggested that the matter concerning the recording system has to be taken up with the top structures, e.g. the administration of RBL.
- The RBL programme could compare its current management information system with other effective systems, for example, the recently established one at the Gauteng Youth College in Johannesburg. SAIDE could arrange a visit to the Youth College for a member of the RBL programme.

### 2.2 Mathematics:

The following proposals were made:

- Students should be motivated to enrol for Maths during these coming years because this year's intake percentage for RBL is too low (17%).
- ASECA should help with the training of more students for Maths. (Ms Tessa Welch stated that GYC has come to the conclusion that ASECA is failing in the training of students in a mathematics class). A Maths facilitator's view concerning that ASECA programme will be appreciated in order to determine where the problem lies.
- There must be an introductory course to Maths that can be introduced to try and lower the high rate of failure in Maths 101, but it will be without credit, since its purpose would only be to introduce students to university maths.
- Ms Jenny Louw at the SAIDE office may be consulted for more information on a course prior to Maths 101.

### 2.3 General:

Prof. Strydom remarked that it is important to remember to use the concept *Resource-based learning*, and not *Distance learning*, because the concept *Distance learning* is mostly associated with UNISA's mode of delivery.

### 2.4 Issues to be followed up:

#### (a) SAIDE contact:

- Ms Jenny Louw agreed to be a contact person at SAIDE for whatever information concerning Open, Distance, and Resource-based Learning the faculties at this university may need.

#### (b) Belgium contact:

- The Dean of Theology will visit the Open Learning institutions in Belgium shortly; SAIDE was asked to supply the name of a contact person in Belgium for this purpose.

#### (c) Courses:

##### (i) Sociology:

- The Sociology co-ordinator, Mr Danie Jacobs, explained that he was not satisfied with the present Unisa study guide he is using, because it does not provide space for assignments and no writing activities are included; and that, therefore, it binds

At present course coordination functions<sup>2</sup> are shared between

- the programme manager (for example, organizing payment in terms of all course design-related contractual arrangements, monitoring of deadlines, negotiation of copyright and ordering arrangements),
- the head of the Strategic Service (for example, identification and appointment of part-time and short-term staff and negotiation of outsourcing contracts),
- secretarial assistance within and the Strategic Service (for example, assisting the programme manager in organizing professional development activities for course team staff, as appropriate), and
- the research division of the Strategic Service (for example, responsibility for course-specific elements of a broader quality assurance strategy).

Because of a shortage of capacity, some functions are not performed at all - for example, allocation of course team tasks and responsibilities (academic, instructional design, graphic design, desktop publishing, editing, translating). It might be argued that in the main existing materials are being used, and therefore there is no need for instructional designers, editors, and so on. However, even this year, materials were being developed in certain of the subjects, (for example, English), and next year, quite a number of subjects will be developing materials because they have been unable to find prepared courses that are suitable for their needs.

Associated with this is the need for coordinated curriculum design and course design and development processes. There is considerable variation in the way that the various subject coordinators have interpreted the demands of resource-based learning and curriculum design for resource-based learning. Not all of these variations can be attributed to natural differences in subjects. It has been impossible due to time constraints and pressure of other responsibilities for the existing management staff to keep track of all developments. It will be even more difficult when there is a ten subject package. If certain subjects fail to adopt a thoroughgoing resource-based learning approach, it will undermine the attempts of other subjects. Strong course coordination could prevent this from happening.

The existing staff - management and subject coordinators - manage the coordination of facilitators effectively, and clearly see it as an important part of their work. However, if inexperienced facilitators are employed (as is likely when the programme expands) the demands for training and monitoring will increase vastly. A course coordinator could assist with the overall management of the facilitators, which would free individual coordinators to concentrate on detailed subject-specific and professional support.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pilot phase of the programme has run smoothly this year from an administrative point of view. Even though there were some problems with facilities, equipment and venues and with arrival of the some of the materials, they were sorted out, and did not impede learning for long. For the most part, a flexible attitude to students was adopted, though there was necessary firmness

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<sup>2</sup> Please see the list of functions for course coordination and course design in Appendix E

## CONTACT SESSIONS

- ⇒ Flexibility with regard to attendance at contact sessions is important if the principles of resource-based learning are to be respected. The attendance-based credit system in the Foundation course needs to be looked into as it undermines the kind of flexibility which resource-based learning is meant to encourage.

## FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT

- ⇒ The issue of provision and maintenance of overhead projectors and related equipment should be looked into for next year.
- ⇒ There needs to be clear communication between the subject coordinators and the managers of the facilities around the demands of the style of teaching and learning for provision of facilities and equipment.

## COMMUNICATION

- ⇒ The successful weekly meetings between subject coordinators and facilitators ought to be retained; the monthly meetings between administration and subject coordinators are also vital and need to be continued and broadened from time to time to include the facilitators.
- ⇒ There needs to be more attention given to formal structured meetings with students and their representatives.
- ⇒ As the programme expands, a greater amount of information needs to be put into writing.

## 5. Conclusion

Although the learners seem to take a longer time than it was expected by the course designers to change to this new mode of learning it is quite visible that they are more spontaneous and participatory than in the traditional modes in which they were taught, i.e. in the face to face/contact tuition. The learners' responses to the questionnaires show that they do the work on their own, that the facilitators come closer only to guide and facilitate the work.

This project has already created the spirit of independence with the learners, i.e. they can already do the work on their own, irrespective of whether the facilitator is present or not; as a result, they are already starting to plan how and when they think they want the work done.

The Resource-based Learning seems, therefore, to be of great help to both the learners and the facilitators for this problem of massification, and for the academic development in particular; because the passive "I am taught" changes to the active "I learn". In this case the learner becomes independent in learning, which also means he/she develops academically as an independent thinker.

There are, however, some worries expressed by some observers in the departments in which the courses are offered, concerning the success of the project. Some of these observers maintain that these students cannot make it at the university the following year. But the fact of the matter is that the facilitators who deal with them regularly have expressed a lot of positive change with the students concerning their academic development and independence (cf. Appendix 16).

## ENGLISH

1.1 Title of component of learning package	1.2 Available on time Yes/No	1.3 Physical quality Good, satisfactory or poor
Textbook 1 - title:	Yes	Good
Textbook 2 - title: Think write Start Lonely art	Yes Yes Yes	Poor Poor Poor
Learning Guide/Unit/Module 1- title:		
Learning Guide 2 - title:		
Learning Guide 3 - title:		
Videotape(s)		
Audiotape(s) Being Here Mine boy	Yes Yes	Good Poor
Extra notes (photocopied)		
Other (specify)		

1.4 Have you any suggestions for improvement?

Answers:

- English must be scheduled for morning hours.
- Tests must be written during the year so that the students can gauge themselves for the exams, otherwise they will fail in exams as they are already failing assignments.
- Time for English lessons on Tuesday is too long.
- The facilitator could clarify some questions first before assignment is written.
- The marking method of facilitator is not satisfactory.
- Facilitators must not be too strict in marking, because English is not the students' mothertongue.

the UFS campus to assess the chances of each new intake. They claimed that the test had shown that students who obtained a 30% or less had no hope of passing English 1, let alone English 2. They stated that the average mark obtained by the CPP and NCPP students (1997) was 22%. They, furthermore, stated that the standard deviation of 12 indicated that 4% of students were in the high risk category, while 96% of the target group were in the high-high risk category. They gave the results that reflect the progress of the present NCPP and CPP students thus far as follows:

- For the Language Placement Test the group scored 22%.
- An assignment on Being Here (short stories): 365 students wrote, 81 passed (22.19%).
- A reading and language test: 340 wrote, 46 passed (13.53%).
- A poetry assignment: 307 wrote and 65 passed (21.17%).

#### **b. Comments on RBL programme by external evaluators**

The English department reported that their department had recently been visited by Professors Peter Titlestad and Ella Lickendorf who had been responsible for the external evaluation of the Department of English; and that they expressed great interest in the RBL programme, although they also raised a few concerns, e.g. that

- There is a danger of backlash if students are not carefully selected for the CPP and ENS courses.
- A one-year course may not be able to impart the necessary skills, and that many of the students may fail the English courses or other subjects because of general academic deficiency.
- It is difficult to see how the current CPP students can, in practice, go directly to English 200; and that a tricky political situation could develop if expectations are unrealistic.

#### **c. Preliminary Conclusions**

The English department concluded their report by pointing out a few disturbing aspects to their department, e.g. that

- The majority of students admitted onto the course are so academically disadvantaged that they have no hope of passing the course. The evidence is based on the results of the Language Placement Test which was 22% for the CPP/NCPP students and an average of 46% on a test for the students on campus.

The English department is expected to prepare these students for English 2 (Eng 215/216); and that this is proving to be increasingly impossible; and also that even the small number of successful students will not be able to cope with the demands of English 2.

- These students come from a passive learning background and as a result, they find autonomous learning difficult. This means that the constraint of one year is counter-productive to a very good teaching method. This department also feels strongly that these students must never be deprived of contact time with qualified teachers. The department suggests a hybrid RBL programme that, they say, seems to be an answer.

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