

**A Case Study investigating the Essay Writing Skills of Eastern Cape Technikon Education Students using the Writing Process Workshop Language Software**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature.....

Date .....



## ABSTRACT

This research is based on a study which was made in order to investigate why the students who study Education at the Eastern Cape Technikon fail to acquire competence in essay writing, in spite of going through the Computer program that is being used by the Department of Communication. The name of this program is the Writing Process Workshop, and will be referred to as the WPW throughout the study. This program has been in use at the Technikon as a form of supplementary program for those students who were perceived to have shortfalls<sup>1</sup> in their essay writing communication skills.

This perception came about from the Department of Communication which decided that those students who scored less than 40% overall in (in language, not in content) their assignments, class works, and tests should go through the program and work independently, in the hope that their performance will improve.

The study spans over two years, with the first year being the period where the researcher collected data in the form of written errors that the students made in their essays. The second year of the research is the period when the main research took place. During the second year of the research, the researcher observed the students as they went through the WPW for three months. Upon completing the program, the students were asked to respond to a questionnaire. In addition to the questionnaire, the researcher examined the student errors that occurred in the students' essays throughout 2003 (while they were on the program, together with the ones from last year (2002)).

The reason for this was to determine if the errors that were present in 2002 are still present even after the students had gone through the WPW. The researcher then found that there was

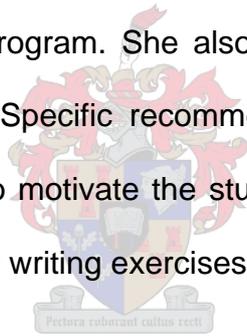
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<sup>1</sup> Those students who continually exhibit incorrect forms in their writing

still considerable occurrence of the same errors in the students' essays, a fact which led the researcher to deduce that very little improvement in the writing skills of the students has occurred between 2002 and 2003.

To explain the above point further, the research findings indicated that the essay-writing competence of the subjects did not improve in spite of the WPW intervention. The researcher then went on to evaluate the program, using a set of guidelines<sup>2</sup>, and found it consistent with the requirements of the evaluation; and therefore ruled it out as the cause of the failure of students to improve their competence in writing.

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher found that the students do not put conscious effort to apply what they have learnt in the program, and that some have not even completed the required tasks from the program. She also found that there is lack of integration of the software into the curriculum. Specific recommendations in Chapter 9 are given on how to facilitate this integration and to motivate the students to apply what they have learnt from the WPW to the mainstream essay writing exercises.



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<sup>2</sup> Structural, Technical and Content- based analysis from a series of researched, published criteria.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing is gebaseer op 'n studie wat aan die Oos-Kaapse Technikon onderneem is. In die ondersoek is gepoog om te bepaal hoekomopvoedkunde-studente nie die nodige vaardighede in die skryf van opstelle kon verwerf ten spyte van die feit dat hulle 'n rekenaar program genoem die "Writing Process Workshop" (WPW) deurloop het nie. Hierdie aanvullende program is oorspronklik ingestel om steun te gee aan studente wat opvallende gebreke in die skryf van opstelle as kommunikasie-vaardigheid getoon het. Die departement kommunikasiekunde het aanvanklik besluit dat alle studente met 'n punt van minder as 40% in klaswerk, take en toetse self die WPW moet deurwerk met die hoop dat hulle prestasie sal verbeter.

Hierdie studie strek oor 'n tydperk van twee jaar. Gedurende die eerste jaar het die navorser data in die vorm van geskrewe foute deur studente in opstelle, ingesamel. Gedurende die tweede jaar is daar hoofsaaklik van die observasie tegniek gebruik gemaak. Sistematiese waarnemings is gemaak van studente gedurende die drie maande waartydens hulle die WPW deurloop het. Aan die einde van die drie maande is studente se foute ontleed terwyl hulle ook 'n vraelys moet voltooi.

Met die analise is gepoog om die foute te vergelyk met daardie foute wat reeds teenwoordig was voordat hulle die WPW deurloop het. Daar is bevind dat studente wat die WPW geneem het nog dieselfde soort en aantal foute gemaak het as voordat hulle die kursus geneem het. Dit is dus duidelik dat die WPW-intervensie nie die gewenste resultate behaal het nie.

Die navorser het gevolglik die program ge-evalueer aan die hand van sekere riglyne wat gebaseer is op strukturele, tegniese en inhoudelike aspekte van analise. Aangesien die program voldoen het aan hierdie vereistes is bevind dat daar nie inherente gebreke in die WPW is wat die swak prestasie van die studente kon veroorsaak nie.

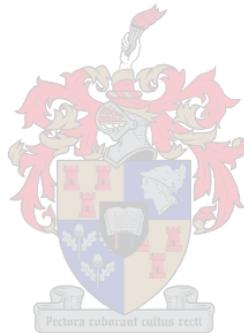
Verder is toe bevind dat studente nie 'n doelgerigte poging aanwend om dit wat hulle in die program geleer het toe te pas nie. Heelwat studente het ook nie al die vereiste take van die WPW voltooi nie. Verder is daar weinig integrasie van sagteware in die kurrikulum. Spesifiek aanbevelings word in hoofstuk 9 gegee oor die bogenoemde integrasie bewerkstellig kan word sowel as hoe om studente te motiveer sodat hulle dit wat hulle geleer het met die WPW kan toepas met die skryf van opstelle in hulle gewone kursusse.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The road to writing this thesis has been a long one. I would therefore like to thank all those who helped me before, during and after engaging in this task.

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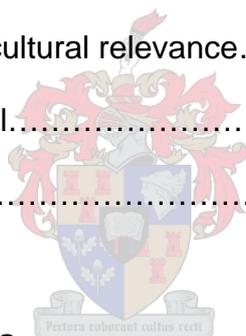
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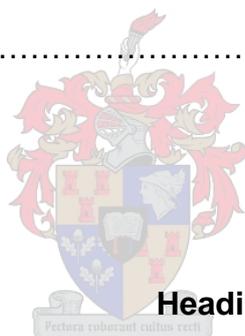
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# CHAPTER 1

## 1.1 Research Question

Why do the essay writing skills of students studying Education fail to develop, in spite of the students going through the Writing Process Workshop (WPW), which is a language software used in the Eastern Cape Technikon?

## 1.2 Background to Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

When educators use computers to teach language, they are engaging their learners in what is termed *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (CALL). Because the use of the language software, WPW, applies to this particular research, the researcher thought that it is imperative to provide background information to CALL.

### 1.2.1 Definition of terms

In language teaching alone, one encounters the names *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *Computer Aided Instruction*, *Computer Assisted Language Instruction*, and *Computer Based Instruction* -all under the acronyms of CALL, CAI, CALI and CBI respectively. The term that the researcher will be using is *Computer Assisted Language Learning* (CALL) because it is widely known, and it is the one that most readers can identify with. While it may be argued that what one calls the process is irrelevant, the terminology, in many ways, is prescriptive as well as reflective of the process it describes. Therefore, the researcher feels that the reference to learning used in the term 'CALL' is, ideally, representative of the type of learner involvement that most modern language teachers aspire towards.

### 1.2.2 Why is it important to understand the effectiveness of CALL?

English Foreign Language (EFL) publishers have been issuing products on CD Rom since early nineties. The point is that the means and channels for the delivery of CALL are with us and are set to expand. With this envisaged expansion, it seems vital that language educators have some understanding of the power of CALL so as to be able to design, select, write, and exploit such material in the most productive fashion. There are also societal pressures that may also lead to a greater reliance on CALL materials. The *massification* of Higher Education and the pressure to teach more learners (the researcher currently teaches more than 300 students per year) uniformly standard, cheaply, and with less staff, may lead some to technology (Bell, 1988).

### 1.2.3 The importance of CALL

Most people seem to remember more efficiently what they experience rather than what they have just read. Stevens says the following in support of the above statement:



Memory is also associated with images, and multimedia used in CALL programs provide opportunities to experience language in a variety of media, each of which serve to reinforce the other. For example, sound, moving pictures, and written words are likely to provide a fuller type of language input that uses two of our sensory channels: eyes for video and text and ears for sound. In addition, the strength of computer-delivered language materials lies in their ability to create a situation in which learners working alone or in groups can interact with the learning materials and reference materials". Learners working with interactive language programs are not passive; they

mostly need to think about the language, engage with it, and respond to it.  
(2000, p. 28)

Simonsen (2001) further clarifies this point by saying that the interactivity of the multimedia provides the learners with opportunities to check, clarify, and confirm their understanding.

In terms of learner differences, the ability of multimedia that is used as a flexible self-study resource may be useful in accommodating learner autonomy. Learners can focus on the areas which they feel they need help in and ignore others.

#### **1.2.4 Second Language Acquisition Theory and CALL**

Another set of reasons to suppose that a CALL environment may give the learners added learning can be derived from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and theory (Doughty, 1991). To provide a brief insight into how ideas from SLA theory might overlap with CALL, the researcher will discuss the concepts of negotiation of meaning (Pica, 1993), of noticing (Schmidt, 1990), motivation (Crookes and Schmidt, 1992) and learner autonomy (Dickenson, 1987).

- **Negotiation of meaning:** Language input for SLA is essential, and debate has centered on what type of input may best facilitate acquisition. Krashen (1985), with his Input Hypothesis, put forward that comprehensible input is important in SLA. More recently, Pica (1994) has suggested that “the relationship of negotiation to language acquisition is slightly different in that it is negotiation during interaction which affords access to language forms and that it is this access which then, in turn, leads to comprehension. Learners can then use this comprehension as they wish in

order to maximize and negotiate their understanding”. Doughty sums this up in the following manner:

The inter-actionist perspective on SLA provides a promising theoretical underpinning for research and development of software for language learning. If language learning is seen as a regular and ongoing interaction between the learner’s mental abilities and the linguistic environment, each contributing to language acquisition and each influencing the other, then interaction between the learner and the auditory and visual environment created in the software may be hypothesized as facilitative to the SLA. (1991, p. 124)

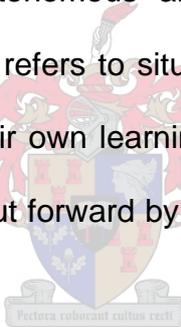
- **Noticing:** The ideas about “noticing” follow the work of Schmidt (1990). *Noticing* is related to the nature of consciousness and the relationship between this and language learning. In a *cognitivist* explanation of language learning, a key role is given to learners’ “attention” to particular linguistic features. The idea is that if learners notice a difference in the nature of Second Language (L2) input to which they are exposed and that of the language they are producing, then changes may occur in the learner’s interlanguage<sup>1</sup> to reposition it in a form closer to that of the input. This attention may then result in L2 input becoming intake. A study by Schmidt and Frota (1986) of a learner’s diary examined the relationship between what had been noticed in input and the language the learner used in her communicative situations. The relationship between the language and that which was produced was very evident. Thus Schmidt and Frota conclude that by “noticing the gap” between the state of one’s current language knowledge and input, one [the learner] will make language gains.

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<sup>1</sup> The place where the learner has mastered some parts of the target language but has not reached the target yet.

- **Motivation:** Crokes and Schmidt (1991) propose that there are connections between motivation and second language learning which should be examined. At the micro-level of motivation, CALL may motivate the learners to attend to the input through its use of combined media. This use of audio and video that is supported by subtitles with instantly accessible definitions of language items through on-line tasks with synchronous feedback may, collectively or individually, motivates learners to attend CALL classes. It is hypothesized that such learning support features may motivate the learners to “notice” and consequently understand the features of the input.

- **Autonomous Language Learning:** The final theoretical area which underpins CALL is that of autonomous and self-instructed language learning. “Autonomous language learning refers to situations in which learners become self-directed (ability to determine their own learning objectives and so on),” (Ellis, 1995 p. 45). There are four reasons put forward by Dickinson (1998) for self-instruction in language learning. These are:



- The reasons that learners might have for attending the class
- Individual differences
- The self instruction mode and how it fits in with the wider educational aims
- Motivational advantages

### 1.2.5 Empirical CALL research

Brett (2002) notes that there has been a meager output of CALL effectiveness research published by recognized SLA research journals, and that 19 empirical studies that Conrad (1996) uncovered represent almost as many different specific areas of CALL applications. As a result, “it is difficult to assess external validity from

any of them in order to relate one to another” (p. 37). The following are some of the researchers whose studies he uncovered. These had results that yielded positive results in favour of the software that was used: Gale (1989), Borrás and Lafayette (1995), Johnstone and Milne (1995), Liu and Reed (1995), and Chun and Plass (1996).

### **1.3 Background into the Writing Process Workshop (WPW) program**

Following the discussions above on CALL, this study now moves to a discussion on the specific program that is the concern of this study. This (WPW) program was purchased by the Eastern Cape Technikon in 1998 from a Johannesburg company, Bellamy and Hough. It was then installed at the Department of Communication’s Writing Centre for use by 40 students at a time.

The purpose of purchasing the program was to use it as a supplement to Communication in English lectures; this means that the lecturers would identify those students who failed to perform to the set standard (40%) as per the Department’s requirements in the writing skills mentioned in Chapter 6. The lecturers would then, upon identifying the students, advise them to work on their writing skills independently at the laboratory, with the guidance of a tutor.

The program is divided into four components of writing:

- **Persuasive Writing**
- **Report of Information**
- **Autobiographical incident**
- **Evaluation**

Out of the four modules, the Persuasive Writing module is the focus of this study. This is because it deals specifically with the essay writing skills that the Department

wants the identified students to focus on. Below is a further explanation regarding what the Persuasive Writing module entails:

### **1.3.1 Persuasive Writing module**

The basis of this module is **form, fluency** and **correctness**. This module has built-in exercises and includes games. It is not linear, and students are allowed the liberty of moving from one part of the module to another as long as the unit they move to is different from the one they were working on. For instance they cannot proceed to another punctuation exercise if they were tackling punctuation; they can only proceed to any of the other units e.g. topic sentences. The language exercises deal with spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence structures and verb tenses. The coherence/content based exercises include editing, revision, topic sentence support, critical thinking, and clarity.

### **1.4 Key concepts (ideas) in the research**

The subjects of this research are 21 trainee teachers. The reason behind the specific choice of subjects is that, unlike other students pursuing other careers, these students will, upon graduation, teach various education subjects in English and some will teach English as a subject at Primary and High School levels.

The concern of the researcher therefore is that, if teachers are to teach subjects in English, they should first be confident enough in writing and speaking the language. That way, they will be able to identify and correct the errors that their own students make. Therefore, reflecting on the above concern, the researcher has noted the importance of cultivating good English writing skills in Eastern Cape Technikon students who are training to be teachers.

## 1.5 Statement of the problem

This study focuses on the concern that in spite of going through the WPW Program, the students who study English at the Eastern Cape Technikon's Communication Department still exhibit incorrect forms of essay writing (coherence, cohesion, sentence structure, topic sentence support, clarity of argument, spelling, verb tense and so on), which create a uniform pattern in their writing. There is then the suspicion that, among other factors, the problem may be that the program is failing to improve the students' performance in writing essays. The study will then seek to investigate the causes of the lack of improvement on the students' part: is it the students' fault? Is it the software used? Is it the curriculum? Is it the lecturers' fault?

The researcher feels that it is important to establish the cause(s) and correct them because the implications of the failure to minimise recurrent errors is enormous when it is taken into consideration that these students will become subject specialists at the various schools that they will teach in.

In addition, as a form of assessment, these students' performance is always evaluated by their subject lecturers based on the essays that they have to write in English. Failure to write grammatically correct essays leads to the students losing marks and, eventually failing their Technikon courses.

As part of the strategy to improve this language usage, the Department of Communication felt that it has become necessary to equip these trainee teachers with better language competence through alternative learning programs such as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs so as to develop more effective English language teaching (ELT) skills for their own learners.

## 1.6 Scope of research

The study is an observational one based on a group of 21 1<sup>st</sup> year (2003) Education students already mentioned above who were exposed to the Foundation Program in 2002 at the Eastern Cape Technikon.

The Diploma in Education students at the Eastern Cape Technikon (the subjects of this research) are trainee teachers who are being prepared to be teachers of English and other Commerce and Technical subjects at the Primary and High School levels. The researcher has taught Communication in English to this group of students for one year (2002) during their Foundation Year Program, and bases this study on data collected from a series of writing exercises and tests that they had to do in 2002 and 2003 (Appendix 1).

Due to their shortfalls in writing exercises (coherence, cohesion, sentence structure, topic sentence support, clarity of argument, forms, spelling and so on), they were identified as a group which would go through the (WPW) software for a period of 3 months, as a form of improving their competence in writing.

Although some cognitive styles, such as the different ways in which different students understand and learn, or even personality variables, underlie certain errors (Corder 1981; Richards 1974), and therefore some parts of this study may remain speculative, the researcher feels that a study such as this could provide a window for determining how learners may be helped to improve their performance by a Computer Assisted Language Learning program when effectively used.

The researcher is following the lead of other CALL researchers such as Tolhurst (2001), Brett, Stevens (1984), de Quincey (1996) and others who have, and continue to explore and evaluate these new instructional options to establish how they can best integrate them into effective pedagogy. They also research what these

new instructional approaches can tell us about language learning processes, a fact which plays a big part in the recommendations made in this study.

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

The significance of this study is that it is practical in nature because it seeks to establish the causes behind the lack of improvement in the students' writing skills competence even though they had been put through the WPW.

In a nutshell, this research seeks to answer the question: 'Why does the Writing Process Workshop' fail to help improve the students' competence in writing as its developers claim it will? Are there other external factors that perhaps contribute to this lack of improvement? The researcher feels that improvement should be seen in the following areas of essay writing:

- **spelling**
- **verb tense**
- **punctuation**
- **formulation of topic sentences**
- **editing and revision**
- **clarity and coherence of argument**
- **good support for the topic**



This paper considers that since the errors cited in this study are from the performance data of students who have studied English for at least 12 years, learning has basically stopped. Their competence may be restricted by false language hypotheses characterised by the language rules they have generated from

their limited language schemata, which they have crystallised into rigid rules that are impervious to new knowledge (Krashen, 1982).

In the students' creative modes, they may apply these rules in terms of their own grammar, thus creating more errors that are even more frustrating to the lecturer who has to mark these students' essays. In the light of this concern, Lain (Richards, 1983, p.40) asserts, "If learning is to take place, there is need for an explicit mechanism to encourage the learner to test her rules and establish why they hamper communicative competence". The approach to her errors should not be that they are indicators of failure, but rather an essential part of the Language Learning (LL) process (Selinker 1992; Corder 1981; Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982).

From the above, it is imperative for the researcher to look closely into the software in order to establish if it allows the student to learn the second language according to Selinker et al's statement mentioned above. If it does, the researcher would then seek the answer to the question: where then, does the problem of lack of improvement in the students' essay writing skills lie?

Lastly, the process orientation of much current SLA research can significantly benefit from the collection and analysis of data on factors that affect CALL effectiveness. Studies on how students learn with CALL materials can contribute to our knowledge of SLA and to the development of CALL theory itself, that is, understanding how the use of technology affects the process of L2 learning.

## 1.8 Research method

Ex post facto data in the form of a battery of “common errors” culled in 2002 from the written work of the 21 National Dip-Ed<sup>2</sup> students (the group of students involved in the study) majoring in English, were analyzed using the error analysis method.

Another source of data was errors from the essay assignments that they have been writing in other courses in the three months that they were involved with the software. In addition, the study made use of survey results by way of a questionnaire that the students were required to fill in (Appendix 2), together with a brief interview with the lecturers who teach these students and some of the students (Chapter 6).

Lastly, the researcher evaluated the content of the software to find out if it meets with the criteria that are stipulated by various well-researched studies (mentioned in Chapter 7) on CALL evaluation.



## 1.9 Programme of study

**Chapter 2** deals with literature that has been consulted by the researcher which discusses Language Learning Theories. The reason for this choice of particular literature is that one cannot begin evaluating software without establishing what guides the Language Learning process of the L2 learners.

**Chapter 3** deals with the discussion of literature in Computers in education, together with literature on CALL effectiveness.

Gathering from the readings such as those of engaged in by the researcher throughout this study, it is apparent that educators and language instructors are still

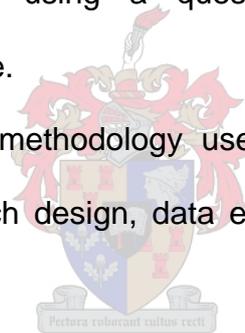
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<sup>2</sup> National Diploma in Education

plagued by the fact that an ever increasing number of students fail to acquire the kind of communicative competence that can facilitate their academic and career endeavours. If the chosen career of such a student is teaching, as is the case with the subjects of this study, the implications of such language disability cannot be sufficiently stressed.

To examine this phenomenon of language disability, this paper has been structured in such a way as to identify and analyse the errors recurrent in the students' written work and to see if the same errors occur during and after they have been exposed to the software. The supposition is that if the findings are that the students' errors are still present, then the researcher would seek to establish the answer to the research question (1.1) by using a questionnaire and an interview, and recommendations will be made.

In **Chapter 4**, the research methodology used in the study is discussed. This includes subjects, the research design, data elicitation and collection procedures, and data analysis techniques.



**Chapter 5** presents information on data collection.

**Chapter 6** presents information on data analysis: errors, questionnaire and interviews.

**Chapter 7** presents information on data analysis: software evaluation. The reason for this data analysis not being integrated into Chapter 6 is that the information regarding the software is voluminous and constitutes a chapter on its own.

**Chapter 8** comprises findings and a conclusion.

**Chapter 9** presents recommendations that the researcher has made.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON LANGUAGE LEARNING THEORIES

#### Introduction

Because the subjects of this study are all L2 learners, as stated in the previous chapter, it is imperative that theories of L2 learning be discussed so as to gather enough understanding of the type of subject that this study is dealing with, and what influences their learning of a second language. The L2 classroom has provided a wealth of data for researchers of CALL. The fundamental goal of such research has been to understand L2 behaviours and processes of language acquisition.

In order to narrow the scope of the research, extensive investigation has gone into determining which variables have the greatest influence on L2 competence. The assumption of some of the research has been that, if efficient language teaching methods, be it traditional or technological, could be designed, learning would then be more effective. Instructional techniques and materials have been designed, applied, adopted, and discarded by various researchers in this search for methods that will influence SL competence (Chaudron, 1990).

#### 2.1 Some Broad Perspectives of findings on Second Language Acquisition Processes

Many theories about SLA processes have their foundations on studies based on the psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and neurolinguistic processes that influence language acquisition. Furthermore, other influential perspectives are the classroom-

centered research and bilingual education perspectives (Beebe, 1988). A brief discussion of some of these perspectives will be engaged in below.

### **2.1.1 The psycholinguistic perspective**

Psycholinguistic language learning theories have had a marked impact on language teaching methods and materials. It is for this reason that a fuller review of these theories has been engaged in, in this study, in relation to that of the other perspectives that have also influenced classroom practice.

#### **2. 1.1.1 The behaviourist learning theory**

Up to the end of the 1960s, the dominant school in psychology which informed most discussions of language learning was *Behaviourism*. Two key notions in these discussions were habits and errors. Behaviourist learning theory espoused the notion that learners mastered the first language (L1) by imitating utterances made by adults. Through reinforcement, the learners identified the stimulus-response associations that constituted the language they were trying to learn. Selinker (Beebe, 1988) states that it was believed that L2 acquisition could proceed in the same way.

##### **2.1.1.1.1 The behaviourist theory of L1 transfer in L2 acquisition**

According to the behaviourist learning theory, old habits tend to influence learning new ones. Simplistically, the view was that where the L1 and L2 share meaning but express it in different ways, an error is likely to arise in the L2 because the learner will transfer the language realisation device from the L1 to the L2. Learning a L2

involves developing new habits wherever the stimulus-response links of the L2 differ from that of the L1.

Therefore behaviourist learning theory proposed to be capable of predicting that *transfer* will take place from the L1 to the L2. Transfer was termed *negative* if it was responsible for errors - a phenomenon that came to be known as *proactive inhibition* (Corder, 1981).

Because errors had to be avoided, attempts to compare L1 and L2 were made to predict when errors would occur, and classroom practice could be directed on the problem areas in order to help the learner overcome the negative effects of L1 transfer. The means that were used to predict potential errors were contained in a procedure known as Contrastive Analysis (CA).

### **2.1.2 Structuralist and mentalist language learning theory**

Structuralist and mentalist language learning theories later overrode behaviourist learning theories. This Chomskyan revolution in psycholinguistics lay the basis for much linguistic thought in that it challenged the behaviourist notion of language as a set of habits the learner adopted, and presented the view that language is represented by an abstract set of rules that the learner generates from her operational interlanguage (IL) or the language data that informs her entire language repertoire.

Briefly, the logic of what evolved from the mentalist and structuralist language theories came to be known as the *creative construction* or *identity hypotheses* (Dulay and Burt, 1974). Its main idea was that the learner works from a set of hypotheses about how the language works on the basis of the language data which is available to him, that is, the examples of language in its context. In constructing these hypotheses, she makes use of the explanations and information that she gathers from the teacher or the language book, including most importantly, any information from the context or from translation about how these examples of language are to be understood or interpreted. Inevitably, some of these will be wrong, thus necessitating that she re-formulate her hypothesis in a way that approximates more adequately those of the TL.

(Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982; Corder, 1981)

Burt et al's theory underlies the IL development process that will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

According to the above discussion, it would appear that at any point, the learner's language is systematic and potentially functional. The implications of this observation for classroom practice is that this basic, albeit developing, functionality makes it unnecessary for the learner to put an effort in acquiring the expected rules of the target language.

### **2.1.3 Developmental or Cognitive theories of learning**

Developmental views of learning were first suggested by Piaget. He postulates the existence of cognitive structures which process information in the mind. These influence the interactions with the outer world. **Cognitive psychologists** believe that we have, in our heads, schemata or frameworks within which we store existing

knowledge, relate new knowledge with existing knowledge, and develop links between related sets of knowledge that enable us to retrieve items appropriately when required. According to Wolff (Kussler 1998), Cognitive psychology regards the human being as an information processing system. It assumes that:

- this system is equipped with complex knowledge components in which the total knowledge is structured and stored in such a manner that it is accessible at all times.
- new knowledge is created through the interaction between knowledge that is already available and incoming stimuli.
- the mental operations optimize the system, i.e. they control the increase in knowledge, as well as the rearrangement and availability of knowledge.

In the wake of the above theory, language teaching is supposed to then move towards an information-processing view of language learning in which students engage actively with the language, within meaningful settings. In addition, they process and re-process new linguistic items by themselves in conjunction with previously learned items in familiar and new contexts (Davies & Higgins 1982; 1985).

The researcher has applied the above theory in Chapter 7 in seeking to determine if the CALL application used in this study does accommodate the students' existing knowledge when teaching them new writing skills.

Another cognitive theorist, Selinker (1992), maintains that “there is a concept referred to as the **interlanguage** concept in any second language learner of a language”). He used the term *interlanguage* to express the various versions of learner's language and is discussed further in the next section.

## The phenomenon of Interlanguage

The phenomenon of Interlanguage has been variously named *approximative systems* by Nemser; *interlingua* by James; and *transitional competence* by Corder (Corder, 1981; Selinker, 1992; Richards, 1974).

According to Selinker (1992), the interlanguage concept refers to the variety of the target language (TL) which is part of the implicit linguistic knowledge or competence of the L2 learner. The learner proceeds through a series of interlanguages in the development process of knowing the TL. Corder (1981) undertook to describe this development in four basic stages:

The first is a stage of *random errors* - Corder's 'pre-systematic' stage. Second is the *emergent* stage in which the learner grows in consistency in linguistic production. The learner has begun to map out a system and internalize certain rules. She is still unable to correct errors when they are pointed out by someone else.

The third stage is a *systematic* stage in which the learner demonstrates more consistency in producing the L2. While the rules inside her head are still not concrete and accurate, they are more internally self-consistent, and they approximate those of the TL system more accurately. Corder (1981) asserts that this is the stage at which learners are able to correct their errors when pointed out to them.

The final stage is the *stabilization* stage in the interlanguage systems. This is the stage Corder (1981) referred to as the 'postsystematic' stage. The learner exhibits language competence in that she makes relatively few errors and has mastered the system since the L2 can be used intuitively. The learner is thereby able to self-correct. Of the four stages, the final stage, which is the *stabilization* stage, is relevant to this study. This is because according to Corder (1981), this is the level at

which the students at the tertiary level should ideally be. Of course, most language learners never get to the final stage and get stuck in one of the intermediate stages. If this happens, *fossilization* takes place (Selinker, 1992). Fossilized items are those incorrect items in the speech or usage of a learner that remain uncorrected or are not pointed out to her as incorrect, and they become part of the learner's permanent language, just like the correct forms.

Many learners, particularly older ones, fail to achieve high levels of proficiency, especially those who, Krashen argues (Beebe, 1988), remain isolated from the target language community. Fossilization of interlanguage structures takes place, resulting in a more or less stable interlanguage. It is the fossilized items that have caused language instructors at the tertiary level a lot of concern because they tend to be resistant to remediation.

The core of the thinking in such descriptions of learner language is the rule formation hypothesis in language learning, which will be discussed in the section concerned with psycholinguistic perspectives.



### **Some factors affecting the Interlanguage system**

According to Sisak (2001), Selinker (1972) lists five factors which directly affect the output of the interlanguage system:

1. Language transfer - fossilizable items, rules, subsystems which occur in the interlanguage as a result of transfer from the native language.
2. Transfer of training - items resulting from particular approaches used in training.
3. Strategies of second language learning - identifiable approaches by the learner to the material being learned.

4. Strategies of second language communication - identifiable approaches by the learner to communication with native speakers of the target language.
5. Overgeneralization (a second language learner uses an L2 rule in situations where a native speaker would not have) of target language linguistic material - overgeneralization of target language rules and semantic features.

By viewing the shape of utterances originating in the interlanguage, as affected by the above categories, we can better see, according to Selinker, the nature of the psychology of second language learning.

### **Other perspectives on Interlanguage**

In addition to and in contrast to Selinker, other theories of the nature of interlanguage have been proposed.

Corder (1981), like Selinker, believes that learners' errors are systematic, regular, and consistent. Because of this system of errors, he postulates that the interlanguage system is based on knowledge or "competence" - a well-defined 'personal grammar' of the L2 learner. Through this system, the learner is 'creating an account of structural properties of the TL, about its grammar, on the basis of his interaction with the data he is exposed to. Corrections to this system can occur on an unconscious acquisition level or through self-correction.

Corder, however, indicates the importance of including an analysis of development within the interlanguage system. He notes that as interlanguages develop, they bear resemblance to each other; the difference lies in the particular learning situation or personality of the learner. According to Corder, a general sequence of interlanguage syntax which implies that there is a property of the human mind which determines the

way the learners process the data of the language to which they are exposed is recognized. He makes three important generalizations concerning this natural order:

1. Younger learners will have more similar interlanguage structures (in part due to the restricted need for communication).
2. That the more communicatively oriented the learning setting, the more similar the structural properties of the learners' interlanguage will be.
3. That, if universal properties exist and a universal grammar exists, then approximative systems of learners from any native language progressing towards any TL will show similarities.

The idea that a universal grammar is responsible for a natural order in morpheme acquisition among both adult and child learners of L1s and L2s raises interesting questions concerning the nature of the latent language structure of Lenneberg (1967) and the psychological language structure postulated by Selinker (1972). Selinker's model (1972) is incompatible with the notion of a natural order of morpheme acquisition in that it allows only a small five percent of adults to access the latent device responsible for these orders.

In accordance with the above discussion, Corder appears to view interlanguage as a developmental process of transitional competence rather than a process of restructuring or reorganizing. One note he offers to those who teach L2 learners is to arrange their teaching methods and curriculum to fit restrictions that these natural orders might impose. For example, teachers should shift from grammar lessons and drills to a more communicative approach to the TL and should incorporate more learner-centered, group-learning, and discovery approaches into their lessons.

How does the learner create her interlanguage? According to Selinker, there are a number of basic processes - but, particularly in his later work, he insists upon

learning strategies - that is, activities that the learner adopts in order to help her acquire the language.

- **Language transfer** - the learner uses her own L1 as a resource. This used to be looked upon as a mistake, but it is now recognised that all learners fall back on their mother tongues, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition, and that this is a necessary process
- **Overgeneralization** - the learner uses an L2 rule in situations in which a native speaker would not.
- - thus at **the phonetic level**, for example, learners of English, after having learnt to master the English 'r', may take to placing it at the end of words, whereas it is not supposed to be pronounced.
- - at **the grammatical level**, a learner in the early stages may use nothing but the present tense. Later, there may be extensive, non-native use of 'be - ing' forms of the verb.
- - at **the lexical level** - learners tend to use base terms and to stretch them - thus a 'goose' might be referred to as a 'chicken', or a teaspoon may be a 'little spoon'.
- **Simplification** - both syntactic and semantic - the **learner uses speech that resembles that of very young children**. This may be either because they cannot, in fact, as yet produce the target forms, or because they do not feel sure of them.

#### 2.1.4 Constructivist views of learning

Diver (1984) suggests that, since learners come to a learning situation with different conceptions and motivations, they will each learn different things from the same

situation. Yalden (1987) claims that each learner tries to fit any new idea into his experience, and this can only occur if the learner is interested in what he is doing.

From the above observation, it is clear that this view of learning must be kept in mind when placing students in any learning environment, especially a computerized learning situation. This is because the learner's individuality is considered, to a certain extent, when he works at his own computer alone and at his own level and pace.

The following are some of the characteristics of the Constructivist theory as reflected in the Stellenbosch University's Hyll website:

1. Only that which can be connected with available knowledge can be understood and learnt
2. The construction processes used differ individually; therefore the results of the learning process are not identical.
3. Learning is always "subjective" and individualized learning,
4. New knowledge implies a re-organisation of the already available information.
5. The social context and interaction are of primary importance in the learning process. Language as tool for interaction is the focal point. Language is for the human being the most important tool to think and learn with one another.

In viewing the cognitive and constructive theories, it is evident that there are some similarities between the two theories which have a bearing over teaching methodologies used if a language instructor is to apply the thinking which is embraced by these theories. Wolff (1996) helpfully summarizes these similarities thus: Both theories see learning as an autonomous, self discovery process which is

enhanced through a rich and authentic learning environment. They also see learning as an active construction process which differs from individual to individual.

In the light of the above discussion on the cognitive and constructive theories, what are the implications for the language instructor? Wolff (Kussler 1998) suggests the following strategies for foreign language teachers:

1. Apply task oriented foreign language teaching - "in teaching a second language we must design forms of work in which the student's attention shall be directed towards the subject matter and away from the form in which it is expressed" (Palmer, 1921:44).
2. Content oriented foreign language teaching - the referral to reality is very important in the constructivist learning process.
3. Cognitive foreign language teaching - the advancement of language awareness through discovery and active research by students - not through formal grammar teaching.
4. Process oriented foreign language teaching - the making aware of strategies, e.g. planning, improvement and review, to manage skills in the foreign language. This process model is further addressed in the section on Writing theories below.

To conclude, according to Bell (1988), understanding of language learning theories and the ability to apply these theories in teaching language are important prerequisites for effective language teaching. In addition, the researcher has applied the cognitive and constructivist theories throughout the study because of the practical and holistic stance that they take in language learning.

## **2.1.5 Second Language Writing and Research**

### **Introduction**

According to Myles (1998), the ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. Perhaps it is best viewed as a continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of "writing down" on the one end, to the more complex act of composing on the other end (Omaggio Hadley, 1993).

It is undoubtedly the act of composing, though, which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language (L2) in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p. 12). Compared to students writing in their native language (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills.

This section below explores writing in relation to particular aspects of L2 acquisition and models of the writing process in L1 and L2.

### **2.1.5.1 Models of L1 and L2 Writing**

Much of the research on L2 writing has been closely dependent on L1 research. Although L2 writing is strategically, rhetorically, and linguistically different in many ways from L1 writing, L1 models have had a significant influence on L2 writing instruction and the development of a theory of L2 writing. Below is a discussion of two popular models of writing.

“The Flower and Hayes (1980, 1981) model focuses on what writers do when they compose”, (Myles, 2000, p.5). It examines the rhetorical problem in order to determine the potential difficulties a writer could experience during the composing process in essay writing. The "problem-solving activity" is divided into two major components: the rhetorical situation (audience, topic, assignment), and the writer's own goals (involving the reader, the writer's persona, the construction of meaning, and the production of the formal text). By comparing skilled and less-skilled writers, the emphasis here is placed on "students' strategic knowledge and the ability of students to transform information . . . to meet rhetorically constrained purposes" (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 116). However, because the social dimension is also important, writing "should not be viewed solely as an individually-oriented, inner-directed cognitive process, but as much as an acquired response to the discourse conventions . . . within particular communities" (Swales, 1990, p. 4).

In more recent studies that examine the goals students set for themselves, the strategies they use to develop their organizing of ideas and the meta-cognitive awareness they bring to both these acts, Flower and her colleagues (1990) analyze

the academic task of reading-to-write to establish the interaction of context and cognition in performing a particular writing task. One of the problems they note is the transition students are required to make when entering the academic discourse community, where students need to learn how to operate successfully in an academic conversation that implies knowledge of the textual conventions, expectations, and formulaic expressions particular to the discourse. According to the researchers, "conceptualizing this transition as a social/cognitive act of entering a discourse emphasizes both the problem-solving effort of a student learning to negotiate a new situation and the role the situation will play in what is learned" (p. 222). The view that writing is typically a socially situated, communicative act is later incorporated into Flower's (1994) socio-cognitive theory of writing. In the social cognitive curriculum, students are taught as apprentices in negotiating an academic community, and in the process develop strategic knowledge. Writing skills are acquired and used through negotiated interaction with real audience expectations, such as in peer group responses.



Instruction should, then, afford students the opportunity to participate in transactions with their own texts and the texts of others (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). By guiding students toward a conscious awareness of how an audience will interpret their work, learners then learn to write with a "readerly" sensitivity (Kern, 2000).

Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) also propose a model that suggests reasons for differences in writing ability between skilled and less-skilled writers. The basic difference is revealed in their two models of writing: the knowledge-telling model, whose basic structure depends on the processes of retrieving content from memory with regard to topical and genre cues, and the knowledge-transforming model, which involves more reflective problem-solving analysis and goal-setting. The latter model

is important because it opens up the idea of multiple processing, which is revealed through writing tasks that vary in processing complexity. The authors discuss the notion of mental representation as a writing strategy. From their research with graduate students, they observe that the students "generated goals for their essays and engaged in problem solving involving structure and gist as well as verbatim representations" (p. 354). The knowledge-transforming or intentional writing model is different from knowledge telling in that it involves setting of goals that are to be achieved through the essay composing process, and the purposeful achievement of those goals. The composing process does not depend on memories and emotions and on external (teacher) assistance for its direction. In fact, Bereiter and Scardamalia criticize formal schooling that encourages the more passive kind of cognition by "continually telling students what to do," rather than encouraging them "to follow their spontaneous interests and impulses . . . and assume responsibility for what becomes of their minds" (p. 361). They also argue that the ability to wrestle with and resolve both content and rhetorical problems calls upon a dialectical process for reflection. If students rarely practice the kinds of writing tasks that develop knowledge-transforming skills, they are not likely to be able to perform those skills easily.

Both the Flower and Hayes, and the Bereiter and Scardamalia writing process models have served as the theoretical basis for using the process approach in both L1 and L2 writing instruction. By incorporating pre-writing activities such as collaborative brainstorming, choice of personally meaningful topics, strategy instruction in the stages of composing, drafting, revising, and editing, multiple drafts and peer-group editing, the instruction takes into consideration what writers do as they write. Attention to the writing process stresses more of a workshop approach to

instruction, which fosters classroom interaction, and engages students in analyzing and commenting on a variety of texts. The L1 theories also seem to support less teacher intervention and less attention to form. According to Myles (1998), despite their implications for classroom instruction, not all the components of these models are appropriate in an L2 context. The Flower model, in particular, does not recognize cross-cultural differences and issues related to socio-cultural variation in the functions of the written language (Kern, 2000). Additionally, with native speakers, "writing ability is more closely linked to fluency in and familiarity with the conventions of expository discourse" (Kogen, 1986, p. 25). L2 writers, however, are in the process of acquiring these conventions and so they often need more instruction about the language itself. Limited knowledge of vocabulary, language structure, and content can inhibit a L2 writer's performance. In addition, the models do not account for growing language proficiency, which is a vital element of L2 writing development. Similarly, essay writing, especially in the revision stage, challenges L2 writers. In his research on how L2 writers revise their work, Silva (1993) observes that learners revise at a superficial level. They re-read and reflect less on their written text, revise less, and when they do, the revision is primarily focused on grammatical correction. On the other hand, L1 writing ability may also transfer to L2. As a result, students who are skilled writers in their native languages and have surpassed a certain L2 proficiency level can adequately transfer those skills. Those who have difficulty writing in their native language may not have a repertoire of strategies to help them in their L2 writing development (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996). These observations warrant consideration for L2 instruction and course design, especially for those courses that include less-skilled writers, or those who have never had the opportunity to engage in more knowledge-transforming tasks in their native languages.

## 2.2 How these theories apply to Xhosa learners

The researcher has included this part because all the subjects are first language (L1) Xhosa speakers, and come from rural area backgrounds. She felt that it will be easier to understand their L2 language learning process if she has a background knowledge into a learning theory pertaining to their specific background.

According to Groenewaldt (1986), “the learning situation in the traditional Xhosa tribal context is such that children are expected to be slavishly obedient, and to memorize prescribed knowledge, rather than display independent judgment.” He refers to this method of teaching as a ‘closed method of learning’; he maintains that an ‘open method of learning’ refers to a learning situation where attitudes of exploration and inquisitiveness are encouraged.

To relate this concept to language learning using computers, a program that centres on drills and memorizing rules would be seen as ‘closed’, while one that encourages practical interaction and individualization would be seen as open. The relevance of Groenewaldt’s study to this one is that the researcher sought to determine (when evaluating the software) if perhaps the program is “open” or “closed”, and if any one of these variables played a part in the students’ failing to achieve good writing skills after being subjected to the program.

There is, however, an enormous need for research in this area because such research would have far-reaching implications for computer language learning.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON COMPUTERS IN EDUCATION

#### Introduction

This chapter deals specifically with the role of Computers in Education, together with evaluation of the programs and systems that are used in Education. For purposes of this study, the researcher has engaged in literature that deals with research that has been engaged in by various researchers of Computer Assisted Education in order to identify the trends and the strategies that have been used in research of this type.

#### 3.1 Didactic principles underlying Computer Assisted Learning (CAL)

Below is the discussion of the researched didactic principles of CAL, and they are Individualization, Mastery learning, and Answer analysis.



##### 3.1.1 Individualization

This principle maintains that each student is unique. According to Serfontein (1980), optimal utilization of computers in teaching implies maximum individualization, and the personality of the student plays a vital role in the way that he or she learns from any CAL software. One can see how closely this principle echoes the constructivist theory mentioned in Chapter 2. The researcher has therefore applied this didactics principle throughout the study in tandem with the constructivist theory.

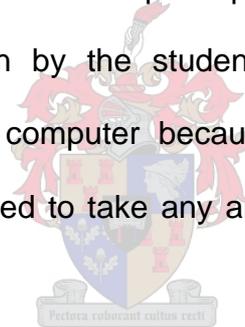
##### 3.1.2 Mastery learning

The idea behind this principle is that a particular concept must be mastered by the learner before the next concept is introduced. Due to the high individualization in

CAL, mastery learning can be implemented by the computer. A student is required to produce the correct version of the lesson before being allowed to proceed to the next one, as is the case in the WPW, the only exception being that which is mentioned in section 1.3.1 where a student may have the liberty to move from one part of the module to another as long as the unit they move to is different from the one they were working on.

### **3.1.3 Answer analysis**

According to Calitz (1982), CAL attempts to ensure the principle of active participation by the learner and to unfold the self-discovery strategy. In the learning situation, CAL presupposes the active participation of the student. However, the answers and questions given by the student stem directly from the previous instruction generated by the computer because the computer mostly has fixed answers and is not programmed to take any answers other than the ones already available.



The last two principles are related to the Developmental theory mentioned in Chapter 2. This is evident in the emphasis of using prior lessons as building blocks for acquiring competence in newly learnt lessons. The researcher has therefore used them in tandem with the developmental/cognitive learning theory in establishing if the program that the subjects have used does address this.

### **3.2 Disadvantages and advantages of CAL**

Davies (1983) says, "Before buying any software, one should generally investigate the disadvantages and advantages of a CAL design." He further states that "this is

to prevent educators from jumping onto the bandwagon simply because the bandwagon is there and becoming disillusioned in the process” (p.56).

### **3.2.1 Advantages of CAL**

- It offers individual learning processes.
- Shy students feel at ease.
- Students determine their own learning pace.
- Computers can adjust the level of work to suit students’ ability.
- Computers do marking and evaluation immediately.
- There is immediate response.
- Computers store data and can print out results.

### **3.2.2 Disadvantages of CAL**

- There are sometimes fixed answers or responses.
- The student who works faster can be seen as ‘bright’.
- Software authors mostly use varying theories of learning. For example, one author might develop his program based on the neuro-linguistic (a study discussed by Genesse (1988) that maintains that L1 and L2 learners of a language involve different part of the brain during the language learning process. On the other hand, another author may use the theory that maintains that all students are the same; and a problem may arise when the student cannot relate to the learning strategies presented by that program. The result of this would then be that the student does not perform well during the



interaction with the program, not because she is incapable, but because she understands concepts differently from other students.

- Computers can be very expensive.
- Time limits in some programs can often stress students, and they may fail to achieve learning objectives.
- Lack of user-friendliness can defeat the purpose of the program.

### **3.3 Some perspectives on CALL effectiveness research**

Below, the researcher has narrowed the discussion from CAL, which is a point of departure for CALL discussion, to some perspectives of CALL research and evaluation because this is the concern of this study is CALL.

An interesting CALL effectiveness study was conducted by Grace et al (1998). In her paper (Calico Journal 15), she relates how a research study they conducted looked into the effectiveness of CALL for teaching writing to establish whether positive results accrue to non-native English students who use personal computers (PCs) in their English L2 class. This study also looked into whether these students held positive attitudes toward using computers to compose in their writing class. The data was collected through the use of a questionnaire administered to the students. The findings were that the time that the students spent interacting with the program determined whether there will be positive or negative results. The more time the students spent at the PC, the more their writing skills improved and vice versa. It is therefore based on this research that the researcher determined that 3 (three) months should be allocated to the subjects so as to rule out 'insufficient time' as one of the factors that might affect this study.

Another interesting perspective on CALL effectiveness research is from Wilson (1996). In answering the question: How effective are new technologies in promoting language learning?, Wilson has the following to say:

Researching CALL effectiveness is admittedly a very difficult endeavor. In the past, projects which chose to deliver modern foreign language (MFL) teaching wholly via ICT have often flopped because students understandably craved human contact. [The scientifically approved but ethically flawed control group - experimental group approach to educational ICT research frequently fails because the subjects in the control group resent being denied access to technology, while the subjects in the experimental group revel briefly in the novelty value of technology - the Hawthorne Effect. (p. 49)

The relevance of the above statement to this study is that it informs the researcher on dynamics of research methodologies. Wilson's statement gives insight to the importance of coordination between language learning through the classroom and through use of computer programs and emphasizes striking the balance between the two.

Another group of CALL researchers, Brown et al (1994), echo the researcher's objectives of conducting the study when they remind us that as providers of education, it is important to step back and consider why we assess the impact of the language education that the students are being provided with.

They answer this question by saying that the need to assess the impact is often inspired by a feeling that the teaching provided (whether by traditional or technological methods) is not achieving its purpose, as is the case with the subjects of this study. This comment is particularly relevant to the assessment of independent learning like in CALL where there are a range of evaluative strategies

to choose from. Brown *et al* further mention the following as pedagogical reasons for software evaluation:

- Creation of learning activities
- Provision of feedback to the student and identifying their linguistic strengths and weaknesses.
- Provision of feedback to the teaching staff on learning shortfalls or achievements.
- To judge performance (grade/degree classification).
- To offer Quality Assurance- internal and external to the institution.
- Making recommendations

The points mentioned above tally with the researcher's objectives for undertaking this study.

Closely linked to the research mentioned above is Jones' study (1986), where he takes the point further by introducing the concepts *reliability* and *validity*. In his study, he raises a number of questions that researchers should ask themselves when contemplating assessing CALL effectiveness. These are: Why do we assess? and, How and What are we assessing? Is the assessment valid? Is the assessment reliable?

Another important aspect of CALL effectiveness research which links well with the developmental theories mentioned in Chapter 2 is the emphasis on the computer system's ability to promote Learner autonomy. Learner autonomy is defined as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning' (Holec, 1981, p.3), a situation in which the learner is solely responsible for all her learning decisions (Dickinson, 1987, p.11) and the learner's 'psychological relation to the process and content of learning' (Little, 1990, p.7).

For others, learner autonomy is seen in more political terms as the freedom to control 'the content and processes of one's own learning' (Benson, 1997, p.25).

Benson usefully summarizes the various definitions of learner autonomy as:

- a) situations in which learners study entirely on their own
- b) a set of skills which can be learned and applied in self-directed learning
- c) an inborn capacity which is suppressed by institutional education
- d) the exercise of learners' responsibility for their own learning
- e) the right of learners to determine the direction of their own learning

An example of a study where Learner Autonomy was considerably and beneficially applied was Kussler's (1990) Jumbo-German programme which has a CALL component and was designed for South African Airways cabin attendants. In his narrative, he takes the reader through various stages of the course, starting with the design and development of the course, to the implementation, through to the results of the course. The important point about this study is that it addresses the basic considerations for creating language courses [conducting needs analyses to establish outcomes and content; designing, creating and delivering the course]. Since the course had a combination of using a computer language software and classroom interaction, it gives a clear perspective on how balance between the theoretical and practical approaches can be struck without letting one take precedence over the other, as is the case with the results of this study.

To conclude, the approach of learner autonomy is based on observations and findings of cognitive-constructive learning and understanding psychology, and further readings on this can be found on a power point presentation by Kussler at [www.sun.ac.za/Hyll/Wolff.1996.htm](http://www.sun.ac.za/Hyll/Wolff.1996.htm). This presentation is relevant to CALL teachers

because it recommends, inter alia, the use of authentic materials and application of a rich learning environment. It also advises against any pre-designed progression to which all previous approaches adhered and has important implications for foreign language teaching.

To conclude further, from the information on CALL research presented in this study, it is clear that any CALL researcher has to identify and maintain the reasons for conducting the research and ensure that validity and reliability are addressed because all these factors serve as points of reference for the rest of the study; and lastly, the ability of the system to address learner autonomy cannot be sufficiently stressed.

### **3.4 Approaches in evaluation of CALL Software**

When addressing applied questions such as design and evaluation of multimedia CALL, it is necessary to select from the many approaches those that are relevant. To be specific, a popular type of L2 acquisition research that is significant for CALL design is one that complements classroom teaching (Pica, 1997). In applying the idea of complementa(rity) to CALL, Doughty (1987,1992) mentions "materials", which refers to software and other materials supporting CALL activities. As he points out, these materials can be designed to operationalize conditions that researchers hypothesize as creating positive conditions for SLA.

Experimental research has shown that highlighting input (what is being communicated to them) in materials to prompt learners to notice particular syntactic forms positively influenced their L2 acquisition (Doughty, 1991). In other words, developments of principles for CALL design methods require effective "input enhancement" (Sharwood Smith, 1991). Even though there may be factors internal

to the learner that influence the likelihood of apprehension, instructional materials should facilitate comprehension of input. Sometimes input can appear to the learner as uncomprehended noise, and output can be produced mindlessly, or it can be created by the learner under conditions that facilitate acquisition of the information being learnt. The latter type of production is called "comprehensible output" (Swain, 1985). In producing the L2, a learner will, on occasion, become aware of (that is, notice) a linguistic problem (brought to his/her attention either by external feedback (e.g., clarification requests) or internal feedback). For example, noticing a problem 'pushes' the learner to modify his/her output.

When errors are recognized in comprehensible output, the process of the learner's self-correction is also believed to be beneficial particularly because the linguistic items for which self-correction occurs may be those for which the learner's knowledge is fragile. Error correction affords the opportunity to "focus on form" (Long, 1988). Focus on form is expected to be beneficial when it occurs during the process of attempting to construct meanings. In other words, it is important that the language containing the noticed error be used in communication rather than for merely displaying examples of the target language. Corrections can come from the learner's own hypothesis testing, from her requests for assistance from others, or from explicit correction.

The features included under interactional activity and communication goal define the characteristics of L2 tasks expected to influence the learner's language in significant ways. For example, "interactant relationship" refers to whether or not the task requires a "two-way" information exchange for goal completion rather than requiring information to travel only "one-way" (Long, 1988, p.34). When the tasks require a "two way" interactant relationship, the quality of the interaction is superior.

CALL developers need to consider how software can provide learners with opportunities believed to facilitate L2 acquisition. In other words, it is useful to view multimedia design from the perspective of the input it can provide to learners, the output it allows them to produce, the interactions they are able to engage in, and the L2 tasks it supports. Because CALL software can actually play a role in input and interaction, it is useful to consider it as a participant in L2 tasks.

To conclude, the researcher has applied the above premise of complementarity/interactional perspective when evaluating the WPW because she believes that it fits in well with the learning objectives associated with the theories mentioned in Chapter 2.

### **3.4.1 Practical Guidelines in evaluation of CALL software**

In order to evaluate any software efficiently, it is necessary to investigate a number of features in the program. Several CALL researchers have come up with various guidelines which one can use as guidelines in evaluating CALL software.

According to Yalden (1987), the style of learning encompassed in the programme must be investigated, for example, does the system use drill or other forms of learning?

Another point of note is user-friendliness. Many writers of CALL effectiveness maintain that the software should be easy to use and to manipulate.

The educational process that the package is supposed to promote must be examined critically. In addition, “there should be well-instructed and clear supporting or accompanying documentation” (Hertz, 2000, p. 45)

A good evaluation should include objective comments from students and teachers to say whether the program was easy/difficult/interesting (Walker, 1983)

The Human Science Research Council (HSRC) Working Committee (1993) uses the following criteria for evaluation of educational software:

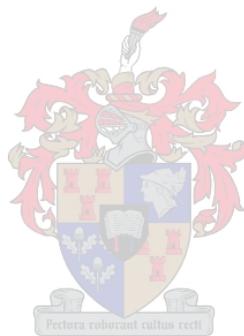
- a) Screen layout: Movement should be from left to right. In addition, overuse of scrolling and flashing modes should be avoided at all cost.
- b) More interesting, positive reinforcement for correct responses versus negative reinforcement for errors should be emphasized.
- c) Forward and backward stepping and requests for "Help" should be available.
- d) Students' material, for example, worksheets should be available.
- e) The program should be used in an interactive way.
- f) The loading of the program into the computer should be easy and uncomplicated.
- g) The program should define its purpose well and achieve it.
- h) The student should be motivated to use the program repeatedly.
- i) Feedback should be timely and non-threatening.

In a comprehensive summary translated by Antoinette van der Merwe (1994), it is interesting to note that the criteria for evaluation of educational software have been addressed according to the following:

- a) Goals or Contents of the software
- b) Accompanying documentation or Supplementary Material
- c) Didactic / Educational / Ethical Form of the courseware
- d) Medial / Programme Technical / Ergonomical Form

Tolhurst (1992), in her journal publication has also provided an interesting perspective on software evaluation and addresses issues like Implementation Considerations, Documentation and Packaging, User Interface, Classroom Management Considerations, and Curriculum considerations

In conclusion, the researcher has, among others, prevalently applied HSRC's, Tolhurst (1992), Kussler & van der Merwe (1994)'s criteria which are further discussed in Chapter 7 in detail in evaluating the WPW program because they are practical and comprehensive in their approach. However, because the criteria of the last two researchers deal more with the structure rather than the content of the program (which is the subject of this study), the researcher has had to, in conjunction with the HSRC's, use other well-researched criteria (see Chapter 7) which address the evaluation of the content of the program.



## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD OF RESEARCH

#### Introduction

This chapter provides a background to the research methodology and design used in procuring and analysing the data of the study. Before deciding on any particular method of eliciting data for use in this study, the researcher read through a number of publications on similar research projects. Some of the research tools and designs that have been used by the researcher are informed by the work of Stevens (2000) in which he published the results of research which he conducted. In this publication, Stevens describes a computer-assisted research project conducted into writing errors of ESL college students where he first used error-analysis to determine the students' errors. He then put the students through a language software after which they were required to give their feedback through survey questionnaires. In order to clarify some of the aspects which he felt were not clearly answered in the survey feedback, he conducted an unstructured interview where he asked them questions related to their experience of the study as a means of clarification and acquisition of additional data.

Another similar study whose methodology the researcher found quite relevant to this study is that done by Simonsen (2001) where he sought to find out English L2 students' reaction to CAI following the use of the software. The part of Simonsen's study that the researcher found most useful was the methodology he used to elicit information from the students. Simonsen made students write comments about their CALL experience in their journals throughout the period they were involved with the

software. In addition, he made them enter information regarding their scores, attendance, feedback received and so on in a log book. The use of a survey questionnaire is also reflected in a study that was conducted at the Brigham Young University in 1981 (Hendricks et al, 2001) to obtain student feedback on their opinion on the TICCIT, which is a language support program for foreign students. Hendricks maintains that the feedback that students supplied in the form of survey questionnaires yielded invaluable information to the study.

#### **4.1 The research design**

This is a task-oriented cross-sectional study involving data culled from the written work (as a form of needs analysis) of these students from the year 2002 when they were in their Foundation Year of study. These were used to determine that the students need the intervention of the WPW program for remedial purposes. Data was then collected progressively during the main research (March – June 2003) in the form of portfolios, a questionnaire, unstructured interviews, and evaluation of the WPW software. This data was analysed, after which recommendations were made.

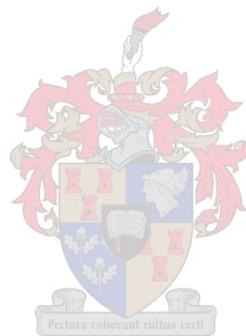
The limitation of this study is that no control group was used because the researcher wanted to avoid the inclusion of another factor- the Hawthorne effect, (See Chapter 3), which would have an impact in the results of the study.

Due to the fact that the students had to have a 12 week period doing teaching practice, their program could only allow flexibility of engaging with the software for only three months as.

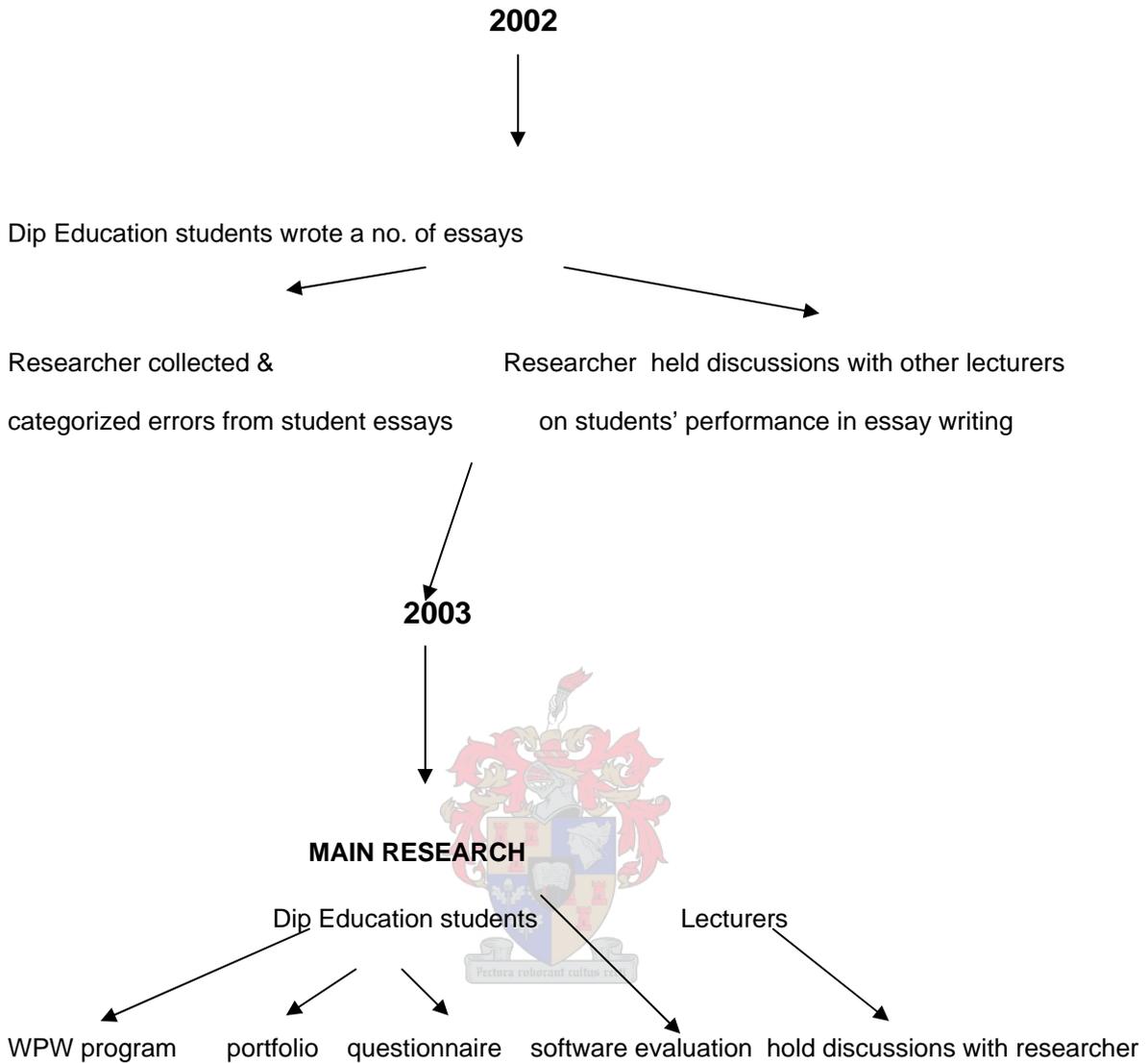
The delimitation of this study is that only students from the Eastern Cape Technikon took part in this research and no comparison was made with students from another institution. It must be noted that whilst this research was being conducted, formal

lectures in the course: Communication in English, together with other lectures, continued as usual.

The assumptions made in this study are that the students were sufficiently confident in the researcher to give honest replies when answering the questionnaires.



## 4.2 Map of the Research Procedures



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Research findings

↓  
Data analysis

↓  
Conclusions

↓  
Recommendations

## CHAPTER 5

### DATA COLLECTION

#### Introduction

As mentioned in Chapter 1, as means of collecting, monitoring, and assessing the subjects' writing skills development, the researcher collected and analyzed students errors, analyzed the contents of the student portfolio, conducted a survey by means of a questionnaire, and held discussions with lecturers who taught the students in 2003 and the students who took part in the study. Details of how all this was done are further discussed in the sections below.

#### 5.1 Language elicitation technique for student errors

The researcher used the task mode as a data elicitation technique (Dulay et al, 1982). The student essays were the only form of tasks considered for data because the curriculum of the Technikon mainly utilizes assignments as a means of assessing the students' performance in any course (See Section 1.8). Therefore, it is hoped that the students' language in these tasks is a fair representation of their normally developed grammar from which relevant inferences about their writing capabilities can be made.

Information regarding the benefits of using error analysis in research and how it is applied has been already covered in Chapters 2, 3; therefore, this Chapter will deal mainly with how error analysis has been used in this study. Although error analysis cannot provide a comprehensive picture of the learner's communicative competence, it provides data for the researcher to respond uniquely to the learner's

illogical language that has been fossilised<sup>3</sup> so as to help her go beyond such limitations towards communicative competence.

### **5.1.2 How error analysis was used in the study**

The researcher collected all the portfolios that the students compiled during the WPW course, and after establishing whether or not the students have gone through the whole program, examined each portfolio individually for errors.

Error analysis, as a branch of linguistics, has two recognised functions- a theoretical one and a practical one. The first is part of the process of investigating the language learning process. The practical part relates to its function of guiding the remedial action required to correct an unsatisfactory state of affairs for learner and lecturer.

The former function, with some aspects of the latter function are the focus of this study because, by establishing and examining the errors made by the students, the researcher could then prove that there is improvement/no improvement in the students' essay writing skills after going through the WPW.

Upon obtaining this proof, she then tried to establish where the problem lay by using interviews, a questionnaire, and an evaluation of the program; after which she made recommendations for a remedial intervention.

### **5.1.3 The descriptive classification of errors**

In order for error analysis to be used as an effective tool for describing learners' interlanguage, it is necessary to divide errors into observable categories through which inferences about the stage of the language learner may be made.

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<sup>3</sup> Fossilized items are those incorrect items in the speech or writing of a learner that remain uncorrected or are not pointed out to her as incorrect, and become part of the learner's permanent language, just like the correct forms.

In this study, such a descriptive classification of errors is guided by Dulay et al's (1982) study because their use of taxonomies that address error analysis in a practical form is relevant to this study.

To provide a systematic description, Dulay et al (1982) devised a system of error classification by using descriptive taxonomies (See Chapter 2). They present four descriptive taxonomies from the framework within which error analysis may be done. These are: the linguistic category taxonomy, the surface strategy taxonomy, the comparative analysis taxonomy, and the communicative effect taxonomy. These terms are explained further in the next section. For purposes of this study, the researcher has used the surface strategy taxonomy in conjunction with the writing areas that are the focus of the WPW because it is in those exact areas of writing that the researcher wants to determine whether the students' writing has improved or not.



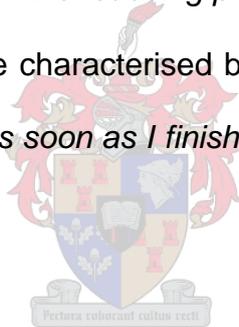
### 5.1.3.1 The surface strategy taxonomy

As mentioned above, in addition to the writing areas that are the focus of the WPW's Persuasive Writing module, the researcher used the surface strategy taxonomy, which focuses on the way surface structures are affected by errors. The choice of this taxonomy was guided by the fact that most of the subjects' errors seemed to fall into this category, and it fitted well with the purposes of this study. Most error descriptions tap this classification in the form of omission, addition and misformation surface structure errors. Examples of such errors have been taken from the subjects' essays and are highlighted under each component description below.

- **Omission** errors result from the absence of an item that would be present in a well-formed sentence. This phenomenon has several sources and Richards

(1974) states that it is observable even with L1 speakers. As an example, a morphological omission caused by the inflected *-ed* may result in a sentence such as: *We **use** to walk barefoot to school* as against *We **used** to walk barefoot to school*.

- **Addition** errors are a function of the addition of an item that should not be present in an utterance. Dulay et al (1982) endeavour to be more specific than the classifications of other researchers. According to them, addition errors are of two different types: (i) Double markings, for example, *The Technikon doesn't have **no** lazy students* as against *The Technikon doesn't have lazy students*; (ii) Regularisation, for example, *The **childrens** in the teaching practice classroom were noisy* as against *The **children** in the teaching practice classroom were noisy*.
- **Misformation** errors are characterised by the use of an incorrect form as in the case, *I'll **borrow** it to you as soon as I finish* as against *I'll **lend** it to you as soon as I finish*.



## 5.2 The Portfolio

### Introduction

Before delving into the use of the portfolio in the study, the researcher would like to discuss the learning theories that guided the choice of the portfolio as a tool for evaluating and monitoring progress of the students whilst interacting with the WPW. The basic guiding principles are based on the theories of constructivist learning, that are discussed in Chapter 2.

The principles of **constructivist learning** indicate that if students are to develop a good understanding of a subject matter, they must relate what they are learning to their own knowledge and experience.

It is due to the above principle that the researcher wanted the subjects to have a continuous awareness (in terms of their writing skills) of where they come from, where they are at present, and where they are going. The first two points then address the **process**<sup>4</sup>, whilst the last part emphasizes the **product** of the students' language learning.

In applying the above statement to the use of the portfolio in this study, the students, whilst going through the language learning process with the software, had the opportunity to identify what essay writing skills they already have, monitor their progress through the scores and feedback given to them by the program, and write reflective journals regarding their learning experience and how they are applying it to the classroom situation (**Process**).

At the same time, because they are aware that the goal for being involved in the software program is to acquire skills that will enable them to achieve competence in essay writing, they are ideally supposed to apply these skills in their assignment essays in their courses so that their essay writing may improve (**Product**).

The benefit of using the portfolio, therefore, is that it applies these concepts together, with the students being able to use what they learn for further development.

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<sup>4</sup> The term **process** in this instance refers to how the learner tackles tasks within and outside an independent learning programme. Looking at **process** will also include some evaluation of the “difference” between a starting and finishing point

In view of the above, although the study applies both concepts at the same time, the portfolio deals more with the **Formative (process)** as against the **Summative (product)** assessments as a means of tracking the development in the writing competencies of the subjects. In order to explain the above concept further, it is necessary for the researcher to first provide definitions of these two forms of assessment:

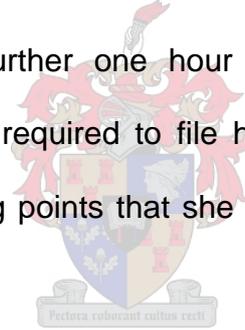
### 5.2.1 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is a method designed to establish how much progress a student is making during learning, with a view to giving feedback to the student. A good example is an essay used as graded coursework. Comments written on it by the tutor/lecturer are intended to help the students learn from mistakes and improve their work (Gibbs & Habeshaw, 1990). Formative assessment is often referred to as assessment of the process of learning. In the area of independent learning, we are very often concerned with this type of assessment. The researcher engaged in this type of assessment during the period that the students were exposed to the software.

The reason for this choice of tool is that the researcher wanted to immediately pick up if there is any improvement in the students' writing, without having to wait until they have completed the program. How the researcher did this is mentioned in 5.1 above: she made the subjects aware of what essay writing skills they already had or lacked by discussing, a day before being involved in the WPW program, the errors (and their correct forms) that they made in their 2002 essays. This was done to make the students constantly aware of their weak points and focus on improving them.

In addition, whilst being involved in the WPW, they wrote weekly journals in essay format narrating their progress and experiences whilst interacting with the program. This essay format journal, together with the essays that they wrote for other subjects, were included in their portfolios and assisted in giving the researcher an indication of whether or not the students are applying what they have learnt from the program to their essay writing exercise. Another reason for the use of formative assessment was that the researcher wanted to closely monitor the subjects' interaction with the program, and see if they are coping. This was done by having the laboratory assistant record their scores for each exercise that they did in the WPW.

The monitoring process took place over 3 months for 2 hours each day, (working with the software), and a further one hour per week on independent writing exercises. Each student was required to file her essays, journals, and the list of strong and weak essay writing points that she compiled with the researcher inside the portfolio.



### **5.2.2 Summative Assessment**

This assessment method is designed to establish what a student has achieved at the end of a unit or course. At the end of the interaction with the software, the researcher engaged in this type of assessment (in addition to the formative assessment) in order to view the product, that is, if the students were now competent<sup>5</sup> in their writing skills. Summative assessment can be equated with the assessment of the product or outcomes of learning.

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<sup>5</sup> To determine if the students' writing skills have improved

This was achieved by gathering all the essays that they had written in other courses during the course of the research in 2003, and comparing them with those of 2002. This was done so as to assess if there was any improvement in their writing (See Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter 6). In addition, their scores in the WPW were assessed so as to see if there was any relation between their performance in assignment essays and their performance in the program. This means that the researcher wanted to determine if, for example, a student who scored high marks in topic sentence support in the WPW would exhibit less errors in that area in her essay as proof of having learnt that particular skill from the program. Lastly, there was an assessment of the errors that each student had made during 2003 to determine if they fell into the same category as those that occurred in 2002 for each student.

### **5.2.3 The Language Portfolio content**

The portfolio includes the following items:

- a) All the language work completed during the WPW course.
- b) Independent Learning Activities: samples of or all of the work that involves writing, carried out independently by the student during the WPW course.
- c) Prescribed writing tasks set by the students' lecturers e.g. assignments/essays.
- d) Learning Log: a document in which learners briefly record each independent learning activity undertaken. In the log, the subjects had to enter the name of the lecturer who gave them a particular writing task, the date, what they were required to do, how they fared as far as writing that task was concerned, how long it took them to complete the task, what writing skills they had to use in

accomplishing that task, and if they were able to apply these writing skills by transferring what they had learnt from the WPW to the task at hand. The completed log gave the researcher an idea of the range of activities done by the learner and the time devoted to each.

Apart from the theories that guided the researcher's choice of the portfolio as a tool in this study, the following are advantages which further convinced the researcher of the benefits of using the portfolio in the study:

- a) Portfolios encourage students to step back and think about areas such as those listed above (5.2.3). Using portfolios also helps them to understand, take control of, and modify appropriately their own learning aims, strategies, and outcomes. According to Arkerman (1996), "With time and practice, this process of reflection will become increasingly automatic." He also underlines the value of this reflective practice either, as it were, in communication with oneself or with others: "People cannot learn from their experience as long as they are totally immersed in it. There comes a time when they need to step back, and, from a distance reconsider what has happened to them. They must take on the role of an external observer, or critic, and they must revisit their experience 'as if' it were not theirs. They need to describe it to themselves and others, and in doing so, they will make it tangible" (p.28).
- b) The portfolio provides not only a record of activities undertaken, but also evidence of how the student has interacted with the language resources and materials used.

In this study, the contents of this document (portfolio) formed the basis for establishing the subjects' progress or lack thereof, and the researcher could thus establish if any other factors, apart from the software, were responsible for the

students' shortfalls in writing skills. The portfolio helped the learner in providing feedback through the questionnaire as he/she had documented most of her vital experiences with the software.

#### **5.2.4 Assessing the language portfolio**

Chappelle et al (1993) maintain that, in assessing a Language Portfolio, we face difficulties which we do not have, for example, in assessing traditional written tests. In traditional written tests, it is possible to identify and define quite clearly the standards required for assigning grades or a pass/fail. With the Language Portfolio, there are fewer absolute standards and many variable factors. However it still remains the best way of using formative assessment when evaluating independent learning.



#### **5.2.5 Problem areas in portfolio assessment**

The following two problems that portfolio assessment may bring to any research, as per a study conducted by Scarcella et al (1997) are discussed below.

He says that firstly, work may be rushed at the last minute so as to meet the requirement of a set number of pieces of independent learning for inclusion in the portfolio. Secondly, sometimes there is great focus on the quantitative aspect of the work, rather than the qualitative. This means that there is sometimes too much information needed to complete the portfolio and that the subject may end up engrossed in the requirements of this administrative side, whereas what is of importance to any research is the content that belies the performance of that subject. To avoid this problem, the researcher dealt with the problems by using Liou et al's (1992) strategies that are discussed below.

### 5.2.5.1 How can these problems be overcome?

Liou *et al* (1992) share the following optimistic view on how the above-mentioned problems of Portfolio Assessment may be dealt with during a study such as the one being undertaken.

#### Monitoring

The more regular the checks on student progress, the more closely the process can be observed. This would ensure that good, independent learning practice is being implemented. Monitoring also gives an opportunity for students to ask questions, air problems, and re-assess their needs.

Face-to-face monitoring sessions allow discussion with the learner about:

- a) work done so far
- b) Whether or not the student feels that learning is taking place through the activities.

This type of monitoring is, of course, time consuming. However, this is in line with all experience of independent learning activities, that is, they take time and effort to be undertaken successfully.

### 5.3 The survey

The survey questionnaire (Appendix 1) was administered among the subjects of this study upon completion of the software exercises on 26 June 2003. A total of 21 students responded to the questionnaire.

### 5.3.1 Aims and the structure of the survey

The aim of the survey was to obtain feedback from the subjects on their experiences with the software, and to comment on how this experience affected (improved or did not improve) their essay writing abilities. Did they find the software helpful in improving their competence in writing or not? The researcher was also hoping that the students could give input on how they thought the software can better meet with its learning objectives (improving the students' writing skills). The survey also sought to determine whether or not there was a conscious effort on the students' part to improve their capabilities in writing. For this reason, the questionnaire has been designed in a way that seeks information on whether or not the students learnt and applied that which they have learnt from the software. If the response is that the students learnt something from the program, did they consciously create opportunities for learning what the software taught? In addition, the researcher sought to find out if they consciously applied what they have learnt from the WPW to their everyday writing activities?

The concern of the researcher was that if improvement in communicative writing ability occurred due to the interaction with the WPW, then why can the students not apply that knowledge to their everyday writing tasks? and if learning did not occur through the use of the WPW, what was the reason?

From past research experience, the researcher had discovered that when students provide their names when completing questionnaires, it is easier to link their performance to their responses, and thus be able to understand why they perform the way they do, based on their responses in the questionnaire. It is therefore for this reason that the subjects of this study were required to provide their names when

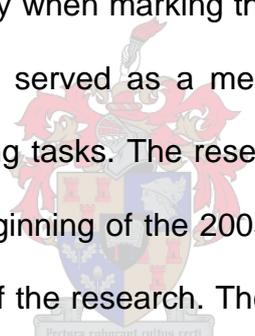
answering the survey questionnaire, and the reason and the importance of such a requirement was highlighted to them.

The last part of the questionnaire was open-ended and required the students to add any further comments that they would like to add. It was expected that all students will answer the questionnaire.

The results of the survey are incorporated into the discussion in Chapter 6.

#### **5.4 Lecturers' ratings**

Five lecturers who lecture the students in other Education courses were asked by the researcher to rate out of ten the students' performance in the areas of grammar that are addressed in this study when marking their written work that is not included in the portfolio. These ratings served as a means for them to keep track of the students' performance in writing tasks. The researcher had briefed them on how to look for these errors at the beginning of the 2003 project and held discussions with each one of them at the end of the research. These discussions were based on the ratings that they submitted to the researcher and they took about 20 minutes for each lecturer. The focus of these discussions was to collect information that would establish if, in the lecturers' opinion, based on the students' writing tasks that they have examined, there has been any improvement in the students' essay-writing skills during the time they were involved in the WPW program. The results of these discussions are incorporated into the discussion in Chapter 6.



## CHAPTER 6

### DATA ANALYSIS: PART 1

#### Student errors, Portfolio, Questionnaire, Lecturer Discussions, Syllabus

##### Introduction

This chapter presents data that has been collected and analyzed by the researcher from the student errors, the portfolio, the survey, and discussions held with the other lecturers and the subjects.

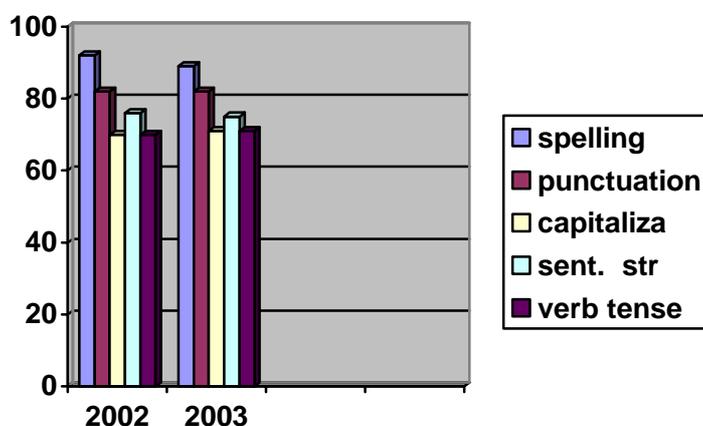
For clarity and to avoid congesting Chapter 6 with too much information, data analysis on the evaluation of the software has been discussed separately in Chapter 7.

##### 6.1 Diagrammatical representation of error analysis data

Figure 1 and Figure 2 below show the proportions of occurrence of different types of the subjects' errors that occurred both in 2002 and 2003.

The researcher, as mentioned in Chapter 5, classified the errors into the two categories that are used in the WPW. These are Usage and Mechanics errors (sentence structure, punctuation, verb tense, capitalization and spelling) and Content errors (editing, revision, topic support, clarity and critical thinking). There were 4 scripts per student in 2002 and 4 scripts per student in 2003, which made a total of 8 scripts for each of the 21 students. She then recorded each error under each category and worked out the average. For example, in 2002, out of the 84 essays, 78 (92%) had at least one spelling error. She applied the same equation to determine the occurrence of errors for both Figure 1 and Figure 2.

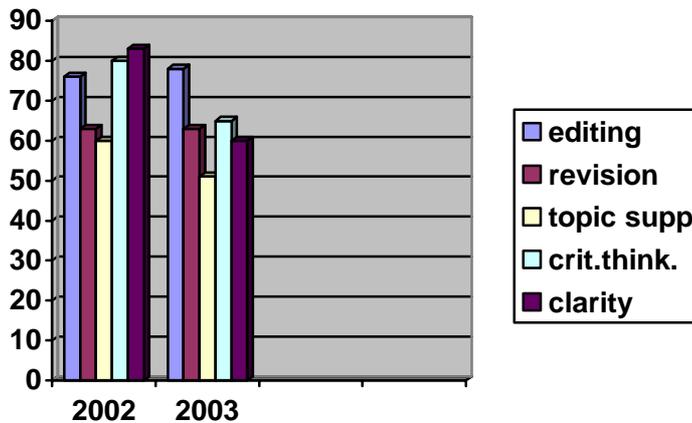
**Figure 1: Language usage and Mechanics error proportions**



The diagram above presents the percentage of errors as they occurred in the two years for all the 21 students. As seen in the diagram above, there is virtually very little, if any improvement in the areas of writing in the students' essays between 2002 and 2003.

The proportion of spelling errors has dropped from 92% to 89%. The proportion of punctuation errors has remained the same at 82%, and capitalization errors have moved from 70% to 71%. The sentence structure errors have decreased from 76% to 75%, whilst verb tense errors increased from 70% to 71%.

**Figure 2: CONTENT error proportions**



The chart above shows the proportion of Content-based errors in 2002 and 2003. In contrast with the Language usage and Mechanics errors (Figure 1), there is a marked decrease in the proportion of content errors that occurred in the students' essays in 2003.

The diagram above shows that the errors of editing increased from 76% to 78% and for revision they have stayed the same at 63%. These errors were determined by looking for what is termed "careless mistakes", that is, those mistakes that would not have occurred had the student taken time and revised her work. Omission and Addition errors were also quite prevalent in this group. For instance, a student would write *I not see him coming* instead of writing *I did not see him coming*.

The diagram shows a marked decrease in the proportion of errors in topic sentence support, critical thinking, and clarity. In these, there was a decrease of 60% to 51%; 80% to 65%, and 83% to 60% respectively.

To determine errors of topic support, the researcher looked at whether the topic sentence is adequately supported by the argument. For errors on critical thinking, the researcher looked at whether or not the student argues her point by putting

across her own ideas or position on the topic. For clarity the researcher sought to determine how clear the argument is, (subject verb disagreement/agreement, redundancy and so on) and if the reader can get the point without seeking clarity from the writer.

It is evident that the students' errors only improved in the areas of clarity, critical thinking and topic support.

## **6.2 The Portfolio**

As mentioned before in Chapter 5, each of the students' portfolios were collected and examined by the researcher. The focus of this portfolio examination was on the students' 2003 written exercises, including their journals (which form part of the portfolio), in order to pick up writing errors that occurred in 2003. The writing errors that were picked up were recorded for each student, and the researcher then tried to establish if each student repeated the same errors that he/she has been making in 2002, by looking back at the data captured from their writing errors of 2002 (See Figures 1 and 2).

### **6.2.1 Presentation of data obtained from the portfolios**

**WPW Work completed:** According to information given in the portfolios, 90% of the students completed all the Persuasive Writing tasks and even attempted other units. 10% did not complete all the tasks. The researcher obtained this information from the sheet which recorded each activity done at the WPW that each student had to keep in the portfolio. For purposes of validity, the students had to indicate to the laboratory assistant every time they completed a task so that he could verify this fact himself.

Based on computer printouts from the program, the researcher deduced that 90% of the students seemed to have performed the required tasks well and were able to proceed to other exercises when working on the computer. This means that this group was able to score, on average, more than 60% in the tasks on first attempt, and upon repeating the tasks; they would score well enough to proceed to other related exercises. To clarify this point further, the software was programmed in such a way that one could not proceed to tasks that belong to one category e.g. summarizing, if one has not scored more than 60%. Such an individual would be prompted until s/he makes the grade so as to proceed to other activities in the same category.

The other 10% of the participants did proceed to other tasks but did not complete all the required tasks. This is the group which (according to feedback), upon feeling too challenged or bored by a certain task, left it for another 'easier' one. The researcher was able to obtain this information from speaking to this group about this fact after finishing the program. They further mentioned that if the program had been designed in a way that did not allow them to proceed at all to other tasks without finishing the one at hand, they would have been forced to work harder on the task at hand until they completed all the tasks.

**Independent Learning Activities:** All the work that involves writing, which was carried out independently by the students when they were involved with the WPW course was examined by the researcher. This work refers to assignment essays and the weekly journals that the students handed in.

The essays were analysed for errors (See section on errors analysis above). The researcher then examined the journals for the Language Usage and Content errors

that are reflected in both Figures 1 and 2. The reason for this further analysis of errors was to determine, on an individual level, if there was any improvement in the writing abilities, as against the general approach used in figures 1 and 2 when the researcher was analysing the essays. Figure 3 below shows the number of errors that occurred in the journal of one of the students during the 3 months when students were involved in the program. For confidentiality reasons, the researcher has coded the name of the subject as 'X'.

**Figure 3. Table reflecting number of errors for student X**

Error type	April	May	June
spelling	28	28	29
punctuation	16	15	14
capitalization	5	7	7
sentence structure	15	12	12
verb tense	9	6	11
editing and revision	4	2	3
topic sentence support	2	2	2
critical thinking	4	3	4
clarity	5	4	4

From the diagram above, one can see that there is a very staggered improvement in this student's essay writing skills.

In conclusion, from the portfolio, it was found that most students concentrated on the first tasks in the WPW; when these tasks became challenging, they would jump around to exercises that interested them. Most students focused mainly on tasks that dealt with supporting a topic, critical writing, and clarity. This is evidently reflected in their performance in their essays. The students avoided editing and revision tasks and sometimes repeated the tasks that they had already done on critical writing. This fact is further discussed in the next Chapter on the evaluation of the software.

### **6.3 The Questionnaire**

From the students' responses in the survey questionnaire, the following was found:



#### **6.3.1 Software content**

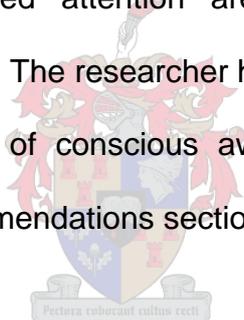
95% of the students felt that they were able to grasp the idea of developing critical thinking and clarity from the WPW. They also admitted that the software spelt out clearly how to support a topic. 65% said that they were able to support their essay topics, but were unable to proceed in writing their essays because facts seemed to get jumbled up and they could not fit them in a coherent order. They also said that the software made clear the issues of revision and editing although it is clear that most students did not apply this knowledge.

The following points have been compiled by the researcher, based on the open ended question at the bottom of the questionnaire:

### **6.3.2 Linguistic ability**

Although the researcher had, with each of the subjects, drafted a list of their individual strong and weak points of essay writing during the orientation period, it was found that 15 % of the students are still not able to identify their own inabilities or problem areas on their own, or do not have a constant awareness of their weak and strong points. The researcher felt that they need to be equipped with a skill of analyzing their own difficulties and accepting them so as to apply effort towards working on them.

Judging by the errors still evident in this group of students' essays, areas of linguistic ability that still need attention are spelling, punctuation, sentence structures, editing and revision. The researcher has written out a recommendation to address the problem of lack of conscious awareness by the students of their inadequacies under the recommendations section in Chapter 8.



### **6.3.3 Motivation**

It was found that marks seemed to play an important part in motivating the students to perform well in the WPW. The students mostly felt that it would be good to get printed results each week from the WPW. They also felt that WPW marks should be made part of the year mark. The students also said that they were motivated by the user- friendliness of the program, especially the feedback, which referred to them by their names.

#### **6.3.4 Attention**

50% of the students admitted to feeling sleepy during the WPW because of the overly warm temperature in the laboratory. This is due to the air conditioning system which does not function properly at the laboratory. Some said they felt tense and 'deviated their attention to other things' when faced with tasks that they felt uneasy with.

#### **6.3.5 Teaching Methodology**

40% of the students felt that it would be good if Communication in English lecturers taught essay writing the way that the program taught it. They felt that the program was more patient and that they were never thrown in the deep end to work out essay writing rules on their own. Unfortunately for the students, the syllabus is designed in a way that assumes that the students already learnt the rules while in High school, and therefore, the syllabus does not cater for teaching them these rules.

#### **6.3.6 Time factor**

Most students, especially the 10% which did not complete the assigned Persuasive Writing tasks, felt that the three months was not enough for them to master every learning aspect that the WPW had to offer. They also felt that it would be more beneficial to them if the program was stretched to six months.

#### **6.4 Lecturers' ratings discussion**

The discussions held between the researcher and the five lecturers who taught other Education courses to the subjects of this study is mentioned have been mentioned briefly in Chapter 5. They focused on spelling, coherence, word order, building arguments and critical thinking, punctuation, topic and supporting sentences, and revising.

- a) Spelling: All five lecturers said that the students' spelling has not improved
- b) Word order: All lecturers said some essays still showed signs of jumbled sentences, and students still have a tendency of jumping from one point to the other.
- c) Building an argument, critical thinking: 4 out of 5 lecturers agreed that there seemed to be improvement in this area in many of the essays.
- d) Punctuation and verb tense: All lecturers thought that if students revised their work, there would be great improvement in this area because they noted that there were still consistent punctuation and tense errors in most of the students' essays.
- e) Topic sentences: 3 out of 5 lecturers felt that there was improvement in this area.

#### **6.5 Syllabus comparison**

The researcher also looked into the writing skills syllabus of the Eastern Cape Technikon in order to establish if there are any major differences in the content with the WPW, and if the two complement each other. The reason for this exercise was motivated by the students' comments which highlighted the fact that they preferred

the WPW approach to learning essay writing to the normal way of instruction. The researcher did the examination of the syllabus with this question in mind: what causes the students to think that the WPW is the better option with regards to content and methodology? The researcher felt that if the two (WPW and the syllabus) complemented each other, the students would begin to see the learning process as a whole, and not view one separately from the other. From the researcher's point of view, this would make it easy for the students to transfer, easily, what they have learnt from the WPW to the classroom, and vice versa.

It was found that the two are totally different in their approach to teaching writing. A copy of the syllabus' outcomes is attached as Appendix 3.

From the appendix, one can see that there is very little that is taught on essay writing, with most writing exercises focusing on report writing, note taking, and writing minutes of meetings. The students, on the other hand, as per their response in the questionnaire, admit that they need the kind of guidance that the WPW offers. Upon further investigation, (discussion with the Head of Department) it was found that the perception of the Department was that the WPW would deal with what could not be dealt with in class. By this, the researcher means that the syllabus is designed in a way that makes assumptions<sup>6</sup> about the level of competence of the student, and does not include the ground rules of essay writing that the WPW includes.

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<sup>6</sup> As tertiary level students, the students are supposed to have been taught and mastered essay writing skills at the lower levels of their studies

## CHAPTER 7

### DATA ANALYSIS: PART 2

#### SOFTWARE EVALUATION

##### Introduction

The following Chapter is a discussion of the researcher's evaluation of the WPW. The reason for this evaluation is that the researcher wanted to determine whether or not the program is responsible for the students' lack of improvement in their writing skills. In order to evaluate the program adequately, the researcher had to evaluate the structural/technical and the content aspects of the program.

The criteria that she used for evaluating the structural/technical aspects was derived from a study made by the HSRC and other CALL researchers (See Chapter 3) for reasons mentioned in the same chapter. For evaluating the content of the program, she employed, in addition to other researchers' criteria, the format used is the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training programme used for teachers of modern languages in UK schools because its comprehensive nature fits in with the study. For clarity on how students found the WPW, she used their feedback that they wrote in their journals that formed part of the portfolio.

##### 7.1 Software content analysis

According to Chapelle (1997), if the content of the program is not relevant or does not address the needs of the student, then the purpose of the language software is lost. For instance, in the case of this study, the content of the program should ideally be designed to address the issue of inadequacy in the students' essay writing skills.

If it does not address this by providing the types of information and exercises needed to develop the students' writing skills, then the researcher would deem it not suitable, and that it is not an adequate tool for use for the subjects in the study.

### **7.1.1 The language curriculum design**

The learning activities contained in the program were varied and appropriate. The students reported that they found the activities quite engaging and challenging. The students who showed improvement in their writing skills mentioned that the way the curriculum was designed made it easier to achieve adequacy in their writing skills, and they were able to apply this adequacy in their essay writing exercises.

The program also had a glossary or reference section which referred the subjects to other resources for further reading.

The learner could also meaningfully 'dip' into the material and was not required to follow a chronological order. While this flexibility was good, it presented problems of a shift in focus for the subjects (See Chapter 6: Questionnaire)

The language activities that the module supported were outcomes-based and involved activities such as journal writing, biography writing, essay writing, brainstorming, editing, revision, pre-writing and so on. The content was extensive, that is, the scope was wide and required intensive work on the part of the students.

In the questionnaire, the students who did not complete all the tasks said that the insufficient time that they were afforded to interact with the program and the volume of the scope influenced their not completing all the tasks.

The approach used supported both teacher-led and student-centered activities. For instance, during the orientation period (the first day), the researcher had to give instructions to all the subjects, paused if need be, and showed the students how to

operate the program. She did this from the lecturer's main station (computer) which is located in the front of the laboratory, and onto a screen projecting what appeared on her monitor.

### **7.1.2 The learning focus of the program**

As a starting point, the researcher sought to find out what the learning focus of the program is so as to determine if it will address the issue of developing the essay writing skills of the subjects. She did this by going through the documentation that accompanied the program.

According to the accompanying documentation, the expected learning outcomes regarding the targeted module was that the students will show evidence of writing competencies by being able to identify a topic, write a topic sentence, write with clarity and conciseness, write an essay that shows critical thinking, and produce good essays which show evidence of editing and revision. The objectives also linked the part of editing and revision to the fact that the students should be able to write essays that are free of grammatical errors like lack of punctuation, wrong verb tense and so on.

The researcher stated these objectives clearly to the subjects a day before they started with the program, and together with each subject, they wrote a list of the student's areas of writing inadequacies and adequacies, together with the goals that each student set for herself, based on the program's objectives.

### **7.1.3 Learning outcomes**

The WPW does support the learning outcomes that are laid out by the designers by engaging in revision exercises that the students engage in. The exercises are quite

interactive and immediately after the teaching of a concept, exercises follow so that the students may get to do the practical side of things whilst the theory is still fresh in the memory.

#### **7.1.4 Quality and availability of materials**

What is the quality of the program's performance? For example, is there good sound delivery? Is it good enough for the intended teaching/learning aims? Are learning materials readily available?

The learning material was readily available, and materials were available to the subjects. These were reference resources and the package that came with the program. Unfortunately, the online references could not be accessed by the students because only one computer in the laboratory has Internet access, and because it is the main station, they are not allowed to use it.



#### **7.1.5 Feedback**

Feedback occurred on a personal note, and students appreciated this as they did not feel so much that they are only dealing with a computer. One student mentioned in the questionnaire that seeing her name on the screen made her quite excited, and made her settle in quite quickly into the program. The subjects were required to engage in exercises after being taught a particular concept or theory, and the program is designed in such a way that it gives the student three chances to get the exercise right.

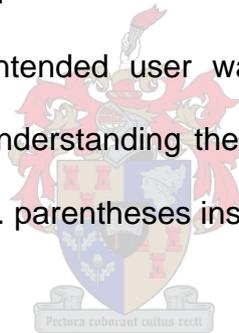
For instance, the first feedback would be *Sorry, Tandi (name of student), try again*. If the student gets the answer wrong again, then he/she will be given clues, if the

answer is wrong again, the correct answer will be provided in a friendly manner by the *professor*<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of progress, the subjects received feedback on their activity through the scores that were normally printed out, although not consistently so, by the laboratory assistant. The reason for this irregularity was that there is only one central printer which, due to being used by all the laboratories, used to break down. The students did mention in their feedback that, as a source of motivation, they would like to see their scores regularly. The researcher, however, used her own office printer to obtain the scores on the subjects' performance.

### **7.1. 6 Level of language used**

The language level of the intended user was clear, and the subjects did not experience any problems in understanding the instructions although some sections did use a few Americanism e.g. parentheses instead of brackets.



### **7.2 Software Technical Structural Evaluation**

Many hypertext systems are poorly designed and are built in a way that does not address the needs of the user. When Brown (1990) conducted an assessment on the quality of hypertext systems designed by seventy student authors, he discovered that poor design of the visual appearance of material, overuse of technology with lots of clever effects, lack of a coherent overall structure, and presentation style were some of the prevalent faults identified.

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<sup>7</sup>. The Professor is the cartoon character with a friendly disposition who appears in the beginning of each section and speaks in the form of a bubble. He also appears when the user clicks on the Help button.

This shortfall on the language software designers' part may contribute to the program not being able to achieve its purpose. It is for this reason that the researcher sought to evaluate the WPW in order to assess whether or not it does meet the criteria of quality software, as set out by the researchers who have already been referred to by the researcher.

The following are the criteria that the researcher used in evaluating the technical and structural facets of the system. In order to fill in gaps that might not have been adequately addressed in the questionnaire, the researcher carried out an expert review to determine answers to some of the issues that the students provided feedback on in terms of the technical aspects of the WPW.

### **7.2.1 Interface Issues**

Interface issues refer to the information channel that allows the hypertext system to explain the internal structure and representation of nodes and links to the user in the simplest and most effective way, and for the user to communicate his intentions and obtain the answer to his intentions. The WPW incorporated interface design principles that served to ensure: (i) consistency of presentation; and (ii) very little was required of the subjects in terms of having to remember objects, actions, and codes to navigate the system.

### **7.2.2 Navigation aids**

During the orientation stage, the researcher went through the system with the subjects very briefly (so that they could learn most things regarding navigation independently later). This brief orientation dealt with information that pertains to the structure and width of the document (only the Module that they were supposed to

do), the buttons and the links, and the way they respond to given functions, e.g., hovering, the colour of links when a mouse is placed over them, and so on. The reason for this orientation was to facilitate the way the subjects oriented themselves, and the researcher wanted to avoid the problems that poor navigation presents to the users, as highlighted by Conklin (1987), "At any point in the system, there should be sufficient information for users such as the use of title, subtitle, page numbers, and so on" (p. 37). He further suggests using graphical document browsers to display the structure of the document so as to allow users to assess what is there.

Hammond and Allinson (1989) maintain that much of the problem in navigation and in particular, disorientation, lies in the lack of understanding of the document structure and the inability of users to assess the amount and size of information available. They maintain that users' lack of overview information or wrong understanding of the hypertext structure make them more prone to losing their orientation. They suggest that in order to have more 'reader-friendly' systems, care should be taken to ensure that users do not feel 'lost'.

In terms of user orientation, the WPW has a map that the user can use to determine information on what documents are linked to the current document that they are using. This map is good for the users, especially the ones who are the subjects of this study whose IT skills are very minimal because it enables them to answer questions like: 'Where am I?'; 'Where do I go from here?'; 'How much information is there?'; 'How did I arrive here?' and so on.

### **7.2.3 Screen and information display**

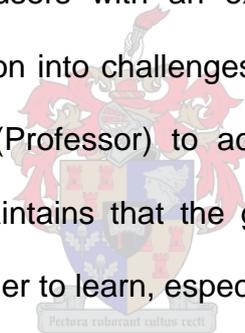
The WPW's screen and information display fits in with Benest's criteria (1990), when he says that it should be kept short and simple, with only the necessary information

displayed. He also says that information should also be grouped to reflect relationships and ordered to capture the hierarchical structure of a program; and this is a fact which the WPW maintains throughout.

According to Yalden (1987), critical information should be highlighted, though this should be used with discretion and only for a small proportion of information on the screen. In the WPW, each topic is highlighted clearly so that the user is able to determine when he/she has moved to a new topic. There is also consistency in the use of terminology, wording, and format on the screen.

#### **7.2.4 Fun to use**

Carroll's (1982) paper "The adventure of getting to know a computer" advocates the game metaphor to present users with an exploratory environment and to turn obstacles such as disorientation into challenges. The WPW consistently applied the use of a cartoon character (Professor) to achieve this together with interesting interactive exercises. She maintains that the game metaphor can be exploited in making hypertext systems easier to learn, especially for computer-shy students.



#### **7.2.5 Ease of use and Dialogue design**

In answering the question: How easy was the WPW for the subjects to use? The students and the researcher found it very user friendly (see sections on 'navigation' and 'ease of use' above). All that the students had to do was log in, and on the opening page screen, they were prompted to type in their names so that the feedback they get when doing their exercises always incorporates that name.

### **7.2.6 Help options and cultural relevance**

The subjects could seek help any time they felt stuck when doing the exercises. Areas of help included grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, although the latter part falls under a separate module. The HELP button, which is very visible on all the pages, is quite efficient. The content did not address cultural concepts that were specifically geared towards the subjects; rather it dealt with general issues that they apparently could still relate to once these were explained to them. To clarify this point, some of the exercises required the students to write to the Headmaster and complain about the lack of lockers in the school. The students in this research group did not attend schools which made use of lockers, and they could only understand the concept when the researcher explained it to them. Surprisingly in their feedback, the students did not mention this fact as something that bothered them during their interaction with the WPW.



### **7.2.7 Visuals and appeal**

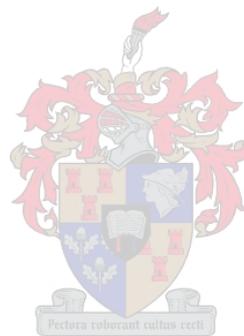
Does this program have appeal? Are learners therefore motivated to extend their learning? The subjects found the user-friendly nature of the program quite appealing, and they expressed the need to spend more time to interact with the program. On the other hand, the researcher does not rule out the fact that they might also have needed to spend more time in the program so as to familiarize themselves with it.

In addition, the program was not too cluttered. It had just enough pictures which did not, in any way, serve to distract the subjects' attention. In fact, the ones that were present were iconic, and this fact made it easier for the subjects to move around the different parts of the program. In addition, these iconic pictures also served as an aid to understanding how the program worked and were relevant to the content. The

choice of colours was also adequate for the age the subjects. This means that because the subjects are young adults, the light colours used had more appeal than if too many bright and bold colours were used.

### **7.2.7 Index or menu**

Fillion and Boyle (1991) suggest that the table of contents, index and references have to be included in any hypertext system. The software package had an index or menu that guided learners towards the grammatical, lexical or other linguistic content of the module and the students found it informative.



## CHAPTER 8

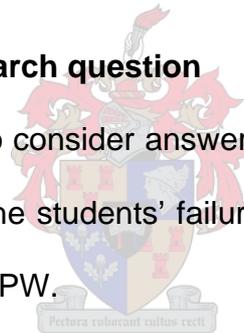
### CONCLUSION

#### **8.1 Present problems compared to original problems**

Judging from the performance of the students and the feedback from the interviews of the lecturers, it appears that very specific problem areas that were present regularly in 2002 that were being experienced by the majority of students are still present; the only improvement is in areas of critical thinking, clarity, and topic sentence support. The question arises as to why these problems have not been removed in spite of the students having gone through the WPW.

#### **8.2 Review of the initial research question**

At this stage, it is necessary to consider answering the research question: What are the factors that contribute to the students' failure to improve the essay writing skills in spite of going through the WPW.



From the data analysis, the researcher has deduced that the WPW, although it has very minimal shortfalls, is adequately designed to assist the students in improving their writing skills. However, because it is used in isolation, and without proper planning, its objectives are lost to the students and they do not apply what they have learnt to their essay writing exercises.

This then means that the curriculum design is the first factor that contributes to the students' writing skills not improving.

The second factor that has been discovered was that the students themselves do not put effort into revising and editing their work. This fact might mislead any reader

into thinking that the student is not competent, whereas it is just lack of enthusiasm, in terms of editing, on the part of the student that is the culprit.

The third factor that was discovered by the researcher was that, as second language speakers of English, the students have a very limited vocabulary to draw from when writing their essays. This fact makes them write words or phrases that do not fit in with the sentence, and this fact can lead to lack of comprehension on the part of the lecturer who has to mark the essay.

The fourth factor was that the students misuse the flexible nature of the program and only concentrated on those tasks that they find less challenging. This might be because they may not be working beyond, but rather, below their capabilities.

The fifth factor that the researcher discovered was that some students are still unable to identify their weak areas of essay writing.



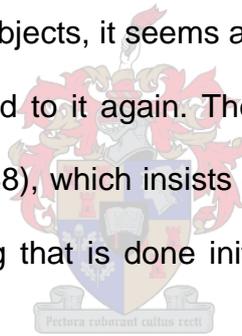
## CHAPTER 9

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions made in Chapter 8, the researcher has come up with the following recommendations:

#### **9.1 Students being able to identify their weak and strong areas of essay writing**

As argued in Chapter 6, the researcher believes that for any student to tackle her writing problems, she must have an ongoing awareness of the areas that need improvement in her writing. As much as the identification of such areas was done by both the researcher and the subjects, it seems as if the students filed the list away in the portfolio and never referred to it again. The researcher therefore thinks that a strategy devised by Porte (1988), which insists on this awareness to be an ongoing process, as against something that is done initially and then forgotten would deal with this problem.



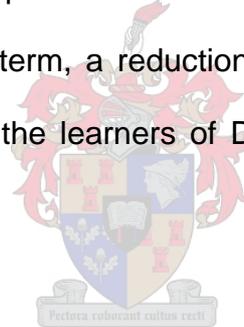
Porte maintains that most of the errors of the subjects are so ingrained that a student may not have perceived them as such, and is thus liable to repeat them. Thus he suggests that students keep a 'Boob Book' in which a student writes a personal mistake and its correct version and use it as his unique reference book. He says that this helps to create awareness in noting and correcting personal mistakes ingrained in the learner.

In an exercise whereby students have to re-write sentences (correctly), culled from their written work, it is very common that even after going through the errors orally in

class, a student corrects the errors made by others and yet indicates that his particular one needs no alteration.

“Therefore”, says Porte, “there would be distinct advantages with this awareness-raising strategy of correction over the traditional "code" systems of script correction” (p. 88). He makes the point that while this system is teacher initiated at the beginning, (time consuming due to the need to provide analysis of personal problem areas) the strategy is designed to eventually become a student-initiated system. This system could also be adapted while doing exercises with the language computer program where the student might record in the ‘Boob book’ all the errors that she received feedback on.

In the short term, one may hope for an increase in the quality of language use in written work; and in the long term, a reduction of incorrect usage being taught to younger learners who will be the learners of Diploma in Education students upon graduating.



## **9.2 More time needed by the students to interact with the system**

Based on the questionnaire feedback from the students, the researcher discovered that the students complained that the time that they spent involved in the software was insufficient to gain all the skills needed for adequate essay writing. The group of students who complained more was the 10% who did not complete all the required exercises in the program. Upon further investigation, the researcher found that these students did not settle on the exercises that challenged or bored them, as a result, they spent most of their time re-doing other exercises, and therefore, the issue of time could be used as an excuse by this group.

The researcher then recommends that, at weekly intervals, the laboratory assistant should monitor the progress of all the students, and if found to have covered few exercises, should work out targets with the student to ensure that she completes all the exercises. In addition, the assistant should be at hand to assist this student when she feels challenged by a task, so that she is not tempted to skip it and tackle something easier.

### **9.3 Motivation for students to revise and edit their work**

As mentioned in Chapter 6, the researcher found out that some of the students exhibit gradual improvement on their writing skills, but due to not revising and editing their work in their successive essays, they make errors in the areas that the researcher had noted improvement on. By their own admission, they agreed that they had not revised their work. In order to facilitate this culture of revision in their work, the researcher recommends that there be a system where the subject lecturers work with the language lecturers so as to put pressure on the students to revise their written work.

This would be done by allocating marks strictly for writing. This means that out of 100 marks for the essay content, 30 marks would be for grammar. The language lecturer would thus mark the grammar part of the essay, and the subject lecturer would mark the content part. The language lecturer would then identify the students who seem to have problems in the area of grammar and work with them individually in a form of a tutorial, and also engage them in the post-writing part of the program. Students could also exercise responsibility by going through their previous marked script(s) just before preparing the final draft of new work to refresh their minds of the

errors that may have been pointed out earlier to them which through ingrained misuse, they may not have been aware of at the time of writing.

#### **9.4 The need for the program to be integrated into the curriculum and be used complimentary**

Most importantly, there has to be a thorough integration of the system into the curriculum. This means that, based on the students' feedback from the questionnaire, they tend to view the skills learnt from the WPW program in isolation with the rest of the Communication Department's writing component of the syllabus due to the vast difference in the approach between the two.

Looking at Appendix 3, one notices that there is no emphasis on essay writing although this is the most important component of writing in a tertiary institution. The areas of essay writing that are tackled are 'giving an opinion' and 'building an argument' (week 10 & 11). These are the areas that the students showed improvement on after being involved in the software (see figure 2 in Chapter 6) This has made the researcher conclude that when the students tackled the same areas in the software, it confirmed what they had learnt in class, and they had an opportunity to put the confirmed knowledge to practice, and thus they gained confidence in this area.

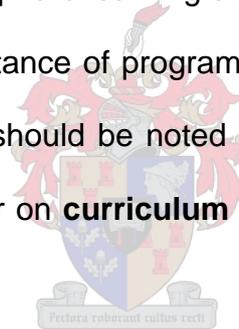
In making recommendations on software-curriculum integration, the researcher has also referred to the results of the CIEL project (a UK based organization which is responsible for a number of learning support projects) whose outcomes confirm the importance of this integration. The CIEL's National Co-ordination Team co-ordinates projects funded under the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning

(FDTL) and Teaching and Learning Technology Programme (TLTP) on behalf of the Higher Education Fund and has had extensive research on issues of Higher learning. In the experience of the CIEL project, independent language learning is most successful when integrated firmly into the language curriculum and is not just an addition to classroom work. Below are some of the benefits of the integration, as highlighted by the CIEL <<http://www.ncteam.ac.uk/projects/>>.

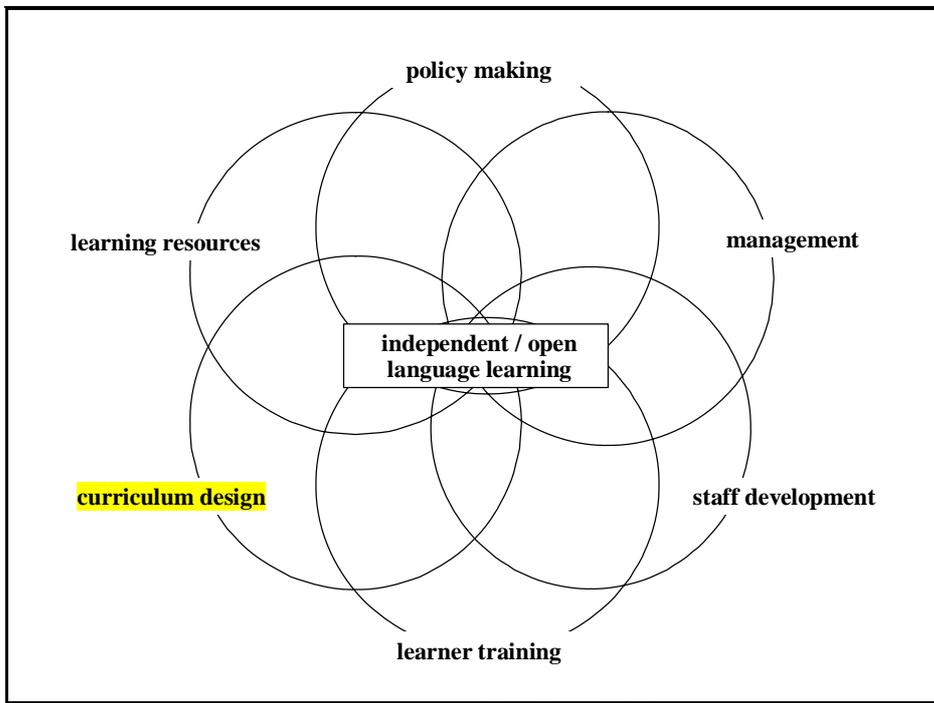
### **9.5 Benefits and challenges of the integration of the software program into the curriculum**

- a) Learners focus on the process of learning as well as the product
- b) Learners develop appropriate learning strategies.

In order to illustrate the importance of program-curriculum integration, the following recommendations from CIEL should be noted (While all the factors in the diagram below are important, the factor on **curriculum** design (highlighted) is most relevant to this study):



**Figure 4: Implementing successful independent language learning: CIEL's 6 key areas**



### 9.5.1 Curriculum design

In interpreting the diagram above, and relating it to the study, it can be seen that the diagram has 6 key factors that are outlined and are interlinked, with the central point being the independent learning, which in the case of this study is the WPW. What this diagram emphasizes is that, for any independent learning to take place effectively, there should be collaboration between these key factors, with clearly formulated boundaries and interrelated strategies. However, because the focus of this recommendation is on curriculum integration, the researcher will limit the discussion to this key point of the diagram.

“In our experience, the design of the curriculum is crucial to the successful implementation or otherwise of independent learning. The other key factors identified (policy making, management, staff development, learner training, learning

resources) can be optimally in place, but without a curriculum which values the development of independent learning and makes time and space for it in the academic timetable, there is likely to be limited success” (CIEL).

As can be seen from the diagram, curriculum design is close to learning resources. In the Technikon, the WPW, which is a learning resource is not linked to the curriculum, as a result, the goal, which is the development of essay writing skills (independent learning) is not being achieved as shown in Chapter 6 (error analysis). Therefore, the Department of Communication should include the following considerations on how to embed independent learning in the curriculum:

- a) The curriculum focus** – As seen in Appendix 3, the curriculum focus for writing strategies is mainly on other forms of writing and not specifically on essay writing. The tasks that are given to students are neither grammar based, nor functional. The high incidence of lexical errors (Appendix 2) shows that there is a serious paucity in the lexical-functional grammar of the students. The students do not have a wide vocabulary to draw from as they write. They are forced to approximate usage from their limited store of words. Therefore, it may be said that they generate linguistic forms from the limited language data they possess. The result of this strategy is a wide variety of local errors as well as some global ones. An illustration of this language use strategy is evident in some sentences in Appendix 2: *The rate of violence has grown up rather than The rate of violence has increased.*

What this implies is that the curriculum should be designed to address this issue by building grammar skills modules into the curriculum and also encourage outside reading and interaction in the target language.

The Department can even purchase software that deals with reading strategies. The students may also be encouraged to use the dictionary facilities available in the WPW.

In addition, the WPW's Persuasive Writing module focuses on essay writing, which although it is an important part of learning in a tertiary institution, is not fully addressed by the curriculum. This fact is enough to create in the mind of the student an idea that the two (mainstream curriculum and the WPW) have nothing to do with each other. However, if the focus of the curriculum would be on essay writing, then the students would relate the two together, and once they have acquired the relevant skills, they can be extended to the other forms of writing such as Report writing.

**b) The delivery – ratio of teacher contact time to independent learning time**

The ratio of lecturer contact time to independent learning time is also very important. The lecturers should be seen by the students as being interested in the program, and should not just leave it to the laboratory assistant to deal with the students' language problems. The curriculum should be designed in such a way that some of the lectures are conducted at the laboratory. That way, the program will be perceived by the students as part of the curriculum and vice versa.

**c) The content -** The type of classroom/independent learning activities and tasks should be structured in such a way that the one confirms the other. For instance, if the lecturer tackles topic sentence support in class, he should refer the students to the software to learn more about

topic sentence support. If the content is intensive in the software, it should also be made intensive in class so that the students can understand the concepts better.

## 9.6 Building a resource base

According to Kussler (1990), a resource system that promotes independent learning should consist of a multitude of materials, of tools to work with on these materials, and of a list of tasks to be accomplished by learner. From the discussions regarding the problems that the students experienced when going through the program, the researcher has made the following recommendations:

- a) **Insufficient number of workstations:** The Department should fix the other computers that are present in the laboratory, and if possible, purchase more because 21 stations is not enough for all the Communication in English students who would like to go through the program.
- b) **Printing facilities:** There should be more than one printer in the laboratory so that the students can receive consistent feedback on their performance by way of printed records.
- c) **Air-conditioning in the laboratory:** This needs to be fixed because it affects the students' attention span and performance. In addition, absence of air-conditioning may lead to collective moisture which may damage the computers.
- d) **Online references:** During the course of the study, the students could not access the other online references due to lack of Internet facilities. This fact prevented the WPW from being utilized to its full capacity by the students, and this did put them at a disadvantage. It is therefore important that the

Department consider Internet facility connection which can be easily controlled.

In conclusion, the most crucial element for independent learning is the degree of integration of independent learning with the language curriculum, and this can be achieved by considering the recommendations outlined above and linking them together as part of the independent learning process. “If the links are not in place, only the most dedicated of learners will prioritise independent learning in order to take charge of their own future” (CIEL).



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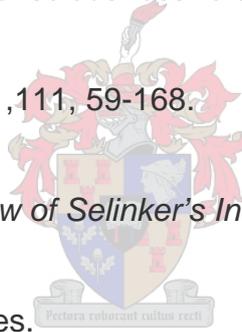
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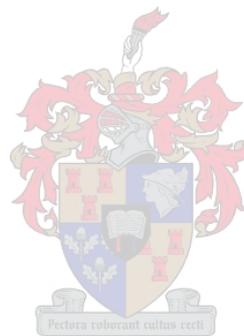
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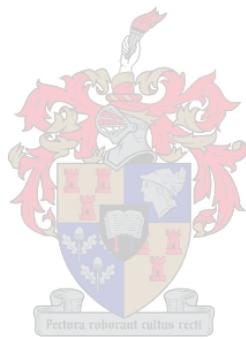
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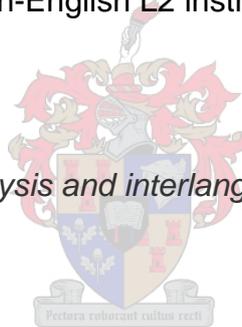
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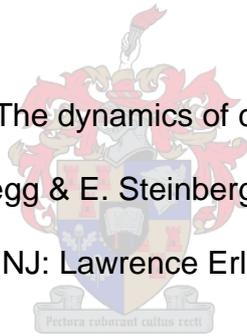
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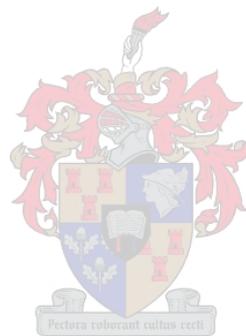
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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### Student Questionnaire

My research is purely for academic reasons and the information you provide will be treated confidentially. You are thus, urged to answer the questions honestly and in as much detail as possible. Please attempt all questions. For those questions you consider irrelevant, kindly put "N/A" (not applicable). Some questions will require that you indicate your response from the suggested list of answers. Please tick next to the response you have chosen. **Please note:** In the questionnaire, Writing Process Workshop is referred to as WPW.



SURNAME..... INITIALS.....

1. Has WPW improved your essay writing skills in any way?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer.....

.....

2. After being exposed to the WPW:

2.1 My ability to write coherently is.....

2.2 My ability to write a clear argument is .....

3. Which one of the following sections of essay writing did you find most difficult before being involved in the Writing Process Workshop?

spelling

revision

editing

4. Which one of the following essay writing sections do you still find difficult after being involved in the WPW?

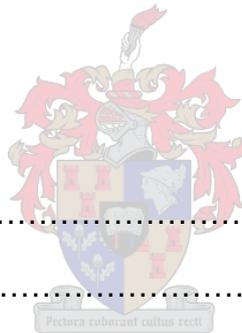
spelling

revision

editing

Please explain your answer.....

.....



5. Are methods and the content used in teaching essay writing the same as the ones used in Communication in English classes?

Yes

No

If your answer is 'no', please explain the difference.....

.....

6. Would you like to have the WPW approach of teaching writing skills used in Communication in English classes?

Yes

No

Please provide reasons for your answer.....

.....

7. Would you like to be more aware of your marks in the WPW? Explain.

.....

.....

8. How often would you like to receive your printed WPW work?

Every week

Every session

Never



9. Do you enjoy writing essays more after being exposed to WPW?

A lot

A little

Not at all

Please provide reasons for your answer.....

.....

10. Did you feel motivated to do well at WPW?

Sometimes

Always

Never

Please provide reasons for your answer.....

.....

11. Have you ever achieved 'excellent' score at the WPW?

Often

A few times

Never

12. After being exposed to the WPW, my ability to write a good essay is ...

weak

average

strong



Please give reasons for your answer.....

.....

13. Would you like going to WPW more often each week?

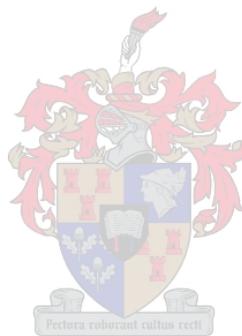
Yes

No

14. What good ideas do you have which would motivate more students to get through WPW?

.....  
.....

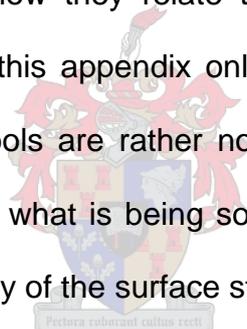
**Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this survey.**



## APPENDIX 2

### ERRORS

While it is easier to write out and pick up Language usage and mechanics errors, it is not possible to write out Content areas without having to show the students' whole script. To explain this further, it is easier, for example, to spot and write out the student's verb tense error. However, although it is also easy to pick up an error on clarity, writing it out as an appendix would mean lifting out the error sentence together with the paragraph or previous sentence, or even the topic that it fails to clarify. This is because the errors that fall into this category can only be picked up when assessed in terms of how they relate to the whole essay argument. It is therefore for this reason that this appendix only shows Language usage errors. It may be argued that the symbols are rather not specific as tools of getting to the source of error, but this is not what is being sought in this part of this paper. The focus is, undoubtedly, a scrutiny of the surface structure of the subjects' errors.



### Elicited task procedures

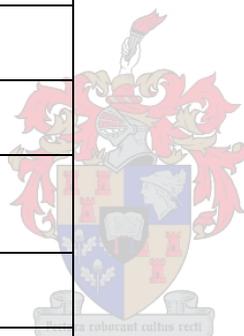
The errors that were analysed were transcribed from a sample of 168 essay scripts (4 scripts from each of the 21 subjects involved in the study in 2002, and another 4 scripts each in 2003). Only the sentences with errors were transcribed from the scripts. Because of the enormous number of errors collected, the researcher has just written out a sample so that she can show how she analyzed the errors. These are further divided into groups under the name (subject A, B, C and so on) of the student from whose errors they were culled.

## Error identification symbols

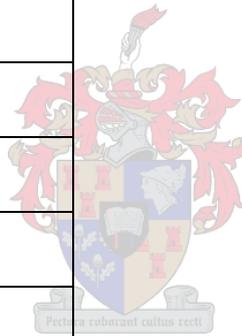
The marking symbols used for the identification of errors are presented below. For clarity, the **word-choice** type of error covers a wide range of **selection errors** in cases where the subject wrote the wrong lexical term, preposition, pronoun, lexical / auxiliary / modal verbs, homophones, articles as well as non-existent words.

### TABLE OF ERROR IDENTIFICATION SYMBOLS AND MEANINGS

Symbol	Meaning
//	New paragraph
PR	use pronoun
PER	shift in person
NR	number problem
G	use gerund
ART	article problem
A	antecedent
AG/P	agreement pronoun
PREP	add preposition
P	incorrect punctuation
CAP	capitalize
L1/TR	translation from L1
WR	wrong



^	add omitted words
?	Meaning unclear
N	Use noun
Mod	Modals
REF	Pronoun reference
WD/CH	Word choice
VB/T	Verb tense
VB/F	Verb form
SP	Spelling
O	Omit
ADJ	Adjective problem
INFML	Informal
WO	Word order
ADV	Adverb problem
UN	unclear verb



## **2002 Errors**

### **Student A**

- It is excruciatingly relentless (WD/CH) to see the year go by without achieving anything.
- We are also tired of being given homeworks (WR) and not get chances of rectifying our own(?).
- There were no tungable (SP) facts.

- The custom (WD/CH) of expelling teachers occurred even to (PREP) other schools. It was an inevitable pandemonium (SP) and chaos (O).

### Student B

- They acted without even consulting people who bare (WD/CH) more clear (WD/CH) than they were. (?)
- (^) Cars of the white people were chased with stones (WD/CH) (L1/TR) without considering that in this country we depend on foreign people.
- Many buildings and equipments (NR) were destructed (VB/F).
- The government has to maintain (WD/CH) such destruction by rebuilding schools.
- Now peace is moving (WD/CH) just like (^) the previous years.



### Student C

- Most unfortunately (^) leaders were not attacked.
- It was due to misunderstandings (SP) with (^) South African National Defence Force.
- To (WR/PREP) my opinion, mass action is a curse.
- .The rate of violence has grown up (WD/CH).
- The rate of prostitution (SP) is growing up (WD/CH).
- People who live in Johannesburg have (^) tendency of buying (^) every time before eating. They don't have groceries in their cardboard boxes (WD/CH).

### Student D

- The (ART) notable event of last year was the wedding of me (AG/P). It was on (^) Sunday afternoon.
- There was (^) musical (WD/CH) band from Umtata
- After that we all move (VB/T) to my husband's home where we find (VB/T) that we are (VB/T) not welcome.
- His mother did not want me to be the wife of his (WD/CH) son.
- It was a day I (^) never forget in my life.

### Student E

- Lets (P) say at night there is no water and the municipality is on strike, so you (WD/CH) are going to stay there miserable (?)
- Although we know that time waisted (WD/CH) is never return (VB/T), the young ones (WD/CH) are very happy when they are told that there is no school.
- I think by doing (WD/CH) this mass action, we want to be one.
- We must (MOD) not exaggerate and trying (VB/T) to be fast (?). We must do it snappy (ADV) (INFORML) in order to get (^) new democratic SA(?)

## 2003 Errors

### **Student A**

- It allows women to say what he or she (REF) want to say.
- Mass action fight (VB/T) for democracy.
- Mass action resulted in dying (VB/F) of people like flies
- In my country, it is the gintsa's (P) who are ringleaders. They do (WD/CH) the mass action in a way that is not appetizing (WD/CH). It is because there is no one to educate them (^) how to do it.
- Can (MOD) it be possible that an uneducated and unskilled maid can earn R800 a month?

### **Student B**

- 
- I also curse (WD/CH) mass action because it retards (VB/T) the prosperity of the country.
  - What can I (WO) say about a (O) mass action is that it is a curse.
  - They are either not happy about (WD/CH) their government or the situation they work under it (O).
  - Mass action is a blessing because the rulling (SP) statesmen cannot (WD/CH) knows people's grievances(R-O) if we (WD/CH) sit and not open their (REF) mouth.

### Student C

- I curse mass action sometime(X) because it do (VB/T) not help us somewhere somehow (WR)(INFML).
- People think that mass action will make everything they want (^) be right (WD/CH).
- I suggest that we do (WD/CH) mass action if we get the (ART/O) permission of (PREP) doing (VB/T) it.
- If there is a (ART/O) mass action (^) the whole of Eastern Cape, in (^) case of hospitals (P) what will (MOD) happen to the patients, (P) because even the doctor (NR) and nurses are involve (VB/T), and are the people who are there to serve (WD/CH) our lives. They are not supposing (VB/T) to work?
- Just imagine the infants living (VB/T) alone by nurses and doctors.



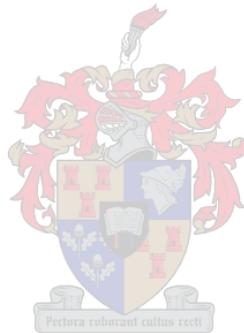
### Student D

- A notable day for me was when I found (WD/CH) [L1/TR] my results.
- At my school (P) I found (WD/CH) a higher post because of my qualifications.
- I put on a big jersey so that I'd be able to stuck (VB/T) my papers (^) full of information (^) the pockets.
- For the following exam settings (WD/CH) I decided to work hard.

### Student E

- My grandfather loves me equally (WD/CH) as my parents do.
- The more he is away is (O) (^) the more he remembers (WD/CH) me.

- R200 is nothing these days but however (O) a (O) half a loaf is better than no bread.
- In town (^) I buy (VB/T) some groceries that I would use during the (O) Christmas. I went to town with a thirteen year old girl who was going to help me with the groceries which was a gallons of paraffins (NR) and some 12,5 kg milmeal (SP), samp and sugar.
- At five o'clock when (^) closing the shop they released me with some warnings (NR).



## APPENDIX 3

### TECHNIKON COMMUNICATION IN ENGLISH LEARNER GUIDE

This is not the complete study guide for the Communication in English syllabus; the researcher has merely lifted the parts that concern Writing because that is the concern of this study.

#### TERM 1

#### WRITING STRATEGIES

##### 1. SUMMARIZING

##### GOALS

To master the art of summarizing any text.



##### OBJECTIVES

You will fulfill your general objective if you are able to:

1. Demonstrate your comprehension of the text by showing understanding thereof,
2. Demonstrate your understanding of the text by determining the theme of the gist of the passage. This should be done either orally or in writing,
3. Reproduce the main idea of the passage, keeping to the required length.

## REFERENCES

- Leigh, R. : The Bedford Guide to writing
- Van Schalkwyk, J. : Communication
- Watt & Hill : A dictionary of Communication and Media Studies

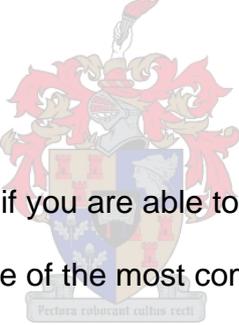
## 2. CORRESPONDENCE

### GOAL

To master language and communication skills to such an extent that business correspondence can be efficiently drafted.

### OUTCOMES

You will fulfill your general goal if you are able to:

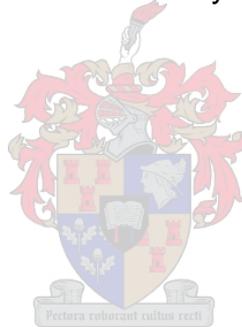
1. State the specific purpose of the most common forms of business correspondence mentioned below,
  - 1.1 Enquires and replies
  - 1.2 Orders and follow-up letters
  - 1.3 Claim and adjustment letters
  - 1.4 Credit letters
  - 1.5 Collection letters
  - 1.6 Employment letters
  - 1.7 Formal letters
  - 1.8 Letters to the press
  - 1.9 Sales and promotion letters

## 1.10 Memoranda

2. Given some practical examples, to identify the purpose of those examples
3. Write a variety of business letters and memos which are able to fulfill their purpose.

### REFERENCES

- Leigh, R. : The Bedford Guide to writing
- Peel, M. : Improving your Communication Skills
- Van Schalkwyk, J. : Communication
- Watt & Hill : A dictionary of Communication and Media Studies



### 3. REPORT WRITING

#### GOAL

To master the art of writing a concise, well-informed, well-researched report.

#### OUTCOMES

You will fulfill your general goal if you are able to:

1. Demonstrate your ability to identify the problem by writing a good problem statement,
2. Demonstrate your ability to write appropriately by designing the problem and documenting the findings clearly, concisely and objectively,
3. State clearly how you arrive at the conclusion. This should be as logical as

possible.

4. Make sound suggestions and recommendations or possible solutions, which may overcome the problem.

## **GLOSSARY**

Title

Terms of reference

Procedure

Findings

Conclusions

Recommendations

Survey

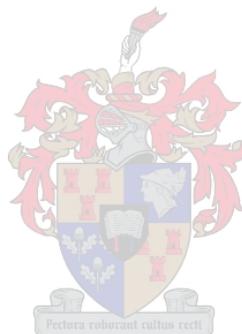
Objective

Record

Interview

Questionnaires

Specifications



## **REFERENCES**

- Leigh, R. : The Bedford Guide to writing
- Little, P. : Communication in Business
- Lesikar, R. : Report writing for Business
- Watt & Hill : A dictionary of Communication and Media Studies

## TERM 2

### WRITING SKILLS

#### Factual and text analysis

- Week 8 & 9
- Characteristics of written conventions
  - Applying appropriate writing strategies
  - Purpose and likely audience
  - Showing an understanding of the text by responding to writing tasks which assess comprehension
  - Newspaper literacy
  - Figurative and literal language
  - Puns in adverts
  - Hyperbole in journalism
- 
- A faint watermark of a university crest is visible in the background of the list. The crest features a shield with various symbols, topped with a crown and surrounded by decorative flourishes. Below the shield is a motto scroll with the Latin text "Pectora roburant cultus recti".

- Week 10 & 11
- The writer's eye
  - Giving an opinion
  - Narrative texts
  - Building an argument

#### Assignment

#### Persuasive text analysis

- Week 12 & 13
- Characteristics and written conventions
  - Purposes and likely audience
  - Identifying missing and misleading information
  - Reading between the lines
  - Using pre-, while-, and post writing model

- Week 14 & 15
- Writing for the media using the Inverted Pyramid
  - Editorials
  - Agony columns
  - Advertisements

- Week 16
- Feature articles
  - Front page story
  - Sports reports
  - Headlines



END OF SEMESTER TEST

### **TERM 3**

- Week 1 & 2
- Giving an opinion
  - Identifying values, world views, stereotypes in a text
  - Identifying textual and visual features in the text as a whole. These should combine to persuade the reader
- Week 3 & 4
- Writing hard facts based on tables, graphs and summaries
- Week 5
- Report writing