Joanne Dorothy Melanie Stielau

# CONFLICTING PARADIGMS:

An investigation into teachers' perceptions of language
teaching practice in English Second Language Primary
School Classrooms, KwaZulu-Natal.

I wish to state that the contents of this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary, are my own original work.

Jo Stielau 2002

# ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to contribute towards research in the area of Second Language Learning and Teaching, with particular focus on English Second Language (ESL) Learning and Teaching in the context of a South African distance college. This report investigates the notion of 'best practice' in language classrooms and compares this notion with a sample of teachers' own views about what constitutes 'best practice' in language teaching. Included in this report are critical discussions regarding language teacher education and the pervasive influence of different language policies in South Africa with regard to the way such policies have influenced teachers' beliefs about their practice. There is also a focus on the debate surrounding the prescription of a single 'best practice' in teacher education. The investigative approach used in this research was essentially qualitative and this report includes details on the benefits and challenges of the narrative task as a research tool, as well as much authentic material in the form of student responses. This investigation found that while many teachers do support practices which are in keeping with official notions of 'best practice' as described in the South African language-in-education policy and Curriculum 2005, there are significant numbers of teachers who advocate practices for language teaching which seem to contradict the notion of 'best practice' including Subtractive Bilingualism, Audiolingual methodology, rote learning and even coersion. Based on these findings, recommendations for the upgrading of existing teacher education programmes and the development of new programmes include the following:

- information on changing policies and practices.
- credibility in change through practice.
- enactment of a process syllabus.
- skills development in general classroom practice.
- language development as part of teacher education.
- acceptance that there is no "best method'.
- the development of broad critical reflexive practice in teachers.

**CONFLICTING PARADIGMS:** an investigation into teachers' perceptions of language teaching practice in English Second Language Primary School classrooms, KwaZulu-Natal.

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# Chapter 1: BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

## Introduction

This dissertation aims to contribute towards research in the area of Second Language Learning and Teaching, with particular focus on English Second Language (ESL) Learning and Teaching in the context of a South African teacher training college. It is hoped that this research will contribute, among other things, insights into the beliefs, context and discourse of English teachers who are themselves, ESL speakers. The specific context of this research was that of a Distance Education College, Natal College of Education (then known as NCE, and subsequently renamed South African College of Open Learning). The research focussed on final year primary school teachers who were registered for the Higher Diploma in Education (HDE) with English as a subject specialisation. The course in which this research was carried out was an English methodology course known as ENG 200P and many of the issues raised in this report concern language teaching. However, the findings and discussions which follow may have implications for teacher educators generally, in the context of the history of educational policy and practice and in the light of educational changes and a new curriculum in this country.

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## 1.1 Problems /issues to be investigated

The questions which have driven this research can be explained briefly as follows: students registered for the ENG 200P programme at NCE perform a number of practical written assessment tasks during the course of their studies. A component of the written tasks usually involves the application of theory to the classroom situation in the form of lesson plans, theme programmes and so on. In other words, students are expected to apply their understandings of theories of language learning and teaching and produce sound lessons for their classroom practice. Some of the practical application assignments submitted by students in the past, revealed that a number of student teachers were experiencing difficulty applying these theories to their classroom situations. In addition, a narrative task given in 1998, based on students' own classroom memories of good language learning revealed views which seem to contradict the current theories on language teaching practice which were informing the ENG 200P programme in which these same students were enrolled. Course developers and lecturers began to wonder what the registered student body believed to be 'good language teaching practice' from their own classroom experiences and current teaching situations and how different these beliefs and practices were from those that underpinned the 200P programme. These are the background questions which led to the investigation carried out and reported on in this dissertation

This introductory chapter aims to put this research into a context. The context should serve to explain how these questions arose and why these student teachers are registered for an English subject specialisation through a distance provider at this point in time. The implications for a change in teaching methods, as required of the new teaching methodology, Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) which underpins Curriculum 20005, will also be explained.

## 1.2 Research contexts

### 1.2.1 Historical Context: Language-in-education policy (1900-1990)

The first issue of importance, in understanding the context of this research, is the history of language-in-education policies in this country, which have largely influenced the language of learning or medium-of-instruction in South African classrooms. An overview of language-in-education policies of the past is merited because they have impacted on the present day in a number of ways:

- Resistance to these language-in-education policies and their failure to reflect current thinking about language learning and teaching has resulted in new policies being developed.

- Historical policies have impacted on the training of ESL teachers in the past. New policies require new training methods at present.

- Past policies continue to influence teachers' attitudes towards English, as a subject, and language teaching in general.

Language policies, like many other political decisions in South Africa's history, have been different for different race groups: white, Indian and coloured language-in-education policies were markedly different from those experienced by black learners under, what became known, as the Bantu Education system. Given the context of this research i.e. black ESL student teachers training as language educators in a largely rural, ESL classroom context, it is the language policies affecting black ESL learners which

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will be the main focus of this section. However, a broader critical overview of the history of language in education policies in South Africa can be found in Vinjevold (1999).

The debate, about which language to use as the medium-of-instruction in South Africa, goes way back in South African history. English and Afrikaans have had a chequered history as mediums-of-instruction in this country with other languages playing second fiddle. In the last century, black education in South Africa was carried out by British missionaries who used English as the medium-of-instruction in their mission schools. This policy was heartily supported by the British colonial government of the day who only gave education grants to English-medium church schools. Although English was used almost exclusively in black schools, a growing number of teachers and missionaries had begun to call for the introduction of African languages into these schools both as a medium-of-instruction and as a subject in its own right (Vinjevold 1999:207). Instruction in Zulu was first introduced into black schools in Natal, and then in 1922, an African language was made compulsory in the Cape. Other provinces followed suit and by 1935, it was compulsory to take a vernacular language at primary school level and, hence it was a compulsory subject for student teachers at training colleges for black primary school teachers. In fact, by 1935, the medium-of-instruction in four provinces was to be in the learners' mother-tongue. It could be suggested that this policy, among other political, social and economic influences, still has a persistent influence reflected in the student subject choices at NCE in 1999. Registration for English and Zulu, as a subject specialisation, is five times higher than any other subject offered (see Table 1.1).

After the National Party came into power, black schools no longer fell under provincial education authorities. In 1953, under the then Department of Bantu Education, a new language-in-education policy extended mother tongue instruction until Gr 8. Over the years which followed language policy changed many times and in many ways. At times all primary schooling was completed in the learners' mother tongue. Afrikaans and/or English were compulsory subjects (but not the medium-of-instruction) from Gr 1 onwards and BOTH became languages of instruction in High School when a dual medium policy reigned (Vinjevold 1999:209).

Not surprisingly, language policy was at the centre of black resistance to Bantu Education. Black opinion objected to the extension of mother-tongue instruction through the whole of primary schooling. It was felt that this policy disadvantaged learners who only encountered English and Afrikaans as older learners and could never master these languages competently enough to succeed in commerce and industry. The dual medium policy at high school level was unpopular for similar reasons (Hartshorne 1992:198).

South Africa's political landscape was changed forever by a series of events and new language-in-education policy decisions which began in 1971 and ended in July 1976. In short, recommendations to change the unpopular dual medium policy were rejected by the Government of the day. At the same time a decision was made to bring the number of years of black schooling in line with that of other race groups. In 1976, learners took to the streets to protest Bantu Education in general and this language policy in particular. Within weeks the hated dual medium language policy was changed to a single medium

language policy and most black schools opted for English as their medium-of-instruction. This choice may have been influenced by the same thinking which is revealed in many of the subjects beliefs about English (see Chapters 4 and 5) and will be discussed in detail later.

Many years of apartheid language-in-education policies have perpetrated political injustice and been the cause of exclusion and failure in the educational process for many black ESL learners. Understandably, it is in the light of this history that the language–in-education policies of the current Education Dept seek transformation and revision with regard to language in the classroom. These policies, and the expectations they create for teacher education are discussed in Chapter 2.

## 1.2.2 Present Context: Language-in-Education Policy today

As discussed previously, historical language-in-education policies have impacted on the training of ESL teachers in the past - requiring teacher training in certain methodologies as well as adherence to the prevailing political ideology of the day. New policies require new training methods at present. This research comes at a time when the new policy must try to replace existing policy. While this is easily done on paper, introducing new methodology to existing teachers or even to new teachers who have modeled their teaching on their own school teachers is not quite as simple. On the one hand, existing beliefs about the 'best' method persist and resist change (Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998, Samuel, M. 1998, Freeman, D. and Richards, J.C. 1993, Richards, J.C. 1990) and on the other, old methodology is ingrained in student teachers from years of observation

of their own teachers' methods when they were language learners (Wickham, S. and Versveld, R. 1999, Wildsmith-Cromarty, R. 1995, Harmer, J. 1991, Larsen-Freeman, D. 1987, Prabhu, N.S. 1987).

The present language-in education policy is contained in the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. It operates within the paradigm of the new constitution, which recognizes that cultural diversity is a national asset, aims to promote multilingualism and develop eleven official languages.   The new policy recognizes that "the inherited language-in-education policy in South Africa has been fraught with tensions, contradictions and sensitivities, and underpinned by racial and linguistic discrimination. A number of these discriminatory policies have affected either the access of the learners to the education system or their progress in it." ( Section iv (A) 2)

All language practitioners, including the student teachers who were the subjects of this particular research, are expected to develop and achieve the following aims of the new language-in education policy:

1. to promote full participation in society and the economy through equitable and meaningful access to language;
2. to pursue the language policy most supportive of general conceptual growth amongst learners, and hence to establish additive multilingualism as an approach to language in education;
3. to promote and develop the official languages;
4. to support the learning and teaching of all other languages in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and South African Sign Language, as well as Alternative and Augmentative Communication;
5. to counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching;

6.	to develop programmes for the redress of previously disadvantaged languages. (Department of Education 1996)

This language policy appears on paper as progressive, ambitious, transformative and all-inclusive. To this end, the Department of Education recommends Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practice as a teaching methodology as well as Additive Bilingualism in cases where the learner's mother-tongue and the medium-of-instruction are not the same language. (1996 iv (A) 5)

However, the reality is somewhat different. The following issues have hindered changes in language teaching methodology and the implementation of the new language policy in schools:

- popular views about the low status of African languages and the high profile of English as a key to economic success (Kerfoot, C. 1993, Pierce, B. 1989)

- the lack of resources in many former DET schools (Samuel, M. 1998)

- limited linguistic skills among teachers (Vinjevold, P. 1999, Gamede, T. 2000)

- a strong audio-lingual influence on current ESL teaching methods (Harmer, J. 1991, Larsen-Freeman, D. 1987, Prabhu, N.S. 1987)

- the beliefs and attitudes of teachers towards English Second Language learning and teaching methodology (Wickham, L. and Versveld, R. 1999, Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998, Samuel, M. 1998, Wildsmith-Cromarty, R. 1995, Freeman, D. and Richards, J.C. 1993, Richards, J.C. 1990)

- misunderstanding, resistance and confusion surrounding the implementation of new curricula and teaching methodology, including Curriculum 2005 (Gamede, T. 2000,

Vinjevold, P. 1999, Parker, B. and Deacon, R. 1993, Samuel, M. 1998, Nunan, D. 1991, Pierce, B. 1989, Prabhu, N.S. 1987)

These problems and issues will be discussed, with particular reference to the students who were the subjects of this research, in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

### 1.2.3 The Institutional Context: Teacher qualifications and the upgrading of underqualified teachers.

The students who were the subjects of this research were part of a national group of teachers already in teaching posts who were trying to upgrade their teaching diplomas from a 3 year qualification to a 4 year qualification. As for many other educational issues in the apartheid era, the criteria for the accreditation of qualifications for teaching varied from race group to race group. In the mid-1970's the white body who made decisions at a national level, the Committee of Heads of Education, recommended that the standard three year teaching qualification, the Diploma in Education (DE) granted at most white teacher colleges, (known as an M+3 level qualification), should be capped by a fourth year Higher Diploma in Education (M+4: HDE). This extended, and higher, qualification became the norm among white teacher diplomates but the principle was not initially extended to black teacher training. Only in 1989 a contract between the Natal Education Department (House of Assembly) and the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education (KwaZulu Government) allowed admission of black students to the former white institution of NCE and opened up the M+4 HDE route to blacks. The salary notch increase following the achievement of the HDE and potential promotion advantages

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made this a popular course. Its popularity was secured by the fact that it was offered as a distance course and teachers could remain in their teaching posts while upgrading their qualifications (Comrie, M. 2000). Student responses to assessment tasks, performed as part of this HDE course, form the backbone to this research.

The HDE consisted of theoretical educational courses and two subject specialisations. The subject choices for students were limited to those subjects in which they had 'majored' in their former DE. In other words, they were only permitted to follow a subject specialisation in which they already had a three year certification. Due to the prevailing language policies of the time, it had been compulsory for all these teachers to study English and Zulu for their Matriculation certificates and they simply continued with these subjects through the course of their various teaching diplomas. Thus, English was a popular choice and a well subscribed course as can be seen in the table below which illustrates the intake into specialist subjects for the year 1999, when this research commenced:

Table 1.1     Subject choices for 4th year HDE, Natal College of Education

**Natal College of Education: HDE Registration 1999**
**Percentage of Students registered per subject**

| AFRIK | MATH | ENG | ZULU | GEOG | SCI | BIOL | HIST | BIB STUDS | COMP STUDS |
|-------|------|-----|------|------|-----|------|------|-----------|------------|
| 0.4 | 4 | 37 | 38 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 0.4 |

### 1.2.4 Profile of the research subjects

Of the 324 students registered for English as one of their HDE major subjects, only 6 were English first language teachers. This fact, and the new Outcomes Based Education approach of Curriculum 2005, meant that many of the existing coursework materials were inappropriate for the intended audience. NCE had originally been a designated 'white' teacher training college. Some of the literature studied was Eurocentric in focus for example, D.H. Lawrence *Sons and Lovers* and Thomas Hardy *Far from the Madding Crowd* ( ENG 200P 1996). Materials such as study guides and tutorial letters, which gave feedback on assignment work, as well as the practical classroom tasks set for the methodology section of the course, did not incorporate aspects of OBE, which was the methodology introduced with Curriculum 2005. Absent from this course were varied, authentic assessment practices with explicit assessment criteria, specific outcomes and a learner-centred approach, which would take cognizance of the largely second language learner population, of whom 76% were rurally-based (HDE Registration, NCE, 1999). All these shortcomings were highlighted in a course audit conducted during 1999 and published in April 2000 by the South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) which found:

> The course has no overall outcomes.....no reference is made to OBE in the ENG 200P modules....there is little evidence of a fully reflexive process being followed in the approach to developing teaching competence. (SAIDE 2000:19) [1]

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[1] It should be noted that NCE became known as the SA College of Open Learning (SACOL) after a 1999 amalgamation. SACOL is the institution referred to in the SAIDE report.

The English Department of NCE began a slow upgrade of materials and change in teaching strategies towards the goals of the Eng 200P course, namely:

- to develop language educators who were able to apply a range of teaching strategies in their language teachers,

- to enable educators to practise CLT and Additive Bilingualism in their ESL classrooms,

- to encourage educators to take the initiative in developing their own lesson plans and resource materials, and

- to develop reflective practice in these student teachers.

Initially the upgrade simply involved changing assessment strategies on existing materials, with the intention of upgrading coursework guides over time. Initial student responses to some of the new assessment strategies provided the background for the research question of this dissertation.

## 1.3 Research Questions

### 1.3.1 Previous assessment strategies

Given the changing student profile and the changing nature of teaching methods, as described in 1.2.4 above, one of the first actions taken in an attempt to deliver a more appropriate course was to set a 'new style' first assignment. Previous coursework assignments, which formed 25% of the total assessment mark, had tended to involve more 'traditional' English learning and teaching assessment strategies. The course was

divided into two main components: a literature section and a methodology section. The first aimed to engage the students in their own English language development, via the study of literature, and the second was a practical course involving the teaching of English at the primary school level. Study Guides were produced in each of these sections and students were assessed on their understandings of each study guide.

## Study Guides used in the NCE English Course (ENG 200P) for HDE

| Literature | Teaching English |
|---|---|
| Lord of the Flies<br>Poetry | Theme Teaching<br>Oral Work and Games<br>Teaching Poetry<br>Questioning in the Classroom |

Assessment on the literature section was very much in the 'traditional' first language mode i.e. discursive essays about themes in the literature and contextual comprehension questions on extracts from the novels. The methodology section was assessed by questions on the content of the study guides, as well as set tasks, in which students were expected to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts in the study guides by developing lessons and activities for their own contexts. They would be expected to implement and adapt teaching strategies outlined in the guide into classroom activities.

There was no real attempt made towards language development of the students themselves in either section of the course. The course was still aimed at a first language student group and the ESL nature of the student population had not yet been reflected in course content. Furthermore, there was very little engagement with the students' own contexts. The course developers and lecturers (all urban, white, first language English

speakers) were well aware of the problems and limitations of this assessment approach and of the fact that there was no clear understanding of the students' social discourse and contexts. Furthermore, even prior to the SAIDE audit, it was felt that there was inadequate reflective practice given to the students and that this should be a priority among the new assessment strategies.

## 1.3.2  New assessment strategies

A variety of new assessment strategies were introduced during 1998 in an effort to engage with the new OBE approach and to make the course more authentic for the present students. Essentially the approach was reasoned along the thinking summarised by Hibbard below:

> Many performance (outcomes-based) learning tasks will be only parts of the Cycle of Learning, while others will take the student through the entire cycle. As the student completes projects that engage the entire cycle, the student's work improves and she feels more capable of being successful with this kind of work. As the valid self-perception grows, the student is more willing to expend the energy to begin and complete a quality product. The Cycle of learning thus becomes a cycle of improving student performance (1996:10).

(For a longer discussion on the rationale and approaches of these new strategies see Lapalala, M. and Stielau, J. 1997) The new strategies included: performance-based assessment, criterion-based assessment, broader task options (including making visual material or giving recorded oral feedback, instead of written responses), personal narratives and self-reflective tasks on those narratives and discursive responses to the opinions of peers.

### 1.3.3  The assessment task which gave rise to the research questions

The first of the more authentic, 'new style' assessment strategies tried by the English Department of NCE was a narrative task, which involved the students in writing a brief, personal Literate Life History (See Appendix A). (Personal narrative tasks as an assessment strategy will be discussed fully in Chapter 2 of this dissertation)

This first task produced astonishing results. Students had written far more than the minimum pages required. Most students, in fact, wrote double the minimum stipulated. Students took the task seriously despite fears that a personal narrative may not have the high status of the more traditional, impersonal academic tasks of the previous year. For example, there was no evidence of copied work, even on those assignments where copying was picked up in the Methodology and Literature sections of the assignment! This was remarkable given that copied work is frequently submitted.  It seems evident that ownership of these experiences was taken seriously. (for  a full discussion on this particular task see Jackson, F. and Stielau, J. 1998)

For the first time in the ENG 200P course, markers were treated to personal, detailed and useful glimpses into the worlds and learning experiences of their students. Furthermore, issues and questions began to arise which made it perfectly clear that further research would be necessary if future changes in the course were to build on existing student understandings and be authentic to their experience of language learning and teaching in their classrooms. For example, one third of the 700 student respondents identified as 'good', several language teaching  rituals and practices that the English Department at

NCE would not want to encourage in a Communicative Language Teaching situation where Additive Bilingualism was seen as the cornerstone of second language teaching. (For a detailed discussion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Additive Bilingualism see Chapter 2 of this dissertation) Students identified as 'useful' a range of practices, some of which were in keeping with CLT and Additive Biligualism and others which could be described as contradictory to those practices. In a narrative task which involved the question, *What teaching practices did your favourite language teacher use which you think were particularly good and useful?* ( NCE, ENG 200P, Task 1 Ass 1, 1998) roughly one third of students cited practices involving subtractive bilingualism, coercion, intimidation, rote memorisation and grammar drills as 'particularly good and useful'. Many responses were similar to these:

*The luck thing for me is that Mr G was number one on speaking English in the classroom. If you spoke in the mother tongue he had the prefect who would give you a yellow paper. That was for punishment.*

*Every morning we were singing the poem in English. It was The Alchemist. We were saying it everyday for that term.*

*I learnt to spell very well. We had five words everyday for spelling. If we did not learn then we were biten with the stick. Even he would stand behind with the stick. Today I am still excellent in the spelling.*

*She praised me because I could talk like an English woman. Listen to Lulama, she would say, she is not like the Zulu girl. I was so proud of that.*

*I learnt the grammar and the tenses very well in that Grade. We had tenses after break everyday even after Friday.*

*The way she was successful was to group us according to our intelligence.*

*I was shaking but I had to read aloud. Even when the other pupils laughed, he would not say sit down. So I read and then it was the end. I have no fear for reading from that time that he forced me.*

To sum up as follows: Given the changes in language-in-education policy and the new language teaching methodology informing Curriculum 2005 (i.e CLT and Additive Bilingualism), given the changing profile of students registered for ENG 200P at NCE, it became necessary to revise the ENG 200P course. Changes began in the form of assessment practices. The first assessment task given was a self-reflective task involving a narrative essay about memories of 'good' language teachers. As outlined in section 1.1, the questions which have driven this research followed on from initial student responses to Task 1 (1998). While the course aim was to involve student learning and teaching with language practices such as CLT and Additive Bilingualism, in line with the new language-in-education policy (Act 84:96) and contained in the Curriculum 2005 Learning Area – Literacy, Language and Communication (LLC)(Dept of Education 1997), many students' responses revealed views which seem to contradict the current theories on language teaching practice which informed the new language-in-education policy and Curriculum 2005 (LLC) and which should have been informing revision of the ENG 200P programme in which these same students were enrolled.

### 1.3.4 Research Questions

In order to most appropriately revise and develop the ENG 200P course, the following questions needed answers:

- What do these student teachers understand, from their own experience as language learners and from observing other teachers, as 'good' language teaching practice?

- Are there differences or conflicts between the student teachers' beliefs and understandings about good language teaching practice, and the current theories on language teaching practice with which should inform changes to the present ENG 200P programme?

- What suggestions can be made with regard to bridging such differences, if indeed they do exist, when developing new material or changing existing material for the ENG 200P course?

# Chapter 2: 'BEST PRACTICE': CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT.

## Introduction

In the course of investigating the research questions in the context described in the previous chapter, it became clear that broader questions needed exploration in order to provide a backdrop to the answers we were expecting:

- What are the national requirements for 'good' language teaching practice in language teacher education?

- What practices could be assumed to be informing current language teaching among our students?

While this research focuses, in the main, on a small group of teachers in a single learning field, English Second Language learning and teaching, the questions raised are firmly housed in the general field of teacher education. This particular field, including the area of language learning and teaching, is undergoing rapid change and review in South Africa. These changes have come about as a result of political change and the need for a transformative education curriculum to promote social justice and economic development, as discussed in the previous chapter. Changes in the ENG 200P course at NCE are a small part of a much bigger transformative picture which includes:

- a new South African Constitution ( Act 200 of 1993), under which there is a new Schools Act ( Act 84 of 1996), including the guidelines for implementing a new Language in Education policy;

- a revisioning and extension of the role of teachers in the classroom (A framework for Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development 1999); and

- a new educational curriculum (C2005 1997).

There has been considerable research, in the last five years, on the impact of these changes into existing classroom practice. Useful insights are reported by the National Centre for Curriculum Research and Development (Gamede, T. 2000) and the President's Educational Initiative Research Project (Taylor, N. and Vinjevold, P. (eds) 1999). It is with these changes in mind, and the idea that they determine what is currently considered 'best practice' for language teacher education, that the following chapter bears relevance.

## 2.1 Communicative Language Teaching and Additive Bilingualism – the official line on 'best practice'

Curriculum 2005, in its structure, development of skills and ideological background, is one of the foundation stones which has been laid in a post-apartheid South Africa towards building a just, economically viable society. The outcomes for the area concerning language learning and teaching, Literacy, Language and Communication (LLC), should be seen in relation to the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996) and all related language policy and guideline documents. The Constitution advocates a policy of multilingualism. The new Language in Education Policy also subscribes to the additive multilingualism model (1996). In addition, in

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C2005, there is a very strong Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasis

including the notion of making and negotiating meaning and the understanding of the

relationship between language and power ( Intermediate Phase document 1997: 22).

The advancement of multilingualism as a major resource is seen as an opportunity to

develop and value:

- learners' home languages, cultures and literacies;
- other languages, cultures and literacies in this multi-cultural country and in international contexts; and
- a shared understanding of a common South African culture.

(Department of Education 1995:13)

One can safely assume then that additive multilingualism is a given starting point in all

South African Language classrooms. It should be noted that these moves towards a more

inclusive syllabus, with an emphasis on CLT, have not only happened since 1994. As

discussed by Larsen-Freeman, international trends in language teaching have moved

away from the Audio-lingual approach towards a variety of humanistic approaches,

including CLT (1987). In fact, for at least ten years prior to C2005 and the new language-

in-education policy, the then Department of Education and Training (DET) syllabus for

English was concerned with "developing pupils' communicative competence" (1986:6).

A formal programme of work on language structure and usage was neither required nor

seen as appropriate (1986: 6). Teachers were instructed to "teach English, not about

English" (1986: 7). This was formalised ten years later and bound into national policies

by the interim core syllabus which was preliminary to C2005. Its implementation was to

"address some of the more urgent problems currently experienced in the teaching and

learning of English in schools" (1995:1) and it contained a noticeable shift away from the

hegemonic focus on English:

> SA is a democratic country in which all people are guaranteed equality, non-discrimination, cultural freedom and diversity etc. English, as one of many languages in South Africa, has an important role to play in the development of a nation which abides by these principles. As English is medium-of-instruction for many learners who do not have it as a home language, English is of central importance to the whole learning process. Nevertheless, pupils' proficiency in their home language(s) should be acknowledged and teachers should draw on this resource (also by allowing pupils to code switch) with a view to enhancing pupils' comprehension, clarification and comprehension of the target language (1995:1-3)

Language structures specified in the syllabus were greatly simplified and communicative

competence was emphasised, as seen below:

1.2 Communicative language teaching uses the language skills which pupils already possess as the basis for further development.(1995:2)
1.3 The multilingual nature of South African society has led to variation in English vocabulary, syntax, accent, stress and intonation patterns. Such variations should be acknowledged in the teaching and assessment of English as a subject. Using language effectively (i.e. language which is appropriate in terms of context, audience and purpose) should be valued more highly than the correct use of a single standard variety of the language. (1995:2)
1.4 The adoption of a language-across-the-curriculum approach was recommended and some background about cognitive development theory was given to support this.(1995:3)

This syllabus reflects strongly the many humanist and progressive features which

encapsulate CLT . While CLT as an entity on its own is not the particular focus of this

work, definitive reading in this area can be found in Harmer (1991) and Richards and

Rogers (1986). Suffice to say that CLT and Additive Bilingualism are prescribed in

National Language Policy documents and have been features of language education in

this country for some time.

## 2.2 'Best practice' – the classroom reality

Despite these requirements and guidelines for 'best practice' for language teaching having been around, internationally, before many of our student teachers were born, and furthermore, despite similar injunctions having appeared in all official language syllabuses, over the last 15 years, one cannot assume that all South African language teachers are following these practices. Enacting syllabus change and changing teaching methods involves three things:

- the ability to change practice by recognition, reflection and revision,

-  clarity about what exactly is different between the new syllabus and the one preceding it, and

- belief in the efficacy of the new methods.

These three points will be discussed in detail. What should become clear in the course of the discussion is that while the intentions for change may be well-founded, the fact that such change involves a certain conception of teaching, a 'best practice', creates a thorny issue.

### 2.2.1 Changing past practice by recognition, reflection and revision

Changing teaching practices is a difficult and protracted task and needs to be undertaken with critical considerations. Language teaching, as part of classroom practice in general, has changed in South Africa since 1994. Prior to this, many South African teachers were trained on the basis of a teaching philosophy known as Fundamental Pedagogics. According to Parker and Deacon, approximately 80% of South African teachers have been inculcated into this particular thinking about education (1993:132). Fundamental

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Pedagogics formed the basis of teacher education programmes at the majority of historically black colleges of education as well as at some universities and technikons. Its basic premise was one which essentially encouraged utilitarian teaching perspectives where knowledge is viewed as something that is detached from the human interactions through which it is constituted and by which it is maintained. Knowledge becomes an end in itself rather than a means towards some articulated, reasoned educated purpose. For graduates of teacher training programmes based on Fundamental Pedagogics, becoming a teacher merely required mastering a body of knowledge and associated skills that were distributed through the rituals of teacher education. The message that was communicated to teachers was that being a teacher means identifying knowledge that is certain (in the case of second language teaching this would include such things as grammatical rules and language structures, or the 'meaning' of a poem, or formulaic greeting strategies, for example). This knowledge would then be broken up into manageable bits and transferred to the learners in an efficient manner. Learning then would be reduced to the mastery of accepted definitions of knowledge in a fixed field, and measurement and testing are emphasized. In essence this is the form of pedagogy that characterizes transmission teaching and learning (Parker, B.and Deacon, R. 1993:37).

Language teaching was achieved in accordance with this view of education. To this end the audio-lingual approach was applied as language teaching practice. The audio-lingual method would fit in nicely with Fundamental Pedagogics with its behaviourist roots. This method made use of consistent drilling followed by positive or negative reinforcement. The method was not entirely drill but did have as its basis the stimulus-response-reinforcement methodology. The language was learned as a 'habit' formed by constant

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reinforcement by the teacher (Harmer, J. 1991:32). Other features of this method which complemented, if you like, the authoritarian approach of Fundamental Pedagogics, were an emphasis on subtractive bilingualism whereby use of a student's mother tongue was forbidden, translation was not encouraged, memorization of structure based dialogue was essential and native-like pronunciation was sought (Richards, J.C. and Rodgers, T.S. 1986). This is borne out by the official *Deel 11 Sillabusse en Fakulteitsvereistes* of the day which, among other things, aimed:

**1.1** To teach the pupil to express himself (sic) correctly and clearly in spoken and written English;
**1.2** To familiarize him with English usage;
**1.3** To make the pupil aware of the importance of English to him as a key to knowledge and communication in South Africa and the world.

and explicitly directed that:

**1.1.4** The memorization of passages of English literature .... should be encouraged.
**1.1.5** Emphasis should be placed on clear articulation, accepted pronunciation and appropriate word choice. (Dept of Education and Training 1977)


South African language education was not alone in seeking the audio-lingual path as its 'best practice' for language learning and teaching:

> The prevailing view of language learning in 1962 was that learning was achieved through habit formation. The mastery of the structures of one's mother-tongue was one habit. The drilling and overlearning to the point of automacity of the target language was another. The language lesson was accomplished by pattern drills, repetition and positive reinforcement. Language was seen as hierarchically organised strata each dealing with different linguistic patterns which were then drilled. The syllabus was essentially structural - progressing to notional-functional and then to the semantic based syllabi – [whereas] communicative competence requires mastery of all three (form, function and meaning).
> (Larsen-Freeman, D. 1987:4).

One can see quite clearly that the sentiments expressed below have their roots firmly in audio-lingual methodology. These are responses from student teachers, collected as part of this research. Students have viewed the following as 'good' teaching practice:

*It was like a blow to him if you suffered a grammatical error and he shouted strongly at those.*

*Correctness of English words was given a watchful eye.*

*I was class captain in her class. I wrote down all those who spoke Zulu and they were punished.*

*When doing the oral work she would expect all of us to participate and made us recite.*

*When it come to the test I know my work very properly what was I expected to do just to recall to my memory everything we have done...*

*He wanted us to memorize the books word by word. We were accurate.*

It may well be that the persistence of the audio-lingual method has other sources, besides history and habit, which would need redress beyond simply the introduction of new methods. Gamede points out that, "Less authoritarian teaching styles, such as Communicative Language Teaching or Critical Language Awareness, call for high levels of language proficiency, but as classroom power relations are unchanged, teachers and learners would both prefer the safety net that the safetalk practice and the Audio Lingual method provides"(2000:11).

As this research took place within the confines of a distance education programme, it was not possible to observe the real life practices of the student teachers who were the subjects of this research. Reliance was placed on their own comments about what constituted good practice. These comments were made in narrative tasks about good

teachers and were taken to be what the students understood to be good language teaching practice. Although this method had limitations, it may well be that had students been observed in real classrooms, the findings may have been similar. For example, Wickham and Versfeld note that while a number of the teachers in their project had attended teacher education programmes at institutions where the 'best' current practices may well have been prominent, researchers, afterwards, observed practices based on years of habit and custom in the classroom (1998: 38). Their observation supports the view discussed above which suggest that pedagogical tradition carries more weight than research based evidence on effective teaching techniques and that this tendency is reinforced by student teacher's immersion in the realities of school once they complete teacher education programmes. The learning acquired about teaching in teacher education programmes is easily shrugged of once the newly qualified teacher closes the classroom door (Wickham. S. and Versveld. R. 1998).

In many ways this is not surprising considering the conditions under which many South African teachers work. This is another issue which cannot be ignored in the recommendations based on the findings in this research. With reference to the Bangalore project described in his book *Second Language Pedagogy*, Prabhu observed that in India (as in South Africa) English is part of 'mainstream' education, with factors such as class size, time table allocation and examination requirements determining the teaching situation. Although working conditions are not the focus of this research, they cannot be ignored in the general discussion of 'best' practice. Wickham and Versfeld report that many teachers work in difficult conditions with over crowded classrooms, inadequate

resources, lack of congeniality among members of staff at their schools and general

disorganisation in the school day (1998: 41). Helping teachers move away from practices

which would not be considered 'best practices' for ESL teaching may require them to

"teach against the grain" (Simon in Wickham. S. and Versveld, R. 1998:42). This brings

to the fore the thorny question of 'best methods – 'best methods' *where* and for *whom*?'

Prabhu (1990) argues that there is no 'best method': language teaching can only be

improved if the search for a best method is abandoned in favour of a focus on

understanding the complex interaction of curricular, interpersonal and methodological

factors in actual classroom practice.

This idea that there is no 'best method' will be one which must be borne in mind when

revisioning material based on the findings of this research. Perhaps this should be most

critically considered when viewing teachers in contexts such as the subjects of this

investigation.

> Any examination of curricula, methods, or materials in which [teaching methods]
> are discussed as if they existed independently of their use by teachers reveals
> positivist assumptions of objectivity in which teachers are cast as subordinate to
> the artifacts of schooling. To put it another way: Discussion of language lessons
> in which the individuality of the teachers and the idiosyncracies of each teaching
> and learning event are not highlighted, contribute to the dimunition of teachers.
> (Clarke, M.A. 1994:11)

The dimunition of learners at a distance college is exacerbated by the fact that marks are

paramount, in the absence of a learner's personality, oral contributions and visible

enthusiasm, which may aid to further his or her cause. Furthermore, in this situation, the

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power gap between student and teacher educator is magnified by distance and lack of contact.

'Best practice', as initially envisioned, begins to suffer the constraints of 'Absolute Truth' – immovable, unattainable and inflexible. Second language teaching has been characterised as situated and interpretive (Johnson, K.E. 1996, Freeman, D. and Richards, J.C. 1993). This characterisation suggests that second language teachers' knowledge is, in part, experiential and constructed by teachers themselves as they respond to the contexts of their classrooms. However, in contrast to this, research in teacher education has largely been focused on developing an empirically grounded knowledge-base to be given to teachers rather than examining what teachers' experiential knowledge is and how they use that knowledge (Golombeck, P.R. 1998). Imposing a codified body of knowledge on teachers, as we develop new materials, and separating them from their experiential knowledge, "may lead to closed worlds of meaning rather than opening windows on possibilities" (Harrington in Golombeck, P.R.1998:447). One aspect of this investigation, and the particular investigative tool used, was the assumption that 'opening windows' may require reconceptualising the notion of knowledge so that it includes the student teachers' ways of knowing and how they use that knowledge in the language classroom. One of the potential difficulties expected was how to reconcile the tension between inviting teachers to reflect on their practice and reformulate their ideas without imposing those of the researcher/teacher educator. This issue is raised again in Chapter 3 – Research Method, when some attention is paid to the difficulty of the researcher's position in this type of research.

Prabhu also cautions that the statutory implementation of an innovation (in this case new language-in-education policy or teaching methodology e.g. OBE or CLT, or even the revisioning of the existing ENG200P course material), "is likely to distort all possibility of a shift in teaching practice which may have taken place by degrees and been modified and assimilated over time by the teacher. It is likely to aggravate the tensions in teachers' mental frames and under threat make many teachers reject the innovations out of hand as an act of self-defense. Alternatively, a strong sense of plausibility about existing practices may make the teachers believe that innovations are misinformed (theory without practice) and counter-intuitive, if not downright harmful to learners. The hopeful scenario, if one is to be less cynical about the prospects, is that some teachers may accept the innovation on trust, some with the expectation of reward (in this case a pass in the ENG 200P course), still others may accept the innovation as according with their own ideological views on education" (1987:105-106).

Clearly innovation and change towards a new 'best method' are complicated issues in teacher education in the light of teachers' existing knowledge and understandings and in the light of their present classroom contexts. Freeman and Richards go so far as to dismiss as a 'myth' the idea that one conception of teaching is better or more effective than others. They explain that when examining teaching, it is necessary to look at how it is conceived, in other words, at the thinking on which it is based. From that sort of perspective, disputes about the supremacy of one method over another become moot (1993). When reading the recommendations for revisioning a teacher education

prgramme, which emanate from this research, it would be sensible to take as a caveat this thinking, along with that of Prabhu, who suggests that efforts to assess methods apart from the teacher who implements them, the setting, and learners with whom they are being implemented are fallacious. It is perhaps fitting to let Prabhu have the last word on any investigation into the 'best practice':

> Objective evaluation [of method] has either to assume that methods have value for learning independent of teachers' and students' subjective understanding of them…or to try to take into account teachers' subjective understanding of teaching, thus ceasing to be objectively evaluative. (1990:175)

## 2.2.2 Mixed messages confuse practice

However, even if we accept that there may be cause to dispute the notion that there is a single 'best practice' against which to compare current teaching practices, the fact remains that policy and curricular decisions have determined a 'best practice ' on a national level, as reported in Chapter 1, and teacher educators are bound to relay this to student teachers. Here may prove yet another stumbling block to change. It is not only the entrenched values and practices of earlier methodology which hinder change. In South Africa's case, the stresses of changing old teaching habits are compounded by mixed messages from a new curriculum which, in some respects, seems more prescriptive than the one it succeeded. For example, in the Learning Area, Language, Literacy and Communication, the Specific Outcome regarding language structure and form : *SO5 Learners will understand, know and apply language structures and conventions in context*, specifies that learners should know and apply grammatical structures and conventions to structure text. Learners would be expected to edit their own (and others)

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language usage. Common features and patterns of different languages are identified, explained and applied (1995:36). In fact, the actual structures themselves, are specified very much as they were in the 1986 DET syllabus e.g. recommended focus on noun classes, pronouns, verbal prefixes and suffixes, basic tenses, concord, active and passive voices, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions etc. Furthermore, of the seven Specific Outcomes finally settled on for this particular Learning Area (Sept 1997: 27-40), only the two in emphasis below, according to Wickham and Versveld, seem to be finding their way into classroom practice:

1. *Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding*
2. Learners show critical awareness of language usage
3. Learners respond to the aesthetic, affective, cultural and social values in texts
4. Learners access, process and use information from a variety of sources and situations.
5. *Learners understand, know and apply language structure and conventions in context.*
6. Learners use language for learning.
7. Learners use appropriate communication strategies for specific purposes and situations.

This fact seems to indicate strongly the persistent implementation of the earlier audio-lingual methods. For example, SO1 *Learners make and negotiate meaning and understanding,* finds expression in the emphasis on vocabulary development, and SO5 *Learners understand, know and apply language structure and conventions in context* can be found in the focus on grammar which does not necessarily imply learners' understanding of structures but rather rote learning of rules, definitions and conventions (Wickham, S. and Versveld, R. 1998:34).

It is hardly surprising that confusion reigns among teachers about changing language teaching methodology and the new language syllabus when aspects of the 'new' seem to resemble so strongly the 'old'. One respondent in this research even went so far as to describe his/her 'good' teacher model, who paid attention almost entirely to form, in this way:

*Writing was one aspect of the language that was causing competency among the pupils because neatness, correct spelling was more emphasized for clear and neat work! Grammar was a weekly programme in the language since it was taken into consideration that punctuation and other aspects of the language were properly done and kept as a rule. You could say Mrs S. was already doing the OBE teaching us to **understand, know and apply language structure and conventions in context**.* (my emphasis)

Confusion and mixed messages have also reigned in the application of Curriculum 2005. The findings of the Review Committee on Curriculum 2005 (2000) recommended changes to the technical and verbose nature of the wording of the curriculum. Such a recommendation could be applied to the revisioning of any content or new material to be developed for teacher education course such as ENG 200P. However, this is more difficult than it sounds. Bonny Norton Pierce warns against the oversimplification of new frameworks or conceptual ideas. She cites Widdowson:

> All movements which attempt to set up a new scheme of values, whether these be political or pedagogic or whatever, are subject to distortion and excess. Practical action requires the consolidation of ideas into simple versions which can widely be understood and applied....the problem of application is: how we can consolidate without misrepresentation? How can we prevent our simple versions from being misleadingly simplistic? (in Pierce, B. 1989:417)

Adding to their confusion, teachers also face changes in their teaching methods with little structural support. Even within the broader sphere of their schools, teachers have not yet encountered the national changes in language-in-education policy for one thing. One of

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the requirements of the South African Schools Act (1996) is that governing bodies develop whole school language policies which promote multilingualism. Most schools have not yet developed a formal language policy. School language policies have tended to maintain the status quo because of existing teachers' lack of proficiency in an African language (in the former white/Indian and Coloured schools) and the perceived high status of English, as the language of socio-economic power and mobility, in the former DET schools, where most of the subjects of this research would be teaching (Vinjevold, P. 1999: 213- 214).

The PEI report (Taylor, N. and Vinjevold, P. 1999) suggests that few schools have developed formal language policies in line with the specifications of the South African Schools' Act language-in-education policy for the following reasons:

- lack of knowledge about the new language policy;

- schools' lack of expertise and experience in developing their own policies;

- lack of an implementation plan and resources and mechanisms for monitoring of new language policy;

- perceptions of the advantages of English;

- staff language competencies;

- socio-economic needs of clients.

To this list one should also add teachers' beliefs about the teaching of language and the notion of Classroom Discourse which follow.

## 2.2.3 Teacher beliefs about English: learning and teaching

In the preceding sections the notion of a 'best practice' has been critically examined in the light of existing classroom practices. The persistent influence of earlier teaching methodologies and policies has been discussed as being relevant to teacher education at times of change. It has also been suggested that lack of clarity, about the actual changes being made, can also affect teaching practice. One other issue of importance, which needs consideration when researching teaching practice with a view to change, is teachers' beliefs about their subject and methods.

Teacher beliefs about language can be seen in three ways. First is the belief about the status of the subject – in this case, the status of English relative to other languages in the learner's lives. Second, there are the beliefs about how languages should be taught – what methods are seen as effective and successful. Third, there is the general belief about what it means to be a teacher. These beliefs are difficult to separate in the practical classroom situation where the teacher (with his/her beliefs about 'best practice') is teaching on a certain curriculum (with its inherent socio-political values) and carrying out a teacher's role within South African Classroom Discourse.

English, as the second language in this instance, has held superior status over the learner's mother-tongue in most South African classrooms. This is not an isolated phenomenon and in South Africa, like many other countries, the superior status of English is compounded by the fact that English mastery is perceived as the key to

economic empowerment and social mobility for most second language speakers (Pennycook, A. 1994, Tollefson, J.W. 1991).

The status afforded English, combined with audio-lingual methodology, resulted in a very rigid classroom situation in its day, suggests Wildsmithy-Cromarty (1995). Audio-lingual practice, with its transmission mode of delivery and authority dimension, was most evident in the ESL classrooms: teacher talk was dominant and there was typically the Initiation-Response-Feedback pattern which allowed little pupil initiative or peer sharing – the type of pedagogy Paulo Freire would term "banking education" (in Wildsmith-Cromarty, R. 1995:118). "Banking education" ensured a steady and predictable return on classroom delivery, which served to promote and sustain the status quo. In Samuel's succinct summary of the prevailing ethos and issues of apartheid education, it is perfectly evident how the status of first and second languages are perceived and how the teaching methodology of the time adds to this perception:

1. The apartheid regime legislated the mother-tongues (L1s) of the white minority (Eng/Afrik), approx 13% of the population as the only official languages of the country. This afforded elevated status to English and Afrikaans within the society in general; even the world of work and commerce was dominated by these languages as a means of keeping economic wealth in the hands of the white minority.
2. The official media of instruction at schools during the apartheid era were English and Afrikaans.
3. The home languages (Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu) of the majority of the black population of South Africa were marginalised
4. An ideology of subtractive bilingualism was adopted whereby the majority of Black South Africans were systematically separated from their mother tongues and inducted into English/Afrikaans medium of instruction.

5. Teachers were seen as implementors of a carefully manipulated syllabus, and their education was aimed at promoting slanted Eurocentric (white ) conceptions of knowledge

6. Both L1 and L2 teaching tended to adopt a structuralist approach, in which students were taught about the language rather than learning how to use the language; consequently communicative competence was limited (1998: 576-577).

Wildsmith-Cromarty suggests that these ideologies and practices have become entrenched and naturalised over a long period of time and that they form both the traditional language teaching pedagogy of the past and still persist today (1995:118). The findings of this research verify how pervasive this belief is and how this belief contributes resistance towards the practice of Additive Bilingualism in language classrooms (see Chapter 4 – Findings). Vast numbers of teachers, who learned their skills under this model, approximately 360 000 of them (Hofmeyer, J. and Hall, G. 1996), constitute the target group for re-skilling in the light of new language teaching methods and the new English syllabus. This re-skilling has largely taken place at teacher training colleges, such as NCE (where this research is based), by means of distance education. Samuel points out the challenges of such a task, stating that many of these teachers "have had little experience of creatively designed language learning programmes. Many of them have not been socialised into seeing the teaching profession as one which does research or into confronting their own thinking about language learning and teaching practice" (1998:579).

Implementing such a re-skilling process certainly seems a tall order. Samuel stresses that the practical issues involved in the content and delivery review of existing courses, such as ENG 200P at NCE, or the new development of courses to promote the kind of

language teaching deemed 'best practice' by the new dispensation, would need to include the following:

1. the renewal of the philosophical (and ethical ) basis of the education of teachers and learners and a re-examination of the kinds of values imbibed during 12 years of induction into apartheid schooling: the challenging of one's *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie in Samuel);
2. the re-examination of the conceptions of self-identity developed by teachers and learners during apartheid schooling; of the ideological basis of racial, linguistic, and cultural boundaries; and of the realm of possibilities for alternate and wider views of self identity within a changing political context;
3. the re-examination of the rituals of disempowerment that characterised current teachers' previous pedagogical practices within the school system;
4. the development of alternate curricular practices within pre-service teacher education programmes with the purpose of raising the quality of teachers' critical reflection and action skills research (1998:580).

Further discussion along these lines will be explored in Chapter 5 – Conclusion and Recommendations.

This notion of an 'apprenticeship of observation' is an extremely important one in any critical discussion on 'Best Practice'. Teachers tend to teach others as they themselves were taught. Those methods which enabled language teachers to learn a language, whatever the degree of success of that learning, are the familiar to those teachers and therefore the 'best'. All teachers have been learners in the past and draw on the memory of what their teachers did in the classroom. These 'borrowed' perceptions acquire, in due course, and in the process of teaching, what Prabhu calls "a sense of plausibility" (1987: 109) in the teacher's mind and he or she comes to identify with them. The emergent view of teaching has begun to highlight the complex ways teachers go about their work as being shaped by their prior experiences as learners ( Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E.

1998:400), their personal, practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin in Freeman D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:400), and their values and beliefs (Pajares in Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:400). As Kennedy points out, student teachers, " like other learners, interpret new content through their existing understandings and modify and interpret new ideas on the basis of what they already know or believe" (in Freeman D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:401).

Beyond the curriculum and notions of 'best method', the apprenticeship by observation of all teachers will have included close observation of Classroom Discourse. This includes what it is to be a teacher, how to talk and deliver oneself as 'Ma'am' or 'Sir' and sustain the dignity involved in that role. Clarke cites Widdowson who says: "Discourse....means a mode of social practice, in particular how institutions establish ideologies for the control of practice" (1994:38). James Gee extends the definition to virtually all spheres of life: "Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions and clothes" (1996:142). Professional discourse therefore, refers to virtually all aspects of being, behaving, thinking and interacting as a language teacher. This includes one's position in society as a teacher; one's relationship with colleagues, students, administrators, and parents or sponsors of students on a day-to-day basis; as well as the ways teachers are portrayed in the professional literature (Clarke, M.A. 1994:11). This teacher role in Classroom Discourse will, of course, embrace aspects of 'best Practice'. Prabhu suggests that persistent belief in Teacher Discourse can get in the way of change as much as any other belief:

Second language teaching in [the] institutional context has to come to terms with the norms and expectations of formal education in general. There are, for instance, perceptions about the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom and there is an expectation of serious substantive matter to be studied. The games and themes and 'fun' of Communicative Language teaching could be seen in conflict with the traditional classroom ethos of the formal school. Traditional perceptions of language as formal grammar, and of language learning as a matter of studying (or translating, or memorizing) serious texts, suited the educational framework very well (1987:4).

. . . . . .

What a teacher does in a classroom is not solely determined by the teaching methods he or she tends to follow. There is a complexity of other forces at play, in varied forms or degrees. There is often a desire to conform to prevalent patterns of teacher behaviour, if only for a sense of security such conformity provides. There is also some loyalty to the past – both to the pattern of teaching which the teacher experienced when he or she was a student, and to the pattern of his or her own teaching in the past. There is the teacher's self image and a need to maintain status in relation to colleagues or education authorities. Above all there is the relationship to maintain with the learners which involves control, certain role plays and expectations, anxieties regarding maintenance of status, fears about loss of face. This relationship is sustained satisfactorily through stable ongoing routines which satisfy the expectations of all stakeholders in the learning: teachers, parents, learners. Such stability comes from shared expectations of behaviour and acts as a framework for progress through the course of a term or programme (1987:103).

Interestingly enough, 'Being a good Ma'am or Sir' was not a category initially considered part language education in this researcher's mind until, after reading student narratives about teachers, it was observed how frequently this issue came to the fore in the form of classroom discipline , dress sense and 'model teacher behaviour'. Some students noticed the following about good teachers:

*He was calm personality and encouraged us under tense circumstances to behave correctly*

*Clean and shiny shoes and white shirts was his language*

*When he talk about cleanliness it was easy for us because he was exemplary in neatness. He was physically fit.*

*He was a gentleman and a teacher by sight and by movement. He was tall with a sharp pointed nose and so smart.*

Rubbing up against existing beliefs is a common occurrence for those involved in teacher education:

> We, as teacher educators, know that teachers' beliefs about teachers and teaching are instrumental in shaping how they interpret what goes on in the classroom. And we admit that teacher's beliefs, and past experiences as learners, tend to create ways of thinking about teaching that often conflict with what we advocate in our teacher education programmes. In sum, we, as teacher educators, now acknowledge that prior knowledge is a powerful factor in teacher learning in its own right, one that clearly deserves our attention if we mean to strengthen and improve, rather than simply preserve and replicate, educational practice. Learning to teach is affected by the sum of a person's experiences, some figuring more prominently than others, and that it requires the acquisition and interaction of knowledge and beliefs about oneself as a teacher, of the content to be taught, of one's students and of classroom life. (Freeman D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:401)

As discussed earlier, teacher beliefs would not only include teachers' understandings of *how* best teaching takes place but also *why* they must teach in a particular way. Part of teachers' socialisation and beliefs is the construct of the 'hidden curriculum'- the socio-economic norms and values emphasized by schools and society, the status of the languages to be learned and those who learn them – this, too, is a major influence on what teachers accept as normal and usual in their classroom (Gamede, T. 2000).

The consequences of these beliefs and the implications for teacher education are enormous as Michael Samuel explains:

> The outcomes of these [apartheid/language-in-education policies] still live on in post-apartheid South Africa because many of the oppressed have naturalised these ideologies. Many Black South Africans were duped into believing that to be educated was to be able to speak English (particularly) and Afrikaans. Understandably, many black South Africans valued the passport to prosperity that mastery of English offered. A major challenge facing teacher educators in the reconstructed education system, therefore, is to address the distorted supremacist conceptions of individual, linguistic, cultural and racial heritages; to confront the

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premises underlying existing teachers' ritualised practices of disempowerment; and to provide a mirror for ideas that have become entrenched in educators' and learners' minds about their own capabilities and the underlying theoretical and pedagogical premises upon which they have organised schooling, teaching and learning ( 1998: 576-7).

The background to this research has assumed that what teachers know about teaching is largely socially constructed out of the experiences and classrooms from which teachers have come. One of the aims of the narrative task, used as a research tool, was to explore that background, to identify areas which may be in conflict with the policies and practices informing changes to the existing Eng 200P course and to allow for exploration of the implications of the findings.

## 2.3 Language Teacher Education by Distance

While the issues preceding this may be general to all teacher education and research in that area, one aspect of this particular report needs additional comment. The subjects of this research were INSET teachers. In other words, they were already qualified teachers upgrading their qualifications from an M+3 Diploma in Education to an M+4 Higher Diploma in Education. To this end, they were all studying by means of distance education while actively employed as teachers. This fact added another dimension to the research and played a major influence in the decision to use narrative tasks as a research tool to investigate teachers' views about good language teaching practice (see discussion in Chapter 3 – Research Method)

Distance education is generally understood as a structured teaching and learning process, delivered through a collection of methods, where educators and the learners are physically separated for part or all of the times and where the course materials are the main means of communication of the curriculum. Distance education programmes for teachers have a significant role to play in a changing South Africa. As noted by the national Teacher Education Audit, distance education has demonstrated great potential for increasing openness in learning and reduction in costs (SAIDE 1995: 141). It has the capacity to reach large numbers of learners in a wide geographical area, and in this way, open access to teacher education programmes and ongoing professional development. (SAIDE 1995:2)

Distance education has, until recently, been the poor cousin of contact courses. An audit of courses in 1995 discovered that the quality and appropriateness of courses was very weak in the areas of 'improving [teachers'] practice and enabling them to reflect on their practice; often institutions regarded teaching practice simply as a form of assessment with little support given to student teachers and the courses showed very little understanding of the realities of schools in South Africa and the contexts of teachers (SAIDE 1995:67). Another audit 5 years on, revealed some improvements in this field, at the college where the Eng 200P course of this report was offered, but identified large gaps in the area of 'reflective practice', as well as limited authentic assessment (SAIDE 2000:13). (Useful general comment concerning strategies for distance programme design and delivery can be found in SAIDE 1999 )

In Distance Education there is little or no contact between learners and educators. Student teachers registered on courses such as the ENG 200P are usually rurally posted and have little contact with teaching models beyond their immediate school and their own historical experiences. Certainly there were a specified number of 'contact sessions' between lecturers and students registered for ENG 200P at Regional Centres around the country. However, these sessions frequently involved 1 lecturer and over 100 students which to all intents and purposes is 'contact' in a very papal and limited sense! (Lepalala, M. and Stielau, J. 1997). As they are given notes and lectured on content, learners are participants in a strong product-syllabus. Such a syllabus is problematic in two ways. Firstly, the top-down approach in setting up such a syllabus ensures that the students are kept at more than just a physical distance in that, their lecturers, who assess them on content and application of theory, are kept at a very powerful and unattainable distance. One could say that there is another distance too, the distance between the discourse of learners and lecturers on this course. The lecturing body of the English Department at NCE, at the time of this research, was all white, all urban and all mother-tongue English speakers. The learner body, on the other hand was all black, all ESL and mostly rural. This factor, plus the rote learning method employed to answer questions set on such a syllabus are limiting in an educational setting. Secondly, distance education is seen as a 'quick-fix' to move from an M+3 to M+4 salary notch by most learners. The familiarity of a top-down, theory-based syllabus is neither questioned critically nor seen as undesirable by teachers registered for these courses (Jackson, F. and Stielau, J. 1998). The 'distance factor' – the isolation of the student subjects, the perceived power of faceless lecturers, familiarity with previous product-syllabuses, prior expectations of the

role of assessment tasks in distance education - may have affected some responses given in the assignments which formed the findings of this research (see discussion under Ch 4 - Findings).

To conclude this overview of previous research then, it is suffice to say that teacher education, in times of change, is a challenging task. Research into teacher education involves the following:

- critical understandings of the current thinking which informs language policy and the notion of 'best practice' for language teaching,

- background knowledge of the history and educational practices preceding current trends which have been internalised by teachers and

- insights into the effect of teachers' existing beliefs about 'best practice' which may influence teachers' responses towards the learning of new methodology.

With these understandings of the issues involved, including the added dimension of teacher education by distance, the research recorded here was conducted.

# Chapter 3: RESEARCH METHOD

## Introduction

This chapter deals with the *how* and the *why* of the research methods chosen to investigate the questions raised in Chapter 1 – Background. As discussed in preceding chapters, South African education is in a transformative process. Changes to the language-in-education policy and to language teaching practices in this country are in line with international trends in language teaching i.e. a focus on CLT and Additive Bilingualism. Furthermore, student teachers at NCE, upgrading their teaching qualifications by distance education, were very different in profile from preceding years of student teachers at the same institution. In 1999, when this research was conducted, nearly all students registered for the ENG 200P course were ESL speakers operating in very different teaching contexts from the original student body who were English mother-tongue speakers in urban settings. Although a limited revision of materials had taken place in line with new policy and Curriculum 2005, it was clear that there was still a long way to go in this regard ( for a comprehensive critical report of materials for ENG 200P see SAIDE 2000).

## 3.1 Background to the choice of Research Method

Not only were materials in some cases outdated, there was also evidence that even the newer, relevant material was missing its mark. As mentioned in Chapter 1, some of the practical application assignments submitted by past years of students had revealed that a number of student teachers were experiencing difficulty applying CLT practices and were

resistant to the notion of Additive Bilingualism in their classroom situations. It was felt at the time that further revision of materials and new development of material to promote 'best practice' as language educators could not be done successfully without a deeper understanding of the student teachers themselves. This would include insights into their own experiences as language learners, some understanding of the models they recognised as 'good practitioners' and also their present beliefs about language learning and teaching. In essence, too, these were the reflective practices noted as absent in the SAIDE audit of this course (2000).

Initial questions, in 1998, arose from the first reflective assignment task ever given to students on the ENG 200P course, one year before this research commenced . This has been outlined in Chapter 1. It will be recalled that roughly one third of students responding to the question *What teaching practices did your favourite language teacher use which you think were particularly good and useful?* ( NCE, ENG 200P, Task 1 Ass 1, 1998) cited practices involving subtractive bilingualism, coercion, intimidation, rote memorisation and grammar drills as 'particularly good and useful'. Clearly it was necessary to probe these responses further in order to make meaningful decisions about what should constitute the content and practices of the revised ENG 200P course.

## 3.2   Research Aims

In brief, the purpose of this study was threefold:

- Firstly, it aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of good and bad language teaching practice and establish an understanding of commonly held beliefs and experiences in these two areas.

- Secondly, it aimed to identify and investigate areas of apparent *conflict* between teachers' conceptions of good teaching practice and the 'official' notion of 'best practice' given in the language-in-education policies of the new dispensation and LLC, the relevant Learning Area of Curriculum 2005.

- Thirdly, the implications of these findings were to be discussed with a view to the revision and reorganisation of the existing ENG 200P subject specialisation at NCE.

## 3.3   Research Procedure

In brief, the research procedure involved an initial investigation of student beliefs about 'best practice' in the form of a narrative task (Task 1) in which they were asked to describe a 'good teacher' from their experience as learners. (The narrative task as an investigative tool is discussed later in this chapter under section 3.4.1) These narratives were analysed and those practices identified by the respondents as being 'good' for language teaching purposes were categorised. A selection of five typical practices identified as 'good', which appeared to contradict general notions of 'best practice' in language teaching, were resubmitted to students for further comment (Task 2). These further comments were then analysed.

**Figure 3.1    Diagram to show Research Design**

**1**
**INVESTIGATION 1**
Students write
narrative task on
'good teacher'

↓

**2**
**DATA COLLECTION 1**

Narratives analysed:
criteria identified by subjects
as 'good' practice sorted
into categories.

**FINDINGS**

criteria
fit
notion of

'best practice'

Criteria
contradict
notion of
'best
practice'

**3**
**INVESTIGATION 2**
Students comment on
criteria contradictory
to 'best practice'

↓

**4**
**DATA COLLECTION 2**
Commentaries analysed:
description, synthesis

**FINDINGS**

**5**
**CONCLUSION**
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

### 3.3.1 Data Collection

Data were assimilated from a sample of two tasks, both essentially narrative essays,
written by student teachers registered for ENG 200P as one of their subject
specialisations for an HDE with NCE in 1999 (investigations 1 and 2 of the preceding
diagram). These tasks formed part of the normal coursework requirements for ENG 200P.

### 1.    Task 1 (Appendix B) – first data collection

This first task was given to determine whether the results of the 1998 task, could
be generalised – including those practices which seemed to contradict the
commonly held view of 'best practice' (see Chapter 2) - and also, to establish a
baseline of generally held beliefs about 'best practice' among the sample students.
The task, which generated data for this research, required students to identify and
relate the methods of one 'good' and one 'bad' teacher in their language learning
experience. The approach to analysis of these narratives was inductive i.e.
beginning with specific individual observations and moving towards the
formulation of general patterns of criteria identified as 'good' under study. The
general patterns were codified and, to some extent, quantified (see these results as
Table 4.1 in Chapter 4 –Findings).

### 2.    Task 2 (Appendix C) – second data collection

The purpose of the second task, given to students, was to investigate the findings of the
data collection task in more depth. In other words to establish the nature of existing
conditions and determine the general relationship between student teachers and their

beliefs and practices, and the language teaching paradigm of the ENG 200P course informed by the 'official' notions of 'best practice'.

For this second task, a representative selection of criteria which were deemed 'good practice' by respondents of the 1998 task, (but which seemed to contradict official notions of 'best practice' outlined in Chapter 2.1) were returned to students for their personal comments and explanation in the second task. (The reason for using comments from the 1998 task, as opposed to comments from this particular sample, was that the course assignments are all handed out to students at the start of the year in a 'course pack'. This is common practice in distance education). Students were invited to give opinions as to whether they agreed with the original writer that these criteria were part of a positive language learning experience or not and whether they personally viewed them as 'good practice'. It was made explicit by two model answers provided that no particular line of opinion was sought (see Addendum C). Students could agree or disagree with the original statement. What was important for the purposes of data collection were the reasons given to explain their response.

The analysis of these responses aimed to determine the extent to which the 'contradictory' criteria, identified in the first task, were supported or rejected by the greater student sample. It was also hoped that this analysis would indicate the extent to which these 'contradictory' criteria could be said to form a trend in beliefs about, and the practice of, language teaching in the student sample. Finally, it was hoped that reasons given by those who opted to support the 'contradictory' criteria as 'good practice' would

give insights into the subjects' background, experience and beliefs which would help in the revision of the ENG 200P course.

### 3.3.2 Sample Selection

Samples of student responses were obtained from an initial selection of the narrative essays for Assignment 1.

n = 75 being 25% of the total number of students registered for the ENG 200P course. Responses from the same sample were gathered to provide the second data collection. The context of the study has been described in detail in Chapter 1. The profile of the student sample is as follows.

**Table 3.2**

**Profile of ENG 200P students who were sampled as subjects for this research**

| Age | % | Sex | % | Teaching context | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 20 – 29 | 39 | Male | 22 | Rural | 74 |
| 30 – 39 | 53 | Female | 78 | Urban | 26[1] |
| 40 – 49 | 7 | | | | |
| 50+ | 1 | | | | |

### 3.3.3 Data Analysis

Although the research tool was a narrative task and, as such, was more likely to deliver qualitative rather than quantitative data, it was decided to combine both qualitative and quantitative methods when describing the findings. There are two reasons for this. Firstly,

---

[1] 'Urban' here defined as those schools which fall under the magisterial district of any large town.

some 75 students submitted narrative responses of an average length of 5 pages! The sheer volume of data needing analysis in the first task required reduction to some workable form.

To arrive at this more workable form, an inductive approach was used. The approach began with specific observations and moved towards the development of general patterns that emerged from the responses by the student teachers to the Task 1 question which simply asked the students to *Describe your best and your worst English teacher*. Initially, no tight organising structure was imposed, or assumptions made, about the interrelationships among the data prior to reading through the responses and analysing the data. This, of course, is very different to the hypothetico-deductive approach to experimental designs which prescribes specification of variables and hypotheses prior to that data collection which would have been required for a strong quantitative approach. However, this design suited the purpose of the first task which was to verify earlier observations in the 1998 narrative task and establish a baseline of commonly held beliefs, among the student sample, about 'best practice'.

The quantitative findings of this research are merely simple reductions of volumes of written information based on subjective categories. (for a critical discussion on this see the section 3.4.3 which follows). The eventual findings of this research emphasize description and discovery rather than hypothesis testing and verification. Anticipating the volume of material which would need analysis, there was some attempt to focus the subject's responses and narrow the playing field, by guiding questions (see Addendum B) such as:

<u>The teacher who gave you a good classroom experience:</u>

What did this teacher do to make you feel good about learning English?
What work do you remember enjoying particularly? (give examples)
How did this teacher encourage you to speak/read/write in English?

Some of these guiding questions gave rise to the codes described below.

In developing codes with which to reduce the data to meaningful chunks, the procedure described by Marshall. and Rossman was followed:

> Probably the most fundamental operation in the analysis of qualitative data is that of discovering significant *classes* of things, persons, events and the *properties* which *characterize* them. In this process, which continues throughout the research, the analyst gradually comes to reveal his own "is's" and "because's": he names classes and links one with another, at first with "simple" statements (propositions) that express the linkages and continues this process until his propositions fall into *sets*, in an ever-increasing density of linkages. Finally the analysis will be complete when the critical categories are defined, the relationships among them are established and they are integrated into grounded theory. Each phase of data analysis entails *data reduction* as the reams of collected data are brought into manageable chunks and *interpretation* as the researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study (1995:113).

While a more in depth explanation of the type of responses which were sorted into categories can be found in Chapter 4 - Findings, the table overleaf outlines the basic codes used:

**Table 3.3**     Categories for coding on the first data collection.

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| Strategies | Teacher used group work, games, variety, went outdoors, interesting activities, drama |
| Rote | Memorization, recitation of chunks of work, use text book verbatim |
| Present | Teacher was on time, attended all lessons, present after weekends/month end and in rain |
| Plan | Links to prior lesson obvious, "easy to understand", well prepared |
| Order | Kept good discipline in class, did not allow teasing, strict |
| Oral | Debate, allowed oral report backs, encouraged talk |
| Group | Arranged groups according to 'intelligence' and level in Eng |
| Good English | Spoke well, good command of language, always used Eng only, wide vocabulary |
| Form | Strict about correct pronunciation, grammar drills and corrections |
| Force | Forced scared learners to speak and participate, "everybody had to…read/answer" |
| Esl Friendly | Used gestures and expression when reading, explained simply, explained in Zulu, allowed class to use Zulu too |
| Eng only | No Zulu allowed in school, only English, punishment for Zulu speaking |
| Empathy | Warm, caring, approachable, discreet about error correction, kindly, community involvement |
| Dress | Neat, smart, tidy, fashionable |
| Assess | Marking done quickly, tests given, progress monitored by questioning |
| Aids | Brought books, newspapers, tapes, made substitution charts grammar, pictures |

## 3.4 Research Methodology: a critical overview

The discussion which follows critically explores issues which are important to this particular piece of research namely:

- the use of the narrative task as an investigative research tool.

- issues involving the research procedure and data collection.

- difficulties encountered during the analysis of data.

- the role of the researcher.

- 'analysis dilemma' – a summary.

### 3.4.1 The narrative task as a research tool

The concept 'narrative' is a familiar term in the field of education and is understood both as a "phenomenon and method and study of personal practical knowledge, and a concept developed as a way of understanding how teachers make sense of, and act within, their professional contexts" (Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, D.J. 1988:36). Human social practices, including the practice of teaching, have histories and contexts and the meanings of those practices can only be understood within the narrative unity of those individual's lives. In this case, the 'teaching and learning lives' of the individual research subjects.

In brief, there were three reasons for choosing the narrative task as a research tool. Firstly, it was believed that the insights received about the student teachers' experiences and beliefs of 'best practice' would help to inform a meaningful revision of existing study material and the development new material for the ENG 200P course. Secondly, it was felt that the task set would give student 'voice' a chance to be heard. Thirdly, it was

hoped that the type of reflective tasks set for the students, in the form of personal narratives, and the follow up interrogation of those narratives, would give students, themselves, cause to reflect on their current teaching practices. In this way, it was believed that the narrative task would benefit the student teachers as an exercise while simultaneously allowing data to be gathered for research.

## Narratives as sources of information

As pointed out in Chapter 2.4, the student teachers who were the subjects of this research were distant from the researchers in many respects. The researcher and the lecturers of the course in which the research was being conducted were all white, all urban and all mother-tongue English speakers. The research subjects, the student teachers registered for ENG 200P, on the other hand were all black, all ESL and mostly rurally based. The choice of research methods was simply guided by the research questions. The purpose of the research was to discover what beliefs and attitudes about ESL learning and teaching were held among a sample of primary school ESL teachers in a distance education programme. The choice of narrative tasks as a research tool follows McKernan's recommendation that researchers acknowledge that these student teachers are subjects of their own realities who are capable of constructing and analyzing those realities (1997). The research aim was to investigate the differences between student teachers' and course developers' understandings in order to make changes to bridge those differences without exacerbating them. As Clarke points out: "Any examination of curricula, methods, or materials in which these are discussed as if they existed independently of their use by teachers reveals positivist assumptions of objectivity in which teachers are cast as subordinate to the artifacts of schooling" (1994: 11).

This acknowledges that human agency is important in the process of change and informing change was, ultimately, the long term goal of this research. Therefore, the research methods used here aimed to give primacy to the feelings, narratives and understandings of the participants. "The relations in which teachers' experiences are embedded are important ... the methodology must create space for teachers to speak for themselves and about themselves in relation to their own realities as they have experienced them" (Musi, M. 1989: 6). This is a very important area in South African research where, historically, researchers are separated from their subjects by the power that comes with wealth, education and access to technology and information. These narratives are not simply narratives of experiences, rather they derive meaning from the context in which they occur. They are the narratives of teachers who, having been learners, are now teaching others and informing yet a third party of researchers or 'outsiders' of the process.

It was hoped that the research methods would allow for the data to emerge from the setting without imposing any preconceived structures on it. This implies an "equality of both insiders and outsiders in the process of inquiry" (McKernan, J. 1997: 77) as opposed to researchers defining problems on their own terms. The intention of this researcher was not to manipulate the student's beliefs in any way, merely to establish a baseline of those beliefs about language practice. For this reason a questionnaire was not used. Instead a narrative task was set and the responses of that task were coded. It seemed a 'less rigid' approach and one which was more likely to lead to an honest view of student teachers'

beliefs and opinions. For example, it is questionable whether students would actually have answered YES, if confronted with a questionnaire containing a statement such as:

The rote learning method is good for language learning     Yes     No

And yet, significant numbers of student teachers described variations of rote learning methods and recounted the benefits of such methods in the narrative essays recalling a good teacher.

The narrative task is one in which the lecturer is provided with a window into their students' worlds. As Dowling points out, these tasks shift lecturer/student relationships and are a "concession on the part of the lecturer that she has something to learn from her students" (1996:19). All too often, individuals who spend their days teaching are viewed as less knowledgeable than individuals who have only infrequent contact with, or research status in, classrooms. Although it can be argued that a certain amount of distance is helpful in gaining an accurate perspective of classroom dynamics, it "stretches credulity to assert that the best theory building comes from individuals who are disconnected from daily contact with the classroom" (Clarke, M.A. 1994:14).

> Narrative inquiry allows us to describe and represent the human relations and the interactions inherent to the complex acts of teaching and learning, and to validate their multiple realities and many dimensions. It allows us to acknowledge that educators know their situations in general, social and shared ways and also in unique and personal ways, thus validate the interconnectedness of the past, the present, the future, the personal and the professional in an educator's life.
>
> (Beattie, M. 1995:54)

**Narrative tasks as a means to give subjects 'Voice'**

While the primary purpose of the narrative task as a research tool may have been to gain a 'window on the world' of the subjects' beliefs and experiences, it should also be remembered that both the narrative tasks were exercises given as part of an academic course. The narrative form in itself was chosen in preference to other tools such as questionnaires, for example, because they could be incorporated, as a writing exercise, into the existing ENG 200P course and it was believed that a reflective task held benefits for the subjects in their teaching worlds.

Narrative tasks provide space for students to give voice to some aspects of their own experiences. This can be a positive process for both researchers/educators and students alike. The act of articulating and sharing such personal opinions, beliefs and experiences, with lecturers or researchers marks them as valuable and worthy of attention. The task gives the student a 'voice'. 'Voice', as used in this instance, is described by McElroy-Johnson:

> When I use the term *voice*, I am thinking of a strong sense of identity within an individual, an ability to express a personal point of view, and a sense of personal well-being that allows a student to respond to and become engaged with the material being studied, the other students in the classroom and the teacher. Voice, in this sense, is having a place within the academic setting, other than just a desk and a book. Voice is the student's participation in, and acceptance of, the academic and intellectual process. It is the student's desire to express ideas in a clear, coherent way, because that student understands that his or her thoughts are important. It is the solid understanding of why an individual must communicate clearly and effectively, the recognition of self within the student that gives that

student the ability to express with confidence the answers to important questions within the academic setting (1993:85-6).

Given the legacy of apartheid education, it was felt safe to assume that many ESL students still struggle to own such a sense of voice within an academic setting - especially a setting as depersonalised as a distance education course. Constans notes that "one shortcoming of much of the research on South African education is that while it has offered descriptions of schools, teachers and students, the style of presentation is somewhat depersonalised. Because of the long-standing political oppression in South Africa, it is important to understand the experiences and to hear the voices of those who were long silenced..." (1997:684). ( Useful insights into the use of narratives in a South African context can be found in Jackson, F. and Stielau, J. 1998, Jackson, F. and Thomson, C. 1997, Dowling, F. 1996). Narrative tasks authenticate experience and empower those to whom they give a 'voice'. This 'voice' is a useful spin off, if you like, from the 'opening of windows' on students' past learning and teaching experiences. It contributes towards a "personalising of the general picture of the woeful effects of apartheid education, past and present, for teacher educators while simultaneously empowering their students" (Jackson, F. and Stielau, J. 1998: 6).

## Narrative tasks as an exercise in self-reflection

Besides giving 'voice' to the research subjects, the fact that narrative tasks could serve as an exercise in self- reflection was thought to be an added bonus. Reflexive practice was an area which was not well covered in the ENG 200P course (see SAIDE audit 2000) and this task provided a good opportunity to begin this process with the students.

Thus, narrative tasks were used both to gather data for this research and in order to provoke reflective experiences for the students. Reflective experiences that would generate "constructive insights about the power of the apprenticeship of observation" (Bailey et al, 1996) in shaping their own pedagogic practices and would promote critical thinking in as much as:

> Narrative studies provide us with different kinds of knowledge and different ways of representing it ... [they] have the potential to bring new meaning to teacher education and to the continuous experiences of change, of growth and of professional development in a teacher's life. Involvement in narrative inquiry allows for ... critical, emancipatory, self-empowering experiences .... through the telling and retelling of our stories and the construction and reconstruction of our knowing (Beattie 1995:65).

Beyond research purposes, the aim in using narrative tasks in the 1999 ENG 200P assignments, was identical to the aims of the preceding year's narrative task as explained below:

> Teacher development is a slow, organic and reflexive process. It cannot be speedily achieved through sudden, quick-fix injections of new input, but has to be facilitated by the creation of opportunities for teachers to step out, however momentarily, from their daily grinds to look at themselves and their discipline in fresh ways. These experiences have to be carefully structured so that self-reflection does not become indulgent navel gazing, but an opportunity to construct new knowledge, insight and praxis. Our use of narrative reflection tasks stems from our belief that professional development is facilitated through rigorous engagement with relevant theoretical knowledge and the articulation of teachers' prior experience. We believe that our teachers need to embrace new paradigms and principles of language teaching and that they need to become confident at accessing, applying and critiquing insights from related research. The aim of our courses is to develop within teachers an open orientation towards progressive language teaching practices. We believe they will be more receptive to doing this in an ongoing, sustained manner if we encourage them to share their existing practical knowledge as teachers, and past experiences as learners. We expected that the provision of opportunities for teachers to develop their own voices would promote their deeper interaction with the new paradigms encountered.
>
> (Jackson, F. and Stielau, J. 1998:7)

This being said, there nevertheless, remains a key problem in optimalising the value of narrative and reflective tasks in massified, distance contexts where there is a lack of opportunity to induct teachers into reflective practices. Such approaches are often so completely 'other' for teachers educated solely through the beliefs and practices of Fundamental Pedagogics (see Chapter 2) that the full benefits of developing deeply reflective processes cannot be attained through one-off narrative tasks. A discussion of the limitations of such reflective tasks follows:.

### 3.4.2 Research procedure and data collection: issues

The research procedures and the analysis of data collected in this instance presented a variety of challenges to the researcher. Attempts to resolve some of these were made and will be explained, while others remain unresolved as tricky areas and cautionary tales to researchers who may follow this route.

### Ethical dilemmas

Having explained, in the previous section, the rationale behind the use of narrative tasks as a means to collect data, let it now be said that the use of students' personal reminiscences for research purposes presents something of an ethical dilemma for the researcher. The first ethical problem faced was whether to reveal to students that at least some of their responses would be used in research intended to inform changes to the ENG 200P course of the future. Fraser stresses that, "of more importance in any study, than assuring anonymity, is to be honest *at the outset* about the degree to which anonymity and confidentiality can be guaranteed" ( 1997:167, my emphasis). Certainly

the respondents risk breach of confidentiality when they reveal to researchers something that would normally be hidden e.g. teacher misconduct, drunkenness, slovenliness, cruelty etc. However, after much consideration and discussion with colleagues, it was decided not to reveal to students 'at the outset', the fact that some of their responses may used for research purposes.

Certainly one lays oneself open to criticism for not revealing, at the start, the dual purpose of the narrative tasks. On the one hand, and ostensibly to the student narrators, the purpose of the tasks was only to spark reflection about ESL practice, to give the students' 'voice' and to earn credit towards their English specialisation course. On the other hand, plans were afoot to use the information, which was revealed in Task 1 and further probed in Task 2, as a basis on which to begin redeveloping aspects of the ENG 200P course. This was not revealed to the subjects until after the event.

Why the delay, when like Freire (1971), this researcher believes that the education of adults, as that of children, should be a collaborative event? The truth of the matter is that there were concerns to avoid a situation where student teachers would be less than honest in their narrative recall of good and bad ESL teachers from their past as ESL learners. If student respondents had known that these narratives would be used to investigate their own beliefs about ESL teaching and learning practice, would they have been honest? Just as many patients in a hospital survey may be compliant, due to their perceived vulnerability in that position (Fraser, D.M. 1997:165), so too, student teachers registered for a course in English may feel that they could be discriminated against if they do not

perform as expected and tell the researcher, who, incidentally, is also in the authority position of assignment evaluator and awarder of marks, what s/he wants to hear.

It was only revealed that the research was taking place after recording the data. Once the narrative tasks had been marked, commented on and returned, permission was asked student teachers' comments, for purposes of improving the ENG 200P course. Assurances of anonymity were given. The purpose that the research findings would serve was also given to students in a covering letter after students had received their yearmarks prior to exams (see Appendix D). It was felt desirable that the respondents did not feel vulnerable and anxious about the way that information, from their narratives, may be used for other purposes (e.g. to fail them for 'wrong beliefs'). It was felt better that permission to use their work for research purposes was asked retrospectively, when it was perfectly clear to the respondents that their narrative essays, in Assignment 1, and their opinions, in Assignment 2, had not affected their marks (see extracts regarding this in tutorial feed back letters: Appendices E and F). For the record, the students scored well on this task – an average of 65% compared to 52% for other tasks in the assignment. Students had been marked for 'effort' rather than content on account of the narrative task being particularly difficult to assign marks to (see Dowling, F. 1995).

While not setting out to betray the students trust, the adage that "fieldwork often has to be intentionally deceitful in order to survive and succeed" (Punch in Fraser, D.M. 1997:68) was held during this research.

## Problems with the narrative type task

Another problem encountered with the narrative task is inherent in the nature of the task and the use of such a task as a coursework assignment 'for marks'. What could be more intimidating than that? Students had not, in the context of study at this college encountered an exercise of this nature, in any of their formal assignment questions. It could be suggested that they were mystified about both the purpose and the process of such a task. This was not the fictitious descriptive essay beloved of the English teachers of their own school experience. Nor was this a recognisable assignment task related to anything obvious in the study guides, which they were reading and working through at the time. One has to ask whether the laudable intent of such a task was purposeful or intimidating to the respondents. That the narrative task served effectively as an exercise in critical self-reflection is a moot point and one which warrants further investigation.

## Validity and Reliability

A query could also be raised regarding the reliability of findings in this research. Naturalistic investigation, which may describe this research to some extent, can be thought to fall short in areas of reliability and internal validity - those methodological controls of quantitative research (Nunan, D. 1992:80ff). Methodological control is generally accomplished by two procedures that rely on the principle of randomness. One is *random sampling* and the other is *randomisation*. Neither of these can be said to have happened in this research. The research sample in this instance was by no means random. The research task was given to all students registered for ENG 200P as part of their first

coursework assignment. The sample of student responses selected as subjects for this research constituted the first 75 assignments returned. These teachers could not be said to be a truly random sample of ESL teachers on the course. Their selection was a case of opportunity sampling. This researcher had access to some 300 ESL teachers who were registered for the HDE at NCE with English as a subject specialisation in their final year. The fact that these students were registered on an INSET diploma course to upgrade their qualifications may suggest that they represent a more enthusiastic and dedicated ESL teacher than average. Furthermore, these students may not even have been representative of the average student registered for the course because two factors indicate that they actually represented a more committed element of the student body than most:

- firstly, most of this sample, as will be seen in the data discussed in chapter 4, completed all three assignments for the course. (This in itself is an above average performance.)

- secondly, the initial sample of Assignment 1 narrative essays taken for analysis were among the first batch of 75 assignments submitted for assessment, many of them before the due date. (This suggests a student/teacher who has a higher level of performance and a higher degree of personal organisation and commitment than the average student on the course. Where, incidentally, some 15% of students fail to qualify to write the exam due to incomplete coursework (i.e. submission of assignments) and, on average, 30% of assignments arrive up to ten days after the due date.)

In addition to the fact that this sample may not be truly representative of most ESL teachers in primary schools another issue needs to be borne in mind. The data actually represents *reported perceptions* and not the teachers' actual classroom behaviour. That behaviour would be best recorded from observations and may in fact create a more accurate picture of language teaching and learning in rural South African classrooms. These factors need to be borne in mind, along with other issues involved in use of the narrative as a research tool, if one wanted to generalise about ESL teaching practice and extrapolate the findings in this research to a wider ESL teaching body.

### 3.4.3 Analysis of data: critical considerations

As discussed above, the validity, reliability and the generalisability of the findings of this research should be viewed critically given the nature of the sample and method of data collection. The analysis of the data should also be viewed critically. This is largely due to the subjective nature of the analysis and interpretation of the data . Even though data appear in graphic form alongside comments and discussion and verbatim responses from subjects in this report, these scores should be viewed only as one researcher's *personal* guidelines for classification and a point of enquiry,  rather than some fast, predictable score gained by an experimental method with external controls.

### Difficulties with categories and coding

As explained earlier, the volume of data contained in 75 narrative essays needed reduction. Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns of belief

in order to categorise them, is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis and the one that is intended to integrate the entire endeavour and give it meaning. The process of category generation, in this research, involved noting regularities in the responses given by the student subjects. As categories of meaning emerged, searches were made for those that had "internal convergence and external divergence"( Marshall. C. and Rossman, G, 1995: 116) i.e. those that seemed internally consistent but distinct from each other such as, 'Use of FORCE' (during language lessons) as one category and 'use of the ENGLISH ONLY RULE' (during language lessons) as another. These categories were not always successful and distinct as the problems below illustrate:

*I've enjoyed reading of books because I was able to tolerate the whole story infront of the class without having a book in my hand eg telling a story*

( Did this response fit into the ROTE learning category – did the respondent mean "I was able *to relate* the whole story…"? Or was the respondent suffering in this instance and was 'tolerate' really intended because FORCE was involved?)

*Each time we read the poem he will read it to us first then we've to imitate him rolling his tongue trying to read exactly as he had.*

(Did 'good' practice here involve attention to FORM (accurate pronunciation) or the teacher's GOOD ENGLISH skills?)

*She made us to speak English.*
(Was this an example of the use of FORCE or application of the ENGLISH ONLY RULE?)

Patton describes how a researcher may use "indigenous typologies" or "analyst-constructed typologies" to reflect the classification scheme use by the subjects of the research (in Marshall. C. and Rossman, G. 1995:114). An example of "analyst-constructed typologies" would be this researcher's category "FORM", which was not an expression any respondent used but seemed to classify a whole range of teacher strategies

in the Audio-lingual mode such as teacher focus on grammar, drills, correct pronunciation etc. An example of an "indigenous typologies" would be the phrase "ENGLISH ONLY rule" (meaning subtractive bilingualism in the classroom) or "singing" (meaning rote recitation). Indigenous typologies typically use the language of the respondents. As categories for this research, these had been gleaned from the insights gained from the first, 1998, narrative task. Some of these expressions were incorporated into the second task in the examples of 'good' practice which contradicted general notions of 'best practice' and required student comment e.g. *Every morning we were* **singing** *the poem in difficult, advanced English, 'The Alchemist', 'The Echoing Green'....this helped us to get the words.*

However, unintentionally, the use of such a word did not give all students a familiar, colloquial sense when asked to comment on this as a 'good' teaching method. Several respondents were simply confused:

*They should speak the words and not sing them. Singing is not good and will not lead to understanding.*

*This is an English class so it is right to be singing in English.*

Patton points out that, " This process entails uncovering patterns, themes, and categories, and may well be subject to the legitimate charge of imposing a world of meaning on the participants that better reflects the observer's world than the world under study." (in Marshall. C. and Rossman, G. 1995:115) This presented a real problem for this research given the social and physical distance from the subjects' experiences (see next section 3.4.4). There may, indeed, have been 'imposition' in the attempt made to focus the

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subject's responses and narrow the playing field by the use of guiding questions which served to focus the subjects' responses (Appendix B). In addition, the guiding questions, themselves, were not always understood. For example, the question, "What do you remember about this teacher's teaching methods related to READING, WRITING, ORAL WORK, GRAMMAR and LITERATURE?" elicited responses such as these below which were either clear misunderstandings or vague or difficult to classify:

Misunderstood
*Her oral method was to speak loudly and clearly which was no problem for us.*

*I do not think this teacher used any method of teaching. I think he was not trained for primary pupils or maybe he chose the wrong career.*

Vague
*His teaching methods related to Reading Writing Oral Work Grammar and Literature were well selected in such away that lessons were not confusing the learners and they made it easier for both teacher and learner to grasp a subject matter w/o being deviated from the theme content of the lesson.*

*Grammar was presented with different types of methods which make a learner think critical.*

Difficult to classify
*Not only reading, writing etc but I admire most to him was that he uses corporal punishment in his side. It work because if you do a mistake you are encouraged to study because punishment was not his first thing...he didn't grab you and fight with you but tell politely.*

## Language as an issue

As explained above, coding responses is essentially an interpretive act. These narratives and reports are written in language, which in itself is subject to interpretation. "Language organises and *produces* meaning in terms of the categories and questions posed" (Walker, M. 1995:40 author's emphasis). The guiding questions given to the students in Task1 and

Task2, may inspire student responses and offer a framework for the narrative but also, importantly "create areas of silence" (Walker, M. 1996:41), where the researcher's apparent disinterest (by the lack of question) may overlook or devalue other experiences or reflections which are important to the respondent. In short, these narrative reflections on 'good' teaching practices do not yield *facts*: this data collection and analysis is a highly subjective interpretation, perhaps best described as a process of *creation* for a range of specific purposes including the justification for redevelopment of an existing English course or research intended for publication or the introduction and evaluation of self-reflective tasks into an existing product focussed syllabus.

Another issue around language is, of course, the inescapable fact that the subjects of this research were relating experiences and beliefs in their second language. How successfully they were able to convey their intentions, is impossible to know. At times it was necessary to guess at meanings when incorrect vocabulary was used, but even then, the guesswork was not easy:

*In Std 7 [the good teacher] first taught us how when to write the alphabet what was the importance of the alphabet and later gave us a short passage to rewrite it using the alphabet where necessary*

Clearly this respondent was not learning the alphabet in Std 7. Did the respondent mean *age* 7. Or perhaps 'alphabet' was wrongly used. So what then does one make of the word 'alphabet'? Does s/he mean punctuation? Grammar? Different tenses?

This one also presents difficulties:

*"I've enjoyed reading because I was able to tolerate the whole story in front of the class without having a book in my hand eg telling a story."*

Is 'tolerate' an error or intentional? Does 'to tolerate' then mean to relate? To tell? To bear? To manage? What about 'without having a book in my hand' does she mean that

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she had rote learned the book? Does she mean she was reciting here? And 'eg telling a story' - she summarised the story in her own words or she related the story verbatim? Nothing is very clear.

At other times the meaning was completely mysterious and for the example below, as in all these cases, the student in the distance education mode is not available to negotiate this meaning:

*This teacher always see teaching as a passive process and learning is an active process.*

The fact that the task instructions were set in the subjects' second language and involved some idiomatic phrases also confused the desired response. For example, one of the guiding questions to students, who were recalling their 'good' teacher, was, *What was the secret of [this teacher's] success?* Naively, the answer expected was along the lines of a description of methods and strategies used. Instead, the word 'secret' had been understood as 'sign' and typical responses ran along the lines of:

*The secret of his success was that his class had a low failing rate.*

*The secret of her success was that she was the HOD.*

One of the limits of this research involves the question concerning the authenticity and intended meanings of the narrative responses given the limitations of expression in a second language. It could be suggested that an interesting body of research lies in similar narrative tasks conducted in the subjects' mother-tongue.

### 3.4.4 The role of the researcher: problems with position

A sticky issue in all research such as this, which involves subjective interpretation in the creation of codes and categories, is the role of the researcher. Those working in a quantitative tradition posit an independent reality: researchers attempt to eliminate biases, values, preconceptions and emotional involvements. Those working in the qualitative tradition (where this research is rooted), maintain that such objectivity is unachievable. They believe that "it is not possible to separate the researcher from what is being researched" (Snyder, I. 1995:45). Because most researchers strongly identify with particular values and carry many personal preferences into their work, it becomes especially important to learn to discriminate between researcher beliefs and opinions, on the one hand, and verifiable, data-inspired support for ideas on the other.

Researchers find themselves in two positions of power. The first is power with regard to the interpretation of information. The second is power with regard to the research subjects. In the first instance, accountability structures put the evaluator into a powerful position. They give him or her the role of 'gatekeeper' in that the evaluator controls access to information: decides what information will be gathered, how it will be processed, which parts will be reported (Nisbet in Fraser, D.M.1997). As a practitioner/researcher there could be a temptation to "edit information, allow personal bias to influence decision making and exert undue pressure on the potential subjects to participate" (Fraser, D.M. 1997:169). Research has shown that "individuals and institutions stand to gain or lose by the transmission and utilisation of knowledge acquired in an evaluation" (Simons in Fraser, D.M. 1997:163). In this case, where the

ENG 200P course was perceived as being outdated and, perhaps ineffectual, the temptation to exaggerate the distance between the student teachers' beliefs about language practices and the ethos of the existing course in order to justify the time, effort and institutional expenditure on content redevelopment, was something that had to be guarded against.

Another issue which may have affected reportage on the findings of the research is the sensitivity towards other stakeholders in the findings. Whilst external researchers might be less concerned about the effects of their studies, as practitioner and researcher/evaluator cognizance had to be taken that this study could affect "the delicate credibility structures amongst [the researcher's] own colleagues" (Griffiths in Fraser, D.M. 1997:163). Many of these colleagues had themselves written the study guides being used for the course and criticism of the course could become a sensitive issue. Balancing enthusiasm to justify change whilst, at the same time, avoiding treading on colleagues' sensitivities undoubtedly impacted on the way the data were viewed. These are the dilemmas facing many practitioner researchers and as Fraser points out "being economical with the truth may be a problem for the practitioner researcher" (1997:163).

The second issue of power, that of power with regard to the research subjects, is one of particular concern to researchers in contexts similar to this one where the researcher's gender, race and status positionality all come into play. McWilliam makes the point that her own emancipatory discourse manifested itself in totalising ways, imposing her own view of reality and appropriate practice so that teacher resistance was then interpreted as "their problem" (in Walker, M. 1995:20). Teacher 'resistance' in this context, may not

be intentional 'resistance' to what are deemed 'best practices' or even resistance to the research method. But, rather, confusion because of the language and wording of the task (see Section 3.4.3), confusion about the very nature of a narrative task (see Section 3.4.1), and also anxieties to 'do well' because the task was part of a course work assignment. This anxiety, which may have interfered with a more accurate account, was evident in responses which described the 'good teachers', whom students recalled from their past, in the very 'present day' jargon of C2005 or words and phrases from the study guides (emphasized below):

*Mr Moloi's teaching method involved finding information, for example, he used **reading skills methods like scanning, skimming, finding main idea and context clues** and he was also involving reading skills which involved **the re-organisation of materials for a specific purpose like comparing, sequencing, reorganising fact and opinion.***

*He was asking questions and the emphasis was placed on **outcomes.***

*Group activities was her best method where the learning was **learner-centred.** Ms J was a facilitator.*

Perhaps, on a more positive note, this use of present day jargon reflects teachers 're-seeing' their past through new terminology and recognising that their 'good teachers' of old were indeed practicing a form of OBE or CLT. In this case, the narrative task was a good point of departure for reflection!

Be that as it may, it is still important to bear issues of power and position in mind, whether interpreting data, viewing the findings of this research or reading the recommendations made towards revisions in the ENG 200P course. While course revisions may attempt to avoid imposing lecturers' or course designers' will on the student teachers, the syllabus designated to these teachers and the notions of 'best

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practice' *are* imposed and teachers' failure to perform these practices is likely to be seen as their problem (refer back to Chapter 2 for a critical discussion on 'best practice'). Teachers after all , responded in terms of the positions available to them in discursive practices (this narrative assignment), shaped by power-knowledge relations (trying to guess what the marker wanted) – what it meant to be recording memories and observations in a ESL classroom and how this was then constructed for purposes of display for the researcher who was also the authority-figure marker. The selection of what students chose to write about and what they chose to remain silent about is significant. On a similar note, Maurice explains how her observation practices created asymmetrical relations between herself and the teachers she was observing. She suggests that the tension between being directive (in this case setting an assignment with guiding questions) and being democratic (allowing subjects to narrate their memories of good or bad teacher practices) is more nuanced than at first it may appear. No matter how subtly the directives are couched, how hidden and silent the authority figure remains, this encounter between student and marker is "stacked in favour of the face that claims expert knowledge... the clinical gaze is that of the eye of power, while silent or self effacing regimes only serve to mask power." (in Walker, M. 1995 :20) This issue became more and more pronounced as the masked power was revealed. Where students had commented with a fair amount of freedom and the narratives were revelatory in Task 1, this had shifted subtly by Task 2. Presumably, the reason for this shift was because the purpose of the task, as a probing and reflective exercise, was perhaps becoming evident, now they were asked to explain earlier responses. Now students were deeper into the course and more anxious to succeed by whatever means would please the marker to

reward them with good marks. Narratives were shorter, there were many more repeated phrases from the study guides and opinions were expressed with caution as shown by the use of phrases such as *"maybe"* or *"sometimes this thing can be a good way..."*.

It became evident that even as an educator trying to emancipate teachers, make them critically reflective of their own practices and the practices of teachers in their experience, one was still bound with them in a distinct and perhaps inhibiting power relationship. Walker argues that " where knowledge (even critical and emanicipatory forms) is being produced there is always power and regimes of truth. The point is not to set out to empower or emancipate others, but to exercise one's power in ways which enable others to exercise power" (1995:21).

## 3.4.5 Dilemma in this research: a summary

It is worth pursuing briefly here the notion of 'dilemma analysis' in data analysis (Winter in Walker, M. 1996:41). Winter outlines three levels of 'dilemma', all of which are applicable to this particular research.

The first level is "ambiguities comprising background awareness of the complexity of the situation but which are tolerable because they are not directly linked to the action" (Winter in Walker 1996:41). These ambiguities would include, for example, subjects' reponses which consisted of phrases from the C2005 document or study guides, or aimed to please because marks were involved in the task, which doubled as a research tool and a coursework assignment. Or even the ambiguities about whether this research sample was

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representative of the ENG 200P group as a whole, because the sample could have been the most conscientious and brightest of the group. In the long run these did not interfere unduly with the progress of the research.

The second level causing dilemma involves 'judgements' which arise where complexity is not seen in negative terms but as interesting and may be resolved. An example of this could be the vast amount of data received which needed judgements to be made when reducing it into categories to become meaningful. The judgements, themselves, need critical examination and must be thoughtfully undertaken, but, for all that they present a dilemma, they do allow the research to take a form and become meaningful.

Finally 'problems' comprise the third level –"those courses of action where the tensions and ambiguities actually seem to undermine the validity, the rationality of the action required" (Winter in Walker, M. 1996:41). For example, these would be the bigger issues which result from the research . These are issues which impinge on the long term goals of the research. They would include the recommendations of the research in terms of revisioning the ENG 200P course in the light of the complex and debatable notion of a single 'best method'- how far can one go in recommending any 'best method? ( for further discussion on this see Chapter 5 – Recommendations).

These dilemmas are grounded "contextually and historically (temporally)" (Walker 1996:41). In this instance, the context creates problems which are inherent in the context of gathering data from students at a distance, in a second language, from an assignment set as part of a diploma course. It has to be assumed that there will be some areas of misunderstanding which the distance cannot allow to be clarified and negotiated. There

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may be misconceptions of the part of the respondents about what is actually required of them in this reflective narrative task – something they are unlikely to have encountered before in their learning. The students may be confused and suspicious about writing personal narratives which may seem inappropriate in a formal educational setting such as a distance education course. There could be misunderstandings in interpreting the respondents' narratives and assigning comments to categories on the part of the researcher. The fact that student teachers are writing narratives, in a language which is not their mother-tongue, and in some instances, particularly for the rurally based student teachers, operating at the level of a foreign language, may mean that their precise meanings and experiences are not delivered to the researcher as they would wish them to have been. As discussed elsewhere in this chapter, the very fact that the researcher has an 'own-agenda', which is focussed on the apparent gap between some teacher beliefs about best language teaching practice, and the notions of 'best practice' held in the new national curriculum for the learning area *Literacy, Language and Communication*, means that there is, per force, a certain focus, perhaps blinkered, in the way these narratives of Task 1 and the subsequent expansion of opinions, Task 2, were analysed.

All of the above present 'dilemmas' in the research and should be kept in mind as the research findings are reported in the next chapter.

# Chapter 4:     FINDINGS

## Introduction

The findings which follow need to be viewed in the light of the critical discussion of the research methodology described in the previous chapter. The dilemmas described above should act as cautions with regard to the subjectivity and limits of these findings. However, Walker insists that these dilemmas are "not binary oppositions but rather inhering one with the other" (1996:41) and as such are part of the 'mess' and grey areas which constitute qualitative research. 'Grey areas' accepted, however, these dilemmas do exist and need to be borne in mind beyond these findings when introducing curriculum innovations, new course developments and, especially, when developing grounded theory as a result of the findings in this type of research. So, this particular report does not claim to be a transparent or conclusive interpretation of the situation of language teaching – beliefs and practice – generally. Rather it is a single account and personal interpretation among many possible accounts and interpretations.

## 4.1 Task1 – Findings

It will be recalled that Task 1 was a narrative essay requiring student teachers to recollect and write about their memories of English teachers whom they considered 'good' or 'bad'. The first past of this report is based on the findings contained in the 'good' teacher narratives. While reading the essays, common methods and phrases were identified as they recurred. These were grouped into broad categories and coded under headings as depicted in Table 3.3 as follows:

**Table 4.1 Data derived from respondents' essays: 'The Good Teacher'**

Description of categories

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| Strategies | Teacher used group work, games, variety, went outdoors, interesting activities, drama |
| Rote | Memorization, recitation of chunks of work, use text book verbatim |
| Present | Teacher was on time, attended all lessons, present after weekends/month end and in rain |
| Plan | Links to prior lesson obvious, 'easy to understand, well prepared |
| Order | Kept good discipline in class, did not allow teasing, strict |
| Oral | Debate, allowed oral report backs, encouraged talk |
| Group | Arranged groups according to 'intelligence' and level in Eng |
| G.Eng | Spoke well, good command of language, always used Eng only, wide vocabulary |
| Form | Strict about correct pronunciation, grammar drills and corrections |
| Force | Forced scared learners to speak and participate, "everybody had to...read, answer |
| Esl Friend | Used gestures and expression when reading, explained simply, explained in Zulu, allowed class to use Zulu too |
| Eng only | No Zulu allowed in school, only English, punishment for Zulu speaking |
| Empathy | Warm, caring, approachable, discreet about error correction, kindly, community involvement |
| Dress | Neat, smart, tidy, fashionable |
| Assess | Marking done quickly, tests given, progress monitored by questioning |
| Aids | Brought books, newspapers, tapes, made substitution charts grammar, pictures |

**Fig 4.2    Categories of 'good practice' contained in student narrative essays**



Number of narrative essays mentioning this category
as 'good practice'
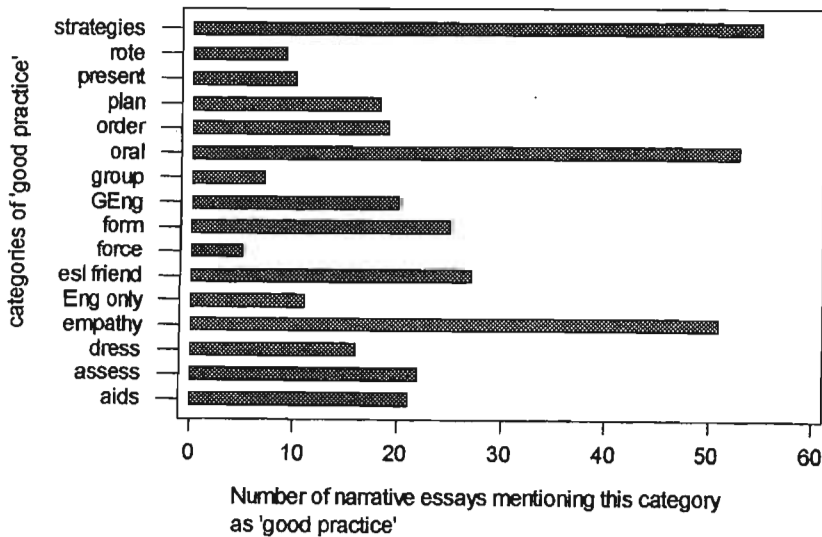
In all, 16 categories were identified and named as being significantly[1] common among

the narrative responses to the 'good teacher' memory. Written phrases were coded and

counted. The categories were further reduced to three groupings which will be discussed

with the results below:

- Group 1 – those which conformed to the criteria which are generally held as 'best' language teaching practice (see Chapter 2).
- Group 2 - categories which apparently contradicted the notion of 'best' language teaching practice.
- Group 3 – an unexpected category which repeatedly presented itself.

## Table 4.2: Analysis of Task 1

| Group 1 Students identify teaching practices which conform to general notion of 'best' practice | | Group 2 Students identify teaching practice which contradict general notion of 'best' practice | | Group 3 Classroom Discourse identified as important to good practice | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | % considered important to best practice | Category | % considered important to best practice | Category | % considered important to best practice |
| EMPATHY | 68 | ROTE | 12 | DRESS | 21 |
| ORAL WORK | 70 | FORCE | 7 | ORDER | 25 |
| AIDS | 28 | FORM | 33 | | |
| PLANNING | 23 | ENG ONLY | 15 | | |
| ASSESSMENT | 29 | GROUP | 9 | | |
| PRESENT | 13 | | | | |
| GOOD ENGLISH | 27 | | | | |
| ESL FRIENDLY | 36 | | | | |
| STRATEGIES | 73 | | | | |

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[1] 'Significant' means similar criteria identified in more than 4 narratives

For purposes of transparency and to help inform the reader of this report, the categories are described below, and include examples of a range of student responses, which informed the particular groups. Also given will be explanations for some particularly subjective decisions.

## Group 1 - Conforming Criteria

These are the criteria mentioned by students in their 'good' teacher profile which conform to general notions of 'best practice' in language teaching outlined in Chapter 2. 'Best practice' would include the notion of Additive Bilingualism which, along with Communicative Language Teaching, is one of the cornerstones of the language teaching methodology informing Curriculum 2005. Additive Bilingualism would be seen in the first category, ESL FRIENDLY and would include those teachers who code switched and employed tactics to aid second language comprehension, such as gestures, relating topics to the learner's immediate context etc

> *He also uses simple and clear explanation in English. The meaning of the word was explained by action.*

> *He encouraged me by allowing me a task of translating from the other languages eg Zulu to English.*

> *She used gestures when she was teaching which make you to understand and she also use facial expression and speak slowly.*

> *When we were writing the essay he would give us the topic to debate first in Zulu, he was coaching somewhat.*

> *He used Zulu to clarify where we were having problems but he did not teach through Zulu.*

> *When he wanted us to write a composition eg "Our School", He took us walking around the school and looking at everythings.*

*She said that to write the story of our Grandmother we must talk to her at home first and then write.*

Other categories, applicable to language specifically, fell into what could broadly be termed Communicative Language Teaching methodology. These would include giving the learners ORAL opportunities:

*He used to give us topics on certain things and divided into groups so that each group can discuss on those particular topics and discuss them orally*

*I remember we were having dialogues that really provoked enthusiasm and feelings we had as if we were these animals involved e.g. "a rabbit and a hyena".*

*As I am an African, I feel a shame of speaking English in front of everyone, so everytime this teacher arrive in the class we do an eyes-break [ice-breaker] ...each and everyone will be excited and wait anxiously for a turn by that way I gained confidence.*

The use of teaching AIDS and resources which contributed to language enrichment was another category:

*He used to bring a tape recorder to class to test our listening skills.*

*He gave us pieces of newspaper to encourage reading skill.*

*He presented wall charts to us, motivate our learning in English.*

Students also mentioned the importance of a language rich environment in which the teacher had a good command of the target language, in this case GOOD ENGLISH:

*She expressed herself clearly and concisely in English. When she pronounced the English word we were able to write it.*

*He had a good memory to explain many words we asked.*

*Her tone was like of whites.*

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Finally, there were memories of teachers who employed a variety of innovative

STRATEGIES to enable the learning process and make it interesting:

> *When he wanted us to write a composition e.g. "The world and its beautiful nature", he took us [out] of the classroom to look at nature and listen to the birds.*

> *He used group discussions e.g. come to class and discuss about the topic.*

> *We watched the TV news in English and after that we wrote down what we had heard.*

> *He encouraged brainstorming, dramatisation of story, creative writing, speeches and debates were organised.*

Then there were a variety of responses which could be considered 'best practice' for

teaching generally and in this sense, would be desirable in a language classroom as much

as any other type of classroom. These go beyond the specialist language educator role

and identify other roles and competences which conform with the Roles and

Competences of the Educator as prescribed by the Department of Education in its

guidelines to the Norms and Standards for Educators (1999). Students recalled that their

'good teachers' were 'learning mediators' and created a good learning environment by

showing EMPATHY:

> *He was always smiling which makes it easy to see that it will be easy to communicate with him.*

> *He was so kind. When a learner failed her work, he would asked her about her bad performance.*

> *He wrote a letter to her parents so as to discuss the matter.*

> *Her classroom was a heaven place.*

The 'good teacher' also made use of PRAISE when creating a good learning environment:

> *Also he was so interested in our school work when a person has the right answer he will praise him.*

> *At the end of the day he always praise if you did something right saying "Good boy/girl, try again, excellent".*

The educator's role as an 'interpreter and designer of learning programmes and material' was another aspect that was deemed desirable in the 'good teacher'. Good teachers were made memorable by the fact that there was evidence of lesson PLANNING and preparation:

> *We learned English whether it was a cold day or sunny day.*

> *What I like to this teacher is the way of introducing the lesson it makes you understand and to be confident before teaching takes place.*

> *She remind us of what she have taught.*

The role of 'assessor' was also identified as important in the subjects' experience of good teachers and one third of the respondents thought it notable that their teachers made sure to ASSESS their performances:

> *He combined our mistakes and discussed in the classroom.*

> *If we were given work it was marked very soon which helped us to know whether we understand or not.*

A category which appeared enough times to be considered significant (13% of respondents mentioned it), is a category which one would expect learners to take for granted and the fact that it is deemed notable is a sad indictment of the teaching

profession. This is the fact that students noted that their 'good teachers' actually came to work and were PRESENT in class!

*She didn't absent herself during official hours without permission.*

*He was dedicated to his work that is always punctual.*

*She was there in the cold and even the rain she was teaching.*

*She was the first one from the staff room after break.*

One category which was fairly common among the narratives and originally grouped in with these Group 1's – conforming to 'best practice', was the category concerning discipline, classroom control and ORDER. After considerations, which will be discussed later, it was moved to Group 3 – Classroom Discourse.

## Group 2 – Contradictory Criteria

As was the case with the original narrative task given to students in the same context in 1998, the 1999 task yielded similar contradictions i.e. students identified as 'good' certain practice which seem to counter the aims of CLT. In significant numbers among student responses about their 'good' teachers, and some of the methods that those 'good' teachers employed, were methods which involved subtractive bilingualism, coercion, intimidation, rote memorisation and grammar drills. By far and away the most commonly mention criteria for good practice was the teachers' attention to 'form'. This seems far removed from the notion of 'communicative competence' and harks back to an earlier methodology having profoundly influenced the students lives both in the methods through which they came to learn English and also in the practices they 'observed as

apprentices' in classrooms of their youth. One out of every three students identified a

range of audio-lingual practices as 'good'. These included a focus on grammar, drills,

correct pronunciation etc. and have been categorised under a heading <u>FORM</u>:

> *It was like a blow to him if you suffered a grammatical error and he shouted strongly at those.*

> *Writing was one aspect of the language that was causing competency among the pupils because neatness, correct spelling was more emphasized for clear and neat work!*

> *Grammar was a weekly programme in the language since it was taken into consideration that punctuation and other aspects of the language were properly done and kept as a rule.*

> *Correctness of English words was given a watchful eye.*

> *She spoke so nice that it was important to say just like her repeating until it is correct.*

> *For grammar he used exercises from the book called Junior High School English.*

Another popular by-product, if you like, of the audio-lingual method, which goes against

the grain of more progressive thinking about language learning and teaching was the

<u>ENGLISH ONLY</u> rule. Many students recalled their good teachers using this practice and

believed it to be useful and worth emulating today:

> *She also wanted us to always speak English everytime at school. There were some prefects who would take down our names if found speaking Zulu.*

> *During his period nobody was allowed to speak Zulu.*

> *I was class captain in her class. I wrote down all those who spoke Zulu and they were punished.*

If the Audio-lingual method was evident in students' responses, so too was the presence

of Fundamental Pedagogics in the form of an acceptance of, and liking for, rote learning.

Fundamental Pedagogics being a teaching philosophy whereby "learning is reduced to the mastery of accepted definitions of knowledge in a fixed field, and measurement and testing are emphasised. In essence this is the form of pedagogy that characterises transmission teaching and learning." (Parker, B. and Deacon, R. 1993:37) The end result of such practices is very likely to have been <u>ROTE</u> learning:

> *I know my work very properly what I was supposed to do just to recall my memory to everything we have done in class.*

> *When doing the oral work she would expect all of us to participate and made us recite.*

> *The way the teacher made it easy for the child to follow him through imitation as imitation teaching method is promoted.*

> *She gave us a lot of vocabulary to learn of word lists.*

> *When it comes to oral work he would encourage memorizing and cramming.*

> *He wanted us to memorize the books word by word. We were accurate.*

> *He gave notes for us to learn.*

Surprisingly some students who were coerced into performing, even under threat of punishment, recalled this as 'good' practice. They identified this practice as 'good' and therefore worth emulating in their own classroom practice. It falls into a category entitled <u>FORCE</u>:

> *She would just point at anyone to do the reading and you MUST do the reading.*

> *He encouraged us to read the newspaper article then you had to tell the class what the article was about. If somebody does not want to he says you must do this.*

> *She was forcing each and everybody to do it.*

One last category, which also seemed to be 'against the grain', so to speak, is the category which involves dividing students up into <u>GROUPS</u>. This should not be confused

with 'groupwork' which is common in OBE methodology and which promotes co-operative learning. Rather, in the narratives of the research subjects, it seemed to be common practice that teachers divided their classes into groups, which they perceived to be groups of good learners and groups of weak learners. As one would expect, given the effects of such a practice on the self-esteem of the 'weak' group, those students who advocated such a practice as 'good' were themselves members of the 'good' group!

> *She divided the class into groups. She gave all the class some work to do. I was a leader in my group. My group was always best and finish work quickly.*

> *Different types of learners (slow and gifted- as I was) She used to put us in these groups for group teaching.*

> *She grouped us in different groups according to our ability to learn or according to our IQs.*

## Group 3 – Classroom Discourse

In Chapter 2.2.3 it was discussed how teacher beliefs include beliefs about the Discourse of being a teacher in a classroom, of being a 'Sir or a Ma'am'. The 'apprenticeship by observation' of all the subjects who wrote these narratives will have included close observation of Classroom Discourse. "Professional discourse, refers to virtually all aspects of being, behaving, thinking and interacting as a language teacher. It includes one's position in society as a teacher: one's relationship with colleagues, students, administrators, ad parents or sponsors of students on a day-to-day basis; as well as the ways teachers are portrayed in the professional literature" (Clarke, M.A. 1994:11). Obviously, the 'good' practices identified earlier contribute towards this Discourse as much as the ones which follow, but these two (dress and order) had a certain uniqueness

and were both heavily subscribed to by as many as a quarter of total respondents. The

first, ORDER, relates to the teacher's ability to keep control of the class. While this is, of

course, a desirable practice and, indeed, the one of the educator's roles- 'leader,

administrator, manager' (Dept. of Education 1996) – it was the *type* of management

which the subjects recalled as 'good' which is notable. They did admire, as expected,

mature, democratic classroom control, even 'strictness' and rigidity within bounds.

However, also acceptable and 'good' were punishments and acts of domineering brutality

and the expectation of fear engendered by such acts.

> *He was a good teacher and very strict demanded diligence, neatness, obedience and honesty.*

> *She was responsible for discipline and also obey the rules and regulations of the education department.*

> *When someone has done something wrong she would make sure that the child sees his/her fault first and a hard punishment comes later.*

> *She was having the stick for the spellings so I know my words even now.*

> *What I admire most to him was that he uses corporal punishment in his side. It work because if you do a mistake you are encouraged to study because punishment was not his first thing...he didn't grab you and fight with you but tell politely.*

> *One time I told her (we had not finished yesterday's work). You know why she thanked me? It was because the other pupils kept quiet because she used to hit us for wrong answers.*

As the South African Council of Educators (SACE) Code of Conduct for Educators

outlaws "any form of humiliation and ... any form of child abuse physical or

psychological" (section 3.5: 1997), one wonders how difficult it will be for teachers, who

subscribe to these as 'good' practice, to adapt to other styles of classroom management

and whether such rigidity would allow, for example, the playful aspects of CLT to

emerge in classrooms. Prabhu suggests that "persistent belief in Teacher Discourse can get in the way of change as much as any other belief" (1987:103).

Another interesting phenomenon, which emerged from the students' narratives, was the persistent reference to the clothing and demeanor of their 'good' teachers. Although the link between dress style, deportment and 'good' practice seemed tenuous to the researcher, the fact that it was a persistent and popular topic seemed to make it an important issue and it was decided to record it here, under a general heading <u>DRESS</u>, as part of Group 3 - 'Classroom Discourse':

> *Clean and shiny shoes and white shirts was his language.*
>
> *When he talk about cleanliness it was easy for us because he was exemplary in neatness. He was physically fit.*
>
> *He was a gentleman and a teacher by sight and by movement. He was tall with a sharp pointed nose and so smart.*
>
> *Lovely to look at ... good clothing ... quality shoes always ... good fashion style ... sweet voice ... very beautiful ... a real Teacher.*

To summarise the findings then, of this first narrative task: they confirm, as expected, that a significant number of ESL teachers reported as good and admirable certain practices which could be said to contradict the generally accepted notion of 'best practice' for language teaching.

## Task 1 as reflexive practice for the students

Although it falls outside of the scope of this research and does not enter any of the research questions, it is worth noting that the task could be said to have served some purpose in stimulating reflective practice in the student respondents. Certainly it seems worthwhile pursuing this sort of reflection with students learning at a distance. Just for the record and lest they be lost, among the responses received for both 'good' and 'bad' teacher narratives were strong, reflective, adult voices:

*Basically, I don't think that Mr N. was stupid, he had knowledge but he just did not have time to teach and plan.*

*I do not think that this teacher used any wrong method. I think that he was not trained for primary school or maybe he chose the wrong career.*

*I am seeing myself in this teacher's manner and method.*

*Today I can say that I do not like this thing what he was doing and seek another way.*

## 4.2 Task 2 – Findings

In some respects the findings of the first narrative task simply served to confirm that, yes, as anticipated, there are significant numbers of teachers who support practices which seem to contradict the general notion of 'best practice'. Task 1 was almost a survey in that its initial purpose was to obtain a snapshot of conditions, attitudes and opinions, from a representative sample at a certain point in time (Cohen, L. and Manion, L. 1985). However, if useful recommendations are to be made towards revising course material for students who hold such beliefs in these practices, then more information is needed. Task 1 served to confirm *what* students believed to be good practice in language teaching. Task 2 attempted to find out *why* these beliefs existed for teachers in this context. The aim was not to be "intrusive for fear of interfering in the reflection of real opinion" (Nunan, D. 1992:141). Hence, Task 2 was sent out with reassurances that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' opinion about the teaching practices requiring comment (Appendix C).

In addition to exploring student beliefs in more depth, submitting these 'contradictory' criteria' back to the same subjects also served to verify that these were indeed valid criteria for 'good practice' among the subjects and that the original count was a reasonable reflection of the numbers who supported such practices. In naturalistic inquiry, credibility of truth value is ascertained through structural corroboration such as this.

The initial findings of Task 2 are reflected in the graph below. The graph shows a comparison between the number of students who identified the 'contradictory' criteria as 'good practice' in their narratives for Task 1 (series 1), and the number of students who later agree and explain why that these practices are 'good' and 'useful' in Task 2 (series 2).

**Fig 4.2: Comparision of positive responses to 'contradictory' practices: Tasks 1 & 2**



94
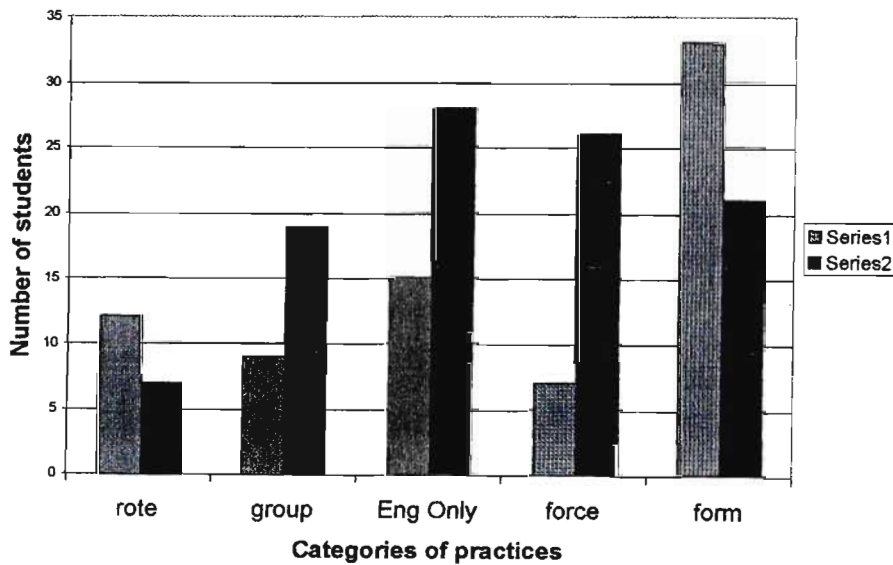
Before looking at student responses in detail, it is interesting to note the following:

- All 'contradictory' criteria had some degree of positive support confirmed by the subjects.

- Three of the criteria for good practice (GROUP, ENG ONLY and FORCE) had scored significantly *higher* than in the first narrative. It should be kept in mind, of course, that the first narratives were initiated by the subjects and that their 5 page narratives were by no means exhaustive memories of their 'good' teachers. It is suggested that presenting them with criteria from other student's memories may serve to have jogged their own which would explain this higher score on the second. Of course, the fact that they were required to make a response, positively or negatively, meant that abstention was not an option and where they had purposely left certain criteria out of Task 1, they were now forced to take a stand, so to speak. That they chose to make a positive stand is, of course significant.

- Two of the 'contradictory' criteria scored lower on the second submission than in Task 1. It could be that the language used to describe the 'contradictory' criteria appeared harsh and negative to the students and they shunned such an activity. It may be that they were confused by the extract given to them for comment. For example, the words "difficult" and "advanced" may have been detracted from the repetitive, 'rote learning' nature of the recitation below:

*Every morning we were singing the poem in difficult, advanced English, "The Alchemist", "The Echoing Green" ... this helped us to get the words.*

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The findings which follow are intended to be as representative as possible of the range of subjects' responses. Their responses could be said to constitute their knowledge as teachers. It is hoped that the detail and quantity of responses supplied in these findings will serve two purposes: firstly to represent these teachers' knowledge as authentically as possible. Woods points out that, all too often, teacher knowledge is determined, not by those teachers themselves, or even by partnered/participatory examination of their work, but by researchers who, in an effort to prove the scientific respectability of their work, view teaching as discrete behaviours, distance their conclusions about teaching from the contexts within which it occurs and ignore the individual perspectives and understandings of the teachers who carry out the very teaching practices that they have studied (in Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:399)

Secondly, 'detail and quantity' of response are supplied here in an effort to be transparent about these findings and the conclusions drawn from them. Understandably these findings come from one researcher. Denny, when discussing ethnography, case studies and 'story telling' makes a point which is appropriate to any researcher, whose position (as discussed in Chapter 3.4.4) sets him or her apart from the research subjects. The point is that "sufficient data should be presented in the report findings for the reader to draw conclusions other than those presented directly by the researcher" (in Nunan, D.1992:77).

As explained under Research Procedure (Chapter 3.4.2) a short description of an event, which depicted 'contradictory' criteria as good practice, extracted from earlier student narratives, was submitted to students for comment in Task 2. These extracts appear below followed by a selection of student responses to that extract. Reasons for their responses

are grouped for convenience into those who AGREED that this extract did involve good

practice and those who DISAGREED. Reasons given for agreeing or disagreeing are

grouped further, in an attempt to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute to the

recommendations made as a result of these findings.

**Task 2.1     Rote Learning**

**Fig 4.3:Task 2 responses to rote memorization as good practice**



unclassified
11%

agree
14%

disagree
75%
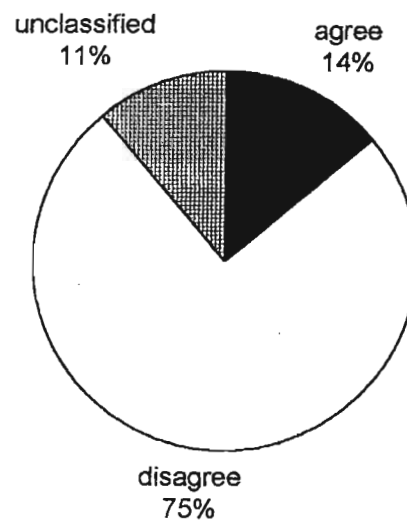
**Response extract 1**

Every morning we were singing the poem in difficult, advanced English, "The
Alchemist','The Echoing Green'....this helped us to get the words.

**Students who agreed with the view that rote learning was 'good' practice**

Gaining vocabulary was a popular reason for supporting this method:

> *This teacher was using the drill method which other teachers hate to do. This method helps the slow learners to develop and understand the subject children are gaining vocabulary, learn good pronunciation and they become confident.*

> *During our times there was no poetry analysis. The emphasis was on gesture and pronunciation and memorization of the poems. The understanding of the poem was of secondary importance. The teachers themselves used to compete the children who could memorise long, difficult poems. This helped us to incline in speaking English using so-called bombastic words from poetry and passages which included idioms and proverbs. This improved our understanding of English. It had an impact on speaking our own mother-tongue, Zulu.*

> *When there are words which (the learners) find difficult they will use gestures and body language, act movement and facial expression changing of tone makes learners happy and proud to be learning a poem.*

In some responses the Behaviourist/ Audio lingual approach is recognisable and finds favour:

> *As children are singing or dramatise they memorise easily. They imitate pronunciation. And what the poem is about.*

> *Although it was difficult at first it encouraged the learners to work on their own and enabled the class to be excellent in speaking the language.*

Some saw in this response a chance to extend learners in the way that Krashen would advocate language learning to involve $i+1$ (1982), and for purposes of stimulating gifted learners:

> *It is a challenge for the intelligent learners.*

> *It is important since others get a chance to excel.*

**Students who disagreed with the view that rote learning was 'good' practice**

The response that such a practice is boring and meaningless, dominated the thinking of those who rejected this rote recitation as bad practice.

Some responses focussed on lack of meaning:

> *Learners were without understanding. They would have a difficulties to apply knowledge gained to any practical situation.*

> *Singing the poem is meaningless.*

> *He only encourage cramming the words.*

Others focussed on how boring this practice would be:

> *It would be boring to me.*

> *The teacher was killing their thinking.*

Some mentioned the difficulty of assessing massed learner responses such as this:

> *As they sing the teacher could not even notice those who pretend to sing while miming,*

There was also considerable mention of the inappropriacy of the content:

> *The words "difficult and advanced" show that it was not the level of the learners.*

> *It would have been appropriate to teach them a poem about something they know e.g. "New Shoes". The poems also, do not lend themselves to ordinary everyday English vocabulary.*

And, of course, there were some responses which were difficult to classify because they seemed to have missed the point or were trying to guess at the response the marker desired:

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*The teacher must teach the difficult words and pronunciation first. Then they can sing freely and not have difficult.*

*No this would not have been good for me because in my day the phonics was not taught at schools. So how would I pronounce such words. The phonics needs to be drilled thoroughly for the pupils to be able to spell and pronounce correctly.*

*The teacher was active the pupils were passive. The teacher was not applying the OBE skill.*

**Task 2.2     'English Only' rule**

**Fig 4.4:Task 2 resposes to "Eng Only" rule as good practice**
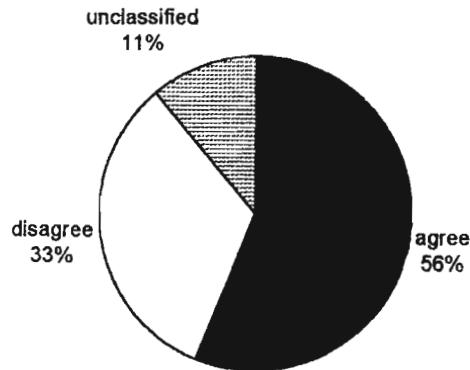


**Response extract 2**

Mr G. was number one on speaking English in the classroom. If you spoke in the mother tongue, he had the prefect who would give you a yellow paper. That was for punishment

**Students who agreed that the application of the English Only rule was good practice**

Many respondents agreed with this statement but expressed themselves in this way, *I also encourage learners to speak English*. It is unclear whether punishment and encouragement were seen as one and the same. Or whether Mr G.'s method was seen as brutal whereas "encouraging" was a gentler alternative. Some offered variations and more constructive "punishments" e.g. *Students must repeat their Zulu conversation to me in English* or *Pupils should be punished by given more work in English*.

Many students cited the 'English only rule' as the method to which they owe their fluency and believed that it reflected <u>dedicated teaching</u>:

> *He was a good teacher who love his subject so he want it inside the classroom and out.*

> *He was willing to promote second language.*

> *This teacher was a good model and cultivating a love for the language.*

Some respondents agreed because it was felt that <u>punishment was necessary to enforce practice of the language</u>:

> *It is not easy for the English teacher to make them speak English in the classroom.*

> *Pupils are stubborn, once you are out of their sight they forget what you have said so the prefect is necessary.*

> *Learners should be punished because when they speak English they should not speak other languages. Especially because English is a second language to them so there is no other way of learning to speak and understand this rather than getting much practice and this would help them in other subjects as English is the medium of instruction, so like or not pupils should know English.*

> *I agree with the writer because by giving punishment to learners mean that the teacher wanted his/her learners to speak and learn English correctly.*

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*The yellow paper is good because learners will not try to speak mother tongue being afraid of the yellow paper. This will make the learners be able to practice.*

*Pupils will seek help and information because they do not like to be seen as failures to others. When he need that word he will seek that word.*

*With this method everybody must try it.*

Others subscribed to the adage that <u>practice makes perfect</u>:

*It was a good way because the child can practice the language.*

*This was the way of helping us to learn and practice it.*

*Learners need this opportunity to practice the language.*

It was also acknowledged that this practice was beneficial because for many learners in rural areas, English exists as a <u>foreign language</u> and that given the limited opportunities to speak it at all, <u>benefit could be had from practice,</u> in any form:

*There is no other place to speak English except in the classroom. Not that I will throw my mother language. I'll be speaking it too at home with friends.*

*Pupils are afraid to speak English to each other, they must be made to do this thing for their goodness.*

*You do make a mistake at the beginning but as time goes on you become more fluent, more sure of yourself. I think that if it was applied when I was at school, I would have had more confidence in speaking English when I began talking.*

*It gives learners a chance to speak, not teacher dominating.*

*They will make lots of mistakes when speaking and from those mistakes they will learn more as long as they are corrected.*

The status and desirability of English was prevalent among supporters of the 'English only rule':

> *I cannot be able to pass even an interview without speaking English. I cannot work if I fail to speak.*

> *It will open doors for them.*

> *What is the use of the mother tongue because they know it already?*

## Students who disagreed that the application of the English Only rule was good practice

Many students gave interesting accounts of their own negative personal experiences of the English Only rule:

> *I had once experienced this method of using a card to those who spoke mother tongue. We used to speak very low so that the prefect may not know the language we are speaking. If it happened that he was given a card then they quarreled a lot because the prefect was not sure of the language which was used. During that argument obviously mother tongue was used. Sometimes when someone was having a card he spoke loudly and chaotically because he/she was already having the card.*

> *My English was not good so I stayed silent at school during Eng only rule. I was not permitted to speak Zulu. So I said nothing. Now my English is still weak and I cannot speak any deep Zulu.*

Some rejected this practice describing how stressful such a rule could be:

> *No this would not have been easy for me as English is my second language. Break is the time for every learner to use any of the official languages.*

> *Language must not be learnt under fear of punishment. One should enjoy learning English at ease.*

> *If it was me...I think I would hate it by now. I imagine the children were afraid to speak to their friends and frustrated.*

Students also mentioned issues such as the negative and regressive <u>attitudes</u> which could develop from such a practice in a classroom:

> *There is no freedom of speech.*
>
> *Learners could not contribute their ideas.*
>
> *This teacher is not respecting my language. This teacher kills my proud of being a Zulu and I feel discouraged.*
>
> *This teacher was causing the pupils to look down upon their language. This teacher was putting more emphasis on English. Pupils must be encouraged and to be proud of their mother tongue.*

In rejecting the English Only rule, some students mentioned the <u>importance of the mother-tongue</u> in a second language classroom:

*Mother tongue should be used in the classroom to explain certain words e.g. 'zombies'[2] (imincwi) learners will never forget that.*

There were also some responses which were difficult to classify because they seemed to have <u>missed the point</u> or where the extract had been misunderstood:

> *I agree with the writer because long ago the child learned well by fear but nowadays they learn freely with participation and comprehend in a lesson. Mr G. is the role model of nowadays learners.*
>
> *Mr G. was using the right method because it will decrease the number of pupils making unnecessary noise in the classroom.*

---

[2] This word had appeared in a story in a different section of the same assignment as Task 2, and had been translated into Zulu for the ENG 200P students.

**Task 2.3     Language learning by force**

## Fig 4.5:Task 2 responses to 'force' as good practice

unclassified
13%

agree
51%

disagree
36%
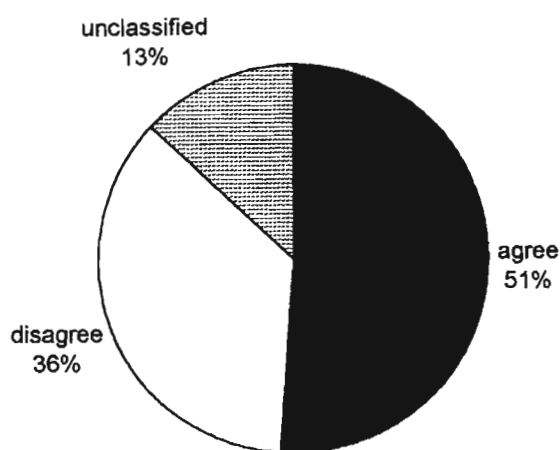
**Response extract 3**

I was shaking but I had to read aloud. Even when the other pupils laughed, he would not say sit down. So I read and have no fear for reading from that time that he forced me.

**Students who agreed that the use of force was 'good' practice**

Despite the apparent brutality of this episode, many students felt that it constituted a

confidence building exercise

> *Yes, I agree with this statement because he/she praises the learner even she is nervous to read in front of others. Fearness, shyness, nervous became little because this teacher motivated the learners so that they must have self confidence.*

> *This is a good teacher, a teacher who gives courage, confident to the learner not discouraging, demoralising the learner in front of others. This teacher planted the*

*love of reading because we learn by mistakes and mistakes need to be corrected by the teacher.*

*I was a shy somebody since then I learn to read for the crowd.*

*A good teacher does not let the reader sit down when some are laughing.*

Some approved of the use of force but preferred to qualify their agreement or embrace this practice more gently:

*Usually I can make the learner read and then praise and encourage him.*

*Even in my class there are pupils who do not yet have develop self-esteem and security when they are to read but I keep on appreciating whatever effort they make when reading.*

Some of the subjects pointed out that in crowded class conditions this practice did give individuals a chance for attention:

*To read aloud help the educator and the whole class to listen to the mistake of pronunciation of words and style of reading whether he/she is right.*

*This is a kind of teacher which is needed in the language practice. All the pupils were prepared to read.*

Interestingly, many responses expressed more concern about the (anticipated) discipline of the laughing pupils, than interest in the coercive teaching method:

*I would adopt the style of this teacher because to discipline others who are laughing at the reader, help the reader to have self confidence in his/ her reading.*

*This would be generally good for all the learners because the teacher allowed them to read fluently without being disturbed by laughing children.*

*It is good that the teacher did not entertain the pupils who laughed.*

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Students believed that forcing learners to perform was beneficial to learners because it was <u>developing a life skill</u>:

> *Our learners are living in the situation where they have to give feedback to the class after the lesson. They do this by reading what they have written in a group. So I forced them to be used in standing and reading in front of other pupils.*

> *He taught them not to give up when others are laughing at you, try until you reach your goals.*

> *English says "Faint heart never won fair lady" means one must take risks in life.*

> *I take forcing as a motivation that leads you to keep trying to do your best.*

There was also a body of students who supported this method by harking back with nostalgia to the authoritarian style, '<u>old school</u>' classroom:

> *Yes I agree. I, as an old teacher and from the old system of education, I understand why old teachers taught forcefully. It was the way they were trained.*

> *In long time ago learners were afraid of their educators. They were having an enormous dignity since most of them were autocratic and authoritarian teachers. But their learners managed to do it in that situations because there was no option in doing things. I think it helped a lot since most of us can read well since we are compared to the learners of today. All what we learnt we were forced to do it and we succeeded .*( Incidentally, this particular respondent was only 30 yrs old)

> *Yes, I agree. The Zulu child need punishment in order to participate fully in a lesson. The punishment would make the child not to forget what the teacher taught him/her. Even today they need punishment in order to comprehend and participate in a lesson.*

**Students who disagreed that the use of force was 'good' practice**

<u>Sensitivity to humiliation</u> was one reason for denouncing this particular method:

> *No, it is a bad idea to let the pupil read the story whereas the others laughed. The educator is supposed to help the child and control the classroom.*

> *I could not bear to be the laughing stalk of the classroom.*

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*The teacher can make me to appear stupid by the other pupils.*

*No. Pupils need not be humiliated and tortured to achieve their best.*

*Many learners leave school because other learners mock them.*

Students also felt that forcing learners to perform in this way would have a negative impact on their <u>attitude and motivation</u>:

*When doing this then there is little motivation to improve or learn.*

*If someone is reading she must be in a good classroom situation, she must be relaxed and secured.*

There was <u>criticism of the authoritarian approach</u> of the teacher:

*The classroom has not a good atmosphere. The teacher was not a democratic teacher he/she regard himself as a resource of knowledge.*

*He was shaking means he was not free. Children should be free as other human beings. There are better methods of participating children.*

*This teacher is not respect learners.*

And then there were those responses which were difficult to classify because they seemed to have <u>missed the point</u> :

*This one should be quiet or else the teacher can group to his/her ability.*

*To read aloud is not good because you do not know what you are reading.* (Focus on reading aloud rather than on teacher and pupil situation)

## Task 2.4    Attention to Form (Audio-lingual practices)

### Fig 4.6:Task 2 responses to a focus on 'form' as good practice

unclassified
11%

agree
42%

disagree
47%
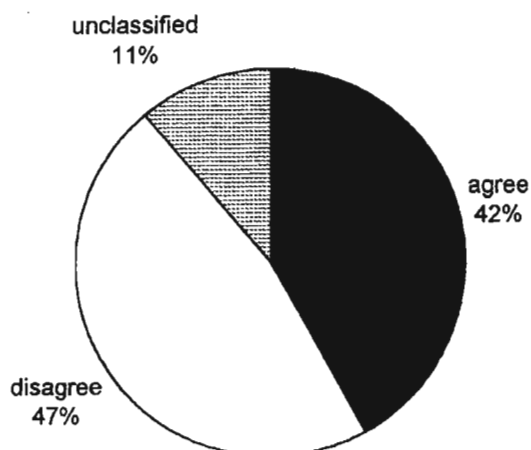
## Response extract 4

I learnt the grammar and the tenses in that grade. We had tenses after break everyday, drill and more drills even after Friday.

To summarise student opinions about this practice as 'good' or 'bad' one could say that

they were in two broad, almost equally divided camps: the audio-lingual brigade

("practice make perfect") and the CLT contingent who dismiss drilling as rote learning

which does not encourage communication.

**Students who agreed with a focus on grammar and 'drilling' as good practice**

Many in favour of this method argued unquestionably that drilling grammar was a commonly accepted 'good' practice and that was that:

> *This method is generally good for all learners. Drilling in English is the correct method of teaching English.*

> *I agree as drill is important and also very successful for teaching a foreign language which is new to the learners.*

> *This educator has a genuine concern not just for good exam results to make her seem successful but for each pupil's education and growth in maturity.*

> *Yes this educator did his/her homework that the child must come out with something on their hands eg grammar and tenses.*

> *The more we drill the more the thing is implanted in the child's brain and it is not easily wasted out.*

> *There is no other way to learn the language.*

> *You have to get the early foundation this way.*

> *You can become perfect in this way*

Some stressed the importance of grammar and tenses:

> *It is good to teach grammar and tenses. Without these there is no good second language. When knowing all of this, they are able to speak/use English in a successful way. If you learn these you can be proud of yourself.*

> *They need to be taught often. Correct speaking is good for self esteem.*

> *Tenses are a problem in learners. Th teacher must provide time for these tenses to be learnt.*

**Students who disagreed with a focus on grammar and 'drilling' as good practice**

Those who were disciples of CLT <u>object to drilling</u> as a method and felt that it

<u>encouraged meaningless rote learning</u>:

> *This sound like an old fashioned method where pupils are looked upon as empty vessels or like animals in the zoo need to be drilled not human being.*

> *Here it is not good because the teacher is just spoon feeding the pupils. In the old days we had those teachers who would drill with using the stick.*

> *This is out of fashion. This teacher should use comprehension test poetry to teach grammar and tenses and even in content subjects.*

> *Maybe by singing they will enjoy but the lesson won't be successful because there is no way of seeing the person who knows what she is saying, errors and misunderstanding will be left.*

> *This is just like a cram work.*

> *There can be no challenge to think critically.*

> *I believe that practice makes perfect but when drilling they seem to learn it so isolatedly.*

> *This does not equip you to speak English properly. They have no communication skills.*

Others felt that this method was <u>liable to be tedious</u>:

> *I would have felt boring to practising more drills even after Fridays.*

> *This is boring stuff without efforts. You cannot be doing one and the same thing same way every now and then.*

> *Learners will dodge my periods since they know exactly what I will be coming to their class to say.*

Some objected, not so much to the method, as to the <u>narrow focus</u>

> *Language is more wide than grammar and tenses.*

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Still another significant group focussed on the last part of the extract, overlooked the

teaching method employed, and concentrated on the bad timing including a

misunderstanding of the writer's original intention "*after Friday* [recess]":

> *This teacher is not wise to teach difficult subjects after break. After break the*
> *learners are tired.*

> *After Friday is nonsense. The teacher has no need to teach after Friday. There*
> *are 5 days for teaching in, it's Mon to Fri. He must plan so that he cannot teach*
> *after Friday.*

> *After Friday comes Saturday and Sunday, learners need to rest.*

**Task 2.5    Attention to grouping learners according to ability**

**Fig 4.7: Task 2 responses to 'grouping' as good
practice**
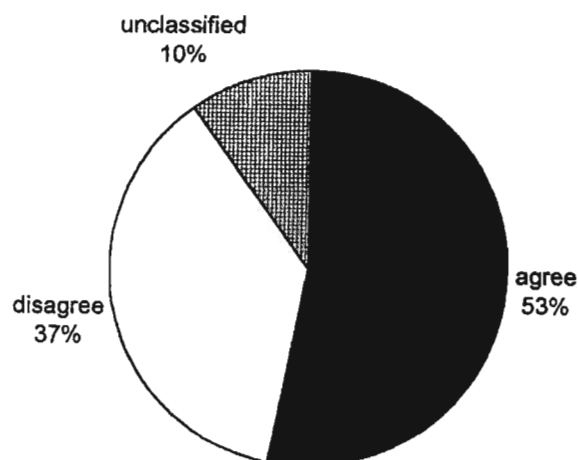


**Response extract 5**

The way she did the lesson successfully was to group us according to our intelligence.

As explained earlier, this method should not be confused with 'groupwork' which is common in OBE methodology and which is co-operative learning. Rather, in the narratives of the research subjects, it seemed to be common practice that their teachers divided the class into groups which they perceived to be groups of good learners and groups of weak learners. The above extract reflects this view.

**Students who agreed with 'grouping' as good practice**

Some of those in favour of grouping learners in this manner felt that it promotes self esteem and protects dignity

> *Those who are highly gifted do compete, then those who are medium do compete and also those who are not gifted. But in the mixed group those who are not gifted see themselves as nothing.*

> *Even the weak and shy ones can participate in their group. So they can be motivated*

> *I would like this way because I could think and speak freely and admit that I don't understand.*

Others pointed out that it encourages good co-operative group work

> *Learners who are the same feel better or comfortable to work together because we know that nobody appeared as the better amongst us but we were guided by the work and enjoy the pace.*

This strategy was thought to be of use in overcrowded classrooms because the teacher can spend more time with the slower learners

> *She can attend those who are having difficulties. The teacher can spend little time with those who are gifted.*

> *Those who are fighting to get it are within teacher's reach to help them closely.*

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Some even saw grouping as personalising the classroom:

> *The teacher is not just group the pupils in any kind...he understands them according to their abilities, interests and their intelligence.*

> *Nobody is hidden and the teacher can see the different problems.*

**Students who disagreed with 'grouping' as good practice**

By far and away the most common fault found with this method was that it promoted the interests of the top group only:

> *Grouping students according to their intelligence is not wise because those who are intelligent will always overpower the one that is not intelligent and in this group everyone is able to participate in a good way of doing work whereas the non-intelligent group pupils will always be passive and they will not do the work properly and they will not be able to solve problems.*

> *The pupils with high intelligence get bored when they finish early.*

> *What will happen to the slow group? They will sit and tell themselves that they can't do anything. The class will be a film room for high achievers only and sometimes average.*

Students also felt that this method would have a negative effect on the self esteem of the 'low-intelligence' group:

> *Pupils with low self-esteem feel isolated in class knowing that they are the dull ones.*

> *The less gifted would have their courage down. It would only benefit the gifted group.*

> *If I am in the low gifted group they can call me as a stupid.*

> *The dull will feel that they are left aside as empty vessels.*

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In contrast to those who felt that this method was good for promoting co-operative work, some felt that it would encourage conflict:

> *Intelligent group promotes high competition in times of discussion and they end up arguing because they claim they know better than each other.*

Finally students, perhaps acknowledging the problems of a poor teacher:learner ratio in South African classrooms, pointed out that this grouping method removed the good learners from an important role in the classroom:

> *You can waste a lot of time teaching all the time the slow pupils.*

> *Because of high enrolment those with high intelligence can give help to those of low intelligence so there should be the leader of a group.*

> *The slow learners can learn from the brighter learners and this also helps lessen the teacher's task when he has a large task .... change the teachers role to facilitator.*

> *The good learners cannot help the other one and they like to teach which is a helpful thing.*

The findings for Task 1 served to identify a variety of criteria held to be 'good' practice in language teaching by the subjects. Task 2 not only corroborated these findings in the area of those criteria which seemed to contradict notions of 'best practice', but added an enormous wealth of insights and understandings into the subjects' world. Not one of the extracts given for comment failed to attract a lively and personal response from all subjects. The reasons given by the students supporting or disagreeing with the practices requiring comment were cogent and well founded. It is these reasons which need to be given attention in the next chapter.

# Chapter 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Introduction

In drawing conclusions from the findings of Chapter 4, it is necessary to revisit the research questions and examine to what extent these questions have been answered. Insights gained from the findings, as well as issues raised in the broader research around language teacher education and the notion of 'best practice', will form the backdrop to the recommendations which conclude this report.

This chapter serves two purposes. The first is to explore briefly what can be learned or verified about this sample of teachers regarding their beliefs of 'best practice' from analysing responses to Task 1 and Task 2 which were used as research tools. The second and more detailed section will explore issues raised and offer recommendations will may be useful towards conducting teacher education in general, and revisioning an existing language course such as the ENG 200P course. Further questions, which have presented themselves in the course of the research, and warrant future investigation, will also be mentioned.

## 5.1 Insights from Chapter 4 – Findings – Task 1

The first two questions guiding this research were as follows:

> What do student teachers [registered for the ENG 200P course in 1999] understand, from their own experience as language learners and from observing other teachers, as 'good' language teaching practice?
>
> and
>
> Are there differences or conflicts between the student teachers' beliefs and understandings about good language teaching practice, and the current theories on language teaching practice which inform the present ENG 200P?

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Let it be acknowledged that there are many broader concerns and issues around the notion of 'best practice' (see Chapter 2). However, for purposes of answering the first two research questions, it has been accepted that in terms of the 'official' notion of 'best practice', the following are givens:

- democratic classroom practice (1999 Norms and Standards for Teacher Education, Training and Development),

- a focus on Additive Bilingualism in present language-in-education policy (1996 Department of Education),

- and a new educational curriculum which identifies Communicative Language Teaching as the model for 'best practice' in the language classroom (1997 C2005).

Based on memories of their own 'good' language teachers, many of these student teachers identified a wide range of teaching practices as 'good'. These practices included general classroom practice such as the creation of a good learning climate, the use of teaching aids and other strategies to mediate learning and sound assessment practices. Their narratives also identified as 'good' many language teaching practices which are in keeping with the official notion of 'best practice', including Additive Bilingualism and a range of CLT practices. These views cohere nicely with the 'official' notion of 'best practice' outlined above.

However, as noted in Task 1 and corroborated in Task 2, a significant number of students also identified as 'good' certain practices which seemed to contradict the official notion of 'best practice'. These practices included methods commonly found in Audio-

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lingualism including a very strong focus on 'form' (pronunciation, language structures and grammar), Subtractive Biligualism, rote learning and even included coercion.

Also revealed in the student responses were persisting beliefs surrounding the notion of 'Teacher Discourse'. These could be seen in most of the responses concerning general classroom practice, as well as how the teacher dressed and commanded authority. It has been suggested that these beliefs, which have their base in the influences of historical practices and the *apprenticeship of observation* ( see Lortie in Samuel, M. 1998), often inform current practice. Many of the beliefs evident did not coincide with democratic classroom practice. Students cited as 'positive', practices which included a strong authoritarian approach, uncritical adherence to a product-syllabus and the division of learners according to perceived 'ability'.

As pointed out in Chapter 3, this student sample was a sample of 'convenience' and not random. This may raise doubts as to the generalisabilty of these findings. While it is accepted that this student sample may not be representative of language teachers in general, it remains interesting to speculate on whether, in fact, a higher percentage of ESL teachers than is represented here, support these apparently 'contradictory' practices and beliefs and that these findings constitute a conservative estimate.

## 5.2 Recommendations from Chapter 4 – Findings – Task 2

Task 2 not only corroborated the findings of Task 1, in the area of those criteria which seemed to contradict notions of 'best practice', but added an enormous wealth of insights and understandings into the subjects' world. The reasons given by the students for supporting or disagreeing with these apparently 'contradictory' practices warrant deeper exploration if one is to make useful recommendations for change in the ENG 200P course and for the development of teacher education programmes in general. The discussion and recommendations which follow aim to answer the last research question:

> What suggestions can be made with regard to bridging such differences, if indeed they do exist, when developing new material or changing existing material for the ENG 200P course?

Recommendations in this report need to be made on two levels. On one level a problem exists because policy and methodology have changed in this country, and in language teaching generally, and some teachers are ignorant of, or simply do not know how to effect, these changes. On another, deeper level, a problem exists because teachers are aware of change and may be able to pay lip-service to new methods in order to receive an education diploma but, in reality, they resist the new methods because they do not find them practical or plausible.

### 5.2.1 Recommendation: Information on changing policies and practice

It can be presumed that some teachers, who were subjects in this research, have advocated the practice of 'outdated' methods simply because they are ignorant or have a poor grasp of changes to policy and practice. The Review Committee on C2005 noted the

inadequacy of the Department of Education's 'cascade model' for disseminating information about C2005 and OBE as a factor contributing to teacher resistance to the new curriculum (2000). Teacher education needs to partner the Department of Education by alerting and instructing teachers enrolled in courses, such as ENG 200P, in these changes. In the most simplistic way it could be said that the 'old' language teaching methods were Audio-lingual in approach and were part of a bigger teaching philosophy known as Fundamental Pedagogics. These methods are replaced by CLT practice in language classrooms following the OBE approach prescribed in C2005. The fact is that things *have* changed dramatically in South Africa and teacher education needs to identify these changes, enact them in teacher education programmes and support teachers in ways that allow them to effect these changes into their classrooms. So, to put it simply, and perhaps stating the obvious in this recommendation: teacher education programmes must inform teachers of these changes. In addition to being informed of these changes, teachers will need to be informed about what practices are considered desirable and 'best' by 'official' standards and need to be assessed in how they manage these practices. It must be assumed that the majority of teachers trained in this country will practice their profession in state employment. As such they will be civil servants carrying out official policy. Whatever cautions and criticisms one may like to raise regarding official policies, the fact is, employees of the Department of Education will be expected to emerge from teacher training programmes understanding how to implement such policies and practices.

## 5.2.2 Recommendation: Developing credibility in change through practice

Many of the teacher respondents to Task 2, who supported the practices which seemed contradictory to the notion of 'best practice', gave succinct and extremely practical explanations as to why they did so. For example: they divided learners into groups in order to manage large and diverse classes; they enforced the English Only rule because their learners had no other access to the language and no chance to practice it beyond school; they defended the drill method and rote learning as ways of giving learners confidence and expanding vocabulary; they forced learners to perform by way of encouraging them to take risks and be heard. None of these reasons showed anything but concern for the best interests of the learners. None of these practices was carried out in malice or without thought. Accepting this fact, raises two points: firstly, teachers are practising methods which they believe to be effective in their own classrooms and secondly, researchers, and developers of teacher education programmes proffering theories and recommendations for educational change, are at a distance from those classrooms.

It is important to remember that these teachers are also learners and like any learner, they will " interpret new content through their existing understandings and modify and interpret new idea on the basis of what they already know or believe." (Kennedy in Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:401). As practitioners, much of what those teachers 'know and believe' is verified for them through effective practice on the classroom floor. More than any theory based content, it is this practical element which is seen to be the task and purpose of teachers and in all classrooms there is an intersection of the epistemological, the political, the social and the practical. This needs to be taken into

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account when creating a balanced curriculum for teacher education. A strong practical element not only gives credence to theory but "is also a powerful recognition of teachers as intellectuals who can construct new knowledge into practice" (Carr, W. in SAIDE 1999). Imposing a codified body of knowledge on teachers and separating them from their experiential knowledge "may lead to closed worlds of meaning rather than opening windows on possibilities" (Harrington, in Golombeck, P.R. 1998: 447). Harrington goes on to point out that opening windows may require reconceptualising the notion of knowledge so that it includes these teachers' ways of knowing and how they use that knowledge in the language classroom (or any other classroom) (1998:447).

It has been suggested that teachers will move from "common practices" to "good practices" and onto "best practice' when the teaching materials (in this instance, the study guides which would be produced for the ENG 200P course) are recognisable to teachers and reflect at least some of the practices with which they are familiar (Wickham, S. and Versveld, R. 1999). What this may mean is that some aspects of Audio-lingualism, which are seen as 'good practice', while apparently 'against the grain' of CLT, be retained in revised language courses for the same reasons that they were identified as 'good' by teachers in Task 2: they do have a practical use, they are seen as credible by many teachers and they *are* appropriate in certain contexts. Developing feasible classroom procedures based on the given pedagogy, the official 'best practice', may involve a reconciliation with the constraints of the teaching context (these could include class sizes, resources, teacher's own linguistic skill, teacher's beliefs and expectations of

'best practice'). In order to do this there would need to be a strong interaction between developer and practitioner (see next recommendation).

In the case of distance courses such as the ENG 200P course, it has been recommended that course material, which is essentially theoretical in content, be complemented with peer and school based interaction and that there should be an integration of theory with practice (SAIDE 1999). The SAIDE audit of this course, as observed in many other distance courses, found that it did "not generally teach classroom practice – as opposed to academic subjects" ( Perraton in SAIDE 1999:8). The audit also recognized the need to put more emphasis on improving teacher's understanding and capacities in practice rather than developing theories of education (SAIDE 1995:17).

In conclusion then, changes and innovations in teaching methods cannot be introduced by theory alone. It is recommended that a strong practical element is incorporated into any new teacher education curriculum and that this practical element includes and builds on to existing practices which have credence with teachers.

### 5.2.3   Recommendation: Enacting a process syllabus

As mentioned above, developing feasible classroom procedures based on the given perception of pedagogy would, in all likelihood, involve compromise due to the constraints of the teaching context. As suggested before, in order to do this there would need to be a strong interaction between researcher/ curriculum developer and practitioner. Not only would this interaction enable the researcher/ developer to access and utilise the 'open window' into the classroom of teachers in order to develop appropriate material,

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but it also gives powerful recognition to those teachers as expert practitioners. Teachers are a living resource, the accumulated life experience of the people living out the roles of teachers in classrooms. The problem for the teacher educator/ curriculum developer lies in working out how to build from that experience, how to validate what teachers know and believe to be right about practice, while at the same time introducing new and useful practices to them. This approach fits nicely with the ideological change in South African education which is from an authoritarian, prescriptive, top-down approach to education, to a more democratic, participatory, bottom-up perspective (Wildsmith Cromarty, R. 1995).

Much has been written about the problems created when research driven knowledge becomes grounded theory and is then offered up to practitioners with little regard for their individual perspectives and contexts and experiences and beliefs (Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998, Golombeck, P.R. 1998, Walker, M. 1996, Freeman, D. and Richards, J.C.1993). Effective language teacher education lies beyond the most effective teaching behaviours and the quest to find the best methods (Prabhu, N.S. 1990). Rather we now accept that what may be effective in one classroom, with one group of language educators, may not be so in another. Teaching is more than an accumulation of research knowledge because it is evident that giving teachers more research knowledge does not necessarily result in a better practitioner. This is a situation which one wants to avoid when developing or revising material for teacher education. "Learning to teach is a long term, complex, developmental process and operates through participating in social practices and contexts associated with learning and teaching" (Freeman, D. and Johnson,

K.E. 1998:402). The interaction between researcher/developer and practitioner can be effected from a process syllabus where ongoing reviews, evaluation and changes contribute to the development of course content.

In some ways the development of a process syllabus can be likened to ongoing action research. Elliot describes action research as the "study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it. [The] total process – review, diagnosis (the area of this research report) planning, (developing a new ENG 200P course) implementation, monitoring effects (evaluating the course) - provides the necessary link between self evaluation and professional development" (in Walker 1996:21) and *also* the equally necessary link between theory and practice/ researcher and subject on the development of a process syllabus.

Problems concerning the positionality of the researcher (or as the case may be, curriculum developer) which were raised in Chapter 3, such as the problem of a researcher/developer's own emancipatory discourse manifesting itself in totalising ways, could be reduced by collaboration with teachers registered for the ENG 200P course. It should be pointed out, however, that while recommended, a process syllabus may be easier proposed than practically developed. Walker cautions "how very difficult it is to achieve this [a process syllabus] within a teaching culture which is not automatically receptive to notions of classroom practice innovation, self-reflection and evaluation and curriculum theorising"(1996:25). One of the difficulties of such a syllabus stems from the history of experience that INSET teachers (those registered for upgrading courses such as

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ENG 200P), "do not see themselves as autonomous professionals but rather the obedient implementors of a top-down syllabus from a national Department of Education and tended by a host of departmental officials; circuit inspectors, subject advisors and a school principal" (1996:26). The development of a process syllabus requires a culture receptive to change, "yet such a culture simply did not exist in Bantu education primary schools where the dominant view of educational activity on the part of teachers, even more than pupils, was to replicate what was given" (1996:26). Just as teachers have certain beliefs and expectations about the Classroom Discourse of their own classrooms, so too, they may have certain expectations of what is appropriate and expected in a teacher education course. These expectations may not include giving advice and suggestions and being consulted as experts! However, let this not detract from the possibilities and benefits which have given rise to this recommendation: that a process syllabus be implemented as teacher education courses are revised and developed.

> [Reform] can be imagined not as the monologic imposition of ideas, beliefs and values by one person or group on another, but as a polyphonic re-forming and re-construction of understandings by all parties involved through the interaction of narratives. When our collective images and imaginations are linked in the creative act of giving voice to shared visions, the process can enable and empower us to re-form and transform both self and community (Beattie, M. 1995:6)

### 5.2.4 Recommendation: General classroom management practice – skills development

One thing which became evident in the course of reading these student narratives, is that many of the practices gaining teacher approval served as measures of classroom management and control. Learners were disciplined, quietened down, kept in order, kept

at the same pace, taught to mind authority and 'put in their place' in the classroom by a

variety of language learning strategies:

> *I was class captain in her class. I wrote down all those who spoke Zulu and they were punished.*

> *When doing the oral work she would expect all of us to participate and made us recite*

> *She would just point at anyone to do the reading and you MUST do the reading.*

> *She divided the class into groups. She gave all the class some work to do. I was a leader in my group. My group was always best and finish work quickly.*

> *In long time ago learners were afraid of their educators. They were having an enormous dignity since most of them were autocratic and authoritarian teachers. But their learners managed to do it in that situations because there was no option in doing things. I think it helped a lot since most of us can read well since we are compared to the learners of today.*

> *Yes, I agree. The Zulu child need punishment in order to participate fully in a lesson. The punishment would make the child not to forget what the teacher taught him/her. Even today they need punishment in order to comprehend and participate in a lesson.*

Before passing judgement on such practices, one needs to consider the conditions under

which many of these teachers work. Although not the focus of this investigation,

Wickham and Versfeld report that many teachers work in difficult conditions with over

crowded classrooms, inadequate resources, lack of congeniality among members of staff

at their schools and general disorganisation in the school day (1998:41). Helping teachers

move away from some practices which would not be considered 'best practice' for

language teaching is likely to involve teacher development in general areas of classroom

management. Any learning which takes place in a classroom is only as good as the

atmosphere created by the teacher to allow that learning to happen. All teachers,

including language teachers, encounter barriers to learning. It is no good introducing new

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methodology to teachers unless they are able to create conditions conducive to learning in their classrooms. The most innovative lessons in the world, the very 'best' of practices, cannot take place in chaos. It would be recommended then that any teacher education programme, even if only for the upgrading of an existing diploma, should be run in conjunction with other professional development courses. These courses need to include classroom management strategies, coping with constraints such as class size, lack of resources, language barriers etc.

### 5.2.5 Recommendation: Language development as part of teacher education

In Task 2, students who supported rote learning, grammar drills and a focus on form as 'good' practice, explained how they believed that these practices aided the acquisition of vocabulary and they stressed the importance of a mastery of structures in language learning. Certainly these points are valid. In a situation where some ESL teachers themselves favour 'safetalk' and have a limited mastery of the target language (Gamede, T. 2000, Vinjevold, P. 1999), it could be suggested that rote learning and activities such as formulaic role play and memorized poems etc. *can* contribute to language development. As long as the majority of English teachers in this country, (indeed any subject teacher in this country) remains a second language speaker of the medium of instruction, there is a need for language development in any teacher education programme. It is therefore recommended that any teacher education carries language development as part of its curriculum. This could be varied in instances where the student teacher is a mother-tongue speaker of the medium-of-instruction, and another language

could be developed – Afrikaans or English teachers taking one of the African languages, perhaps.

It should be stated at the outset that this recommendation presupposes two things: firstly, that 'best practice', based on the language-in-education policies of this country is in the best interests of all concerned. And secondly, if teacher education in this country is to include language development, it presupposes that such development will be in those languages which are the medium-of-instruction in South African classrooms. Inherent in this presupposition are enormously political and value-laden assumptions. Many of the teachers who were subjects of this research have bought into these assumptions, as will many of the best intended revisions of existing teacher education programmes. This will be discussed, later, under the recommendation of increasing reflective practice for teachers.

## 5.2.6   Recommendation: Acceptance that there is no 'best method'

When revising the ENG 200P course, it is recommended that the idea of a 'best method' is abandoned in favour of a broad, contextually appropriate combination of methods. It should be accepted that teaching and teacher education, like the theories and policies which inform them, are not neutral. In the responses of teachers for this research, it is clear that language teaching goes beyond learning content and structures. It involves all that constitutes Classroom Discourse. Simon suggests that teacher education is "....skilling in a practice whose aim is the enhancement of human possibility. What is required is a discourse about practice that references not only what we, as educators,

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might do; but, as well, the social visions such practices would support. Pedagogy is simultaneously about the details of what students and others might do together *and* the cultural politics such practices support. Thus to propose a pedagogy is to propose a political vision."(in Pierce 1989:408) It is important to remember this, if only to help teachers embrace the vision informing C2005 and make a paradigm shift in their classrooms and their thoughts about their practice. This is doubly important if teachers are to become empowered and successful in advancing greater understanding and critical appreciation of their own subjectivity and relationship to the wider society. Such an understanding and appreciation will enable teachers not only to implement change but also to innovate change. An empowered teacher seeks to address the contradictions that might exist between the capacities that curriculum changes encourage, and the forms a society provides for these capacities to be realised. For example, in OBE, continuous assessment may be the one of the practices of this method but the learners' parent body may not like this process rendering it ineffectual or, in another example, group work may be desirable but class sizes average 50, so best practice in this case requires compromise and innovation. Thus, we need to examine whether 'best practice' as a rigid goal, limits the possibilities of teacher growth by emphasising what is appropriate, as opposed to empowering teachers by encouraging them to explore what might be desirable.

At the moment, as it stands, it is clear that even the 'innovations' and humanist roots of CLT and Additive Bilingualism, in C2005, are not neutral: they are essentially positions of value. Until there is recognition, understanding and appreciation of the attitudes and experiences which inform some teachers' apparently resistant and contradictory responses to recommended 'best methods', it will be not be easy to develop authentic

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materials for teacher education nor will it be an easy paradigm shift for those teachers. It is the recognition, understanding and appreciation of these responses from teachers which gives them value and such understandings can then be used in teacher education as a springboard for broadening the notion of 'best method'.

Effective language teacher education lies beyond the quest to find the single 'best' method and recently there has been a steady stream of ideas which counsel against the search for a 'best method'(Larsen-Freeman, D. 1990, Prabhu N. S.1990, Richards, J.C. 1990). Rather, the aim is to accept that what may be effective in one classroom with one group of language educators, may not be so in another. One is embracing here what has come to be know as the 'post-method condition' (Nunan, D. 1991).

The post-method condition is a state of affairs that compels us to refigure the relationship between the theorisers and the practitioners of method. First and foremost it signifies the alternative *to* method rather than the alternative method. Each language teaching method, in its idealised version, consists of a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers. Thus, earlier 'best methods' in South African language education were language-centred methods (e.g. Audio-lingualism) which fitted in with the prevailing political and social ethos of its time and the educational methods of Fundamental Pedagogics. Now, under C2005, there are learner-centred methods (e.g. CLT) which seek to provide opportunities for learners to practice language in (almost) authentic situations. From the practitioner's point of view none of these methods can be seen in its purest form in the actual classroom, primarily because they are not derived from classroom experience and

experimentation but are artificially transplanted into the classroom and, as such, are far removed from the classroom reality (Kumaravadivelu, B. 1994). This problem has been raised earlier in discussion about the benefits of a practical component of a teacher education programme and the potential for good in a process syllabus.

Accepting that there is no best method and adopting the 'post method condition' signifies teacher autonomy and is salutory for researchers and curriculum developers at the same time. The conventional concept of method "overlooks the fund of experience and tacit knowledge about teaching which the teachers already have by virtue of their lives as students" (Freeman, D. 1991:34). The choices teacher educators make, about the content, pedagogies and institutional forms of delivery in teacher education reflect certain conceptions of how people learn to do the work of teaching in this profession. Those choices define what is worth knowing and how it is best learned by those who wish to train or upgrade in the profession. There is a need to examine and assess these choices and decisions against the effectiveness of the outcomes they engender (Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:403). Decisions made without ongoing interaction with practitioners and the student teachers of teacher education programmes could result in the rigid goals of a single 'best method' as described earlier. Furthermore, subscription to a 'best method' engendered in a product syllabus, diminishes the experience of real teachers. Decisions about what teachers should know, how they should learn it, and how their knowledge and competence should be assessed both stem from and create social recognition and value for their work.

Abandoning a notion of a single 'best method' and adopting the 'post method condition' should not result in chaos. Kumaravadivelu (1994) argues that the post method condition allows for what he terms 'principled-pragmatism.' This is different from eclecticism (which, despite its good intentions degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled and uncritical pedagogy because teachers with very little preparation to be eclectic in a principled way have little option but to randomly put together a package of techniques from various methods and label it eclectic). 'Principled pragmatism' is based on the pragmatics of pedagogy in which the "relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualisation, can only be realised within the domain of application, that is, through the immediate activity of teaching" (Widdowson in Kumaravadivelu, B. 1994:30). One of the ways teachers can follow principled pragmatism is by developing what Prabhu calls ' a sense of plausibility'. Teachers' sense of plausibility is their "subjective understandings of the teaching they do. Teachers need to operate with some personal conceptualisation of how their teaching leads to desired learning – with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them" ( 1990:172). This subjective understanding may arise from their own experiences as learners and teachers and through professional education and peer consultation. Because a teacher's sense of plausibility is not linked to the concept of method, an important concern is "not whether it implies a good or bad method, but more basically, whether it is active, alive, or operational enough to create a sense of involvement for both the teacher and the student" (Prabhu. N.S. 1990:173).

> In practical terms, the post method condition creates the need for an open-ended, coherent framework based on current theoretical, empirical and pedagogic insights that will activate and develop teachers' sense of plausibility and create in them a sense of interested involvement. It can also reshape the character and content of L2 teaching, teacher education, and classroom research. In practical terms it motivates a search for an open-ended, coherent frame work based on

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current theoretical, empirical and pedadgogical insights that will enable teachers to theorise from practice and practice what they theorise.

(Kumaravadivelu, B. 1994:44)

In their recommendations for in-service teacher development, Wickham and Versveld acknowledge that 'best' practice requires the "discretionary judgement of the teachers and the flexibility to move between different repertoires of practices" ( 1998:41). This report supports that view and recommends that researchers and education programme developers adopt a 'post method condition'. Teachers, in the course of their education, would benefit from the introduction to a wide repertoire of practices, in different contexts, and should be encouraged in the following: critical evaluation of the confines of a single 'best method', flexibility and reflective practice.

### 5.6.7 Recommendation: Reflective practice

As the points which guide this recommendation are developed, it is worth noting that reflective practice here is divided, for convenience, into two camps. That is reflective practice which is *internal* (in other words reflection dealing with teachers' personal beliefs) and reflective practice which is *external* (in other words critical reflection of the values inherent in, say, the notion of a 'best method', or South Africa's new language-in-education policy). Of course, it is fallacious to say that these two can truly be separated. The ethos which guides the thinking of a product syllabus or a certain language policy will eventually become internalised and naturalised. As discussed in depth in Chapter 2, the narrative task is seen as a good way to begin the type of reflective practice which will explore those issues:

When we examine the stories we've been told, and when we consider the way we cast ourselves in the stories we tell, we can identify boundaries already set for us to which we may have unwittingly acquiesced. In fact, one way to uncover the inadvertent in our own lives is to enter literature and let the grounds for new tales and tellings be called out by the stories of others. Rubbing up against those stories creates an edge in us, one we can use to sharpen our understanding.

(Perl, S. 1994:430).

In their responses to Task 2, teachers supported practices which apparently 'contradicted' the official notion of best practice and in explaining why they did so revealed a wide range of beliefs. These beliefs include the notion that traditional ways are the best ways, that English is a high status language, that the use of long words shows good language acquisition, that to learn is to suffer, that authoritarian practices command respect, that certain behaviours constitute the actions of a 'real' teacher and so on:

*This teacher was using the drill method which other teachers hate to do. This method helps the slow learners to develop and <u>understand</u> the subject.*

*The teachers themselves used to compete the children who could memorise long, difficult poems. This helped us to incline in speaking English using so-called bombastic words from poetry and passages which included idioms and proverbs.*

*[English] will open doors for them.*

*What is the use of the mother tongue because they know it already?*

*A good teacher does not let the reader sit down when some are laughing.*

*In long time ago learners were afraid of their educators. They were having an enormous dignity since most of them were autocratic and authoritarian teachers. But their learners managed to do it in that situations because there was no option in doing things. I think it helped a lot since most of us can read well since we are compared to the learners of today. All what we learnt we were forced to do it and we succeeded.*

*Yes, I agree. The Zulu child need punishment in order to participate fully in a lesson. The punishment would make the child not to forget what the teacher taught him/her. Even today they need punishment in order to comprehend and participate in a lesson.*

*This method is generally good for all learners. Drilling in English is the correct method of teaching English.*

*There is no other way to learn the language.*

*In life these groups are this way. Some are the fast ones, some are the slow. This is how we do in the classroom .*

*Group work as such is the method we do at school. In the class is the same as in the grade having the A grade and the B grade.*

*He was a gentleman and a teacher by sight and by movement. He was tall with a sharp pointed nose and so smart... lovely to look at... good clothing... quality shoes always... good fashion style... sweet voice... very beautiful... a real Teacher.*

The power of these beliefs cannot be underestimated in the effect that they have over the persistence of certain practices and resistance to change. Any revision of the existing ENG 200P course, or the development of new programmes, needs to take this fact into account:

> We, as teacher educators, know that teachers' beliefs about teachers and teaching are instrumental in shaping how they interpret what goes on in the classroom. And we admit that teacher's beliefs and past experiences as learners tend to create ways of thinking about teaching that often conflict with what we advocate in our teacher education programmes. In sum, we as teacher educators now acknowledge that prior knowledge is a powerful factor in teacher learning in its own right, one that clearly deserves our attention if we mean to strengthen and improve, rather than simply preserve and replicate, educational practice.
>
> (Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998:401)

The emergent view of teaching has begun to highlight the complex ways in which teachers conduct their teaching practice as being largely shaped by their prior experiences as learners, during their 'apprenticeship of observation' (This has been discussed at length in Chapter 2). All teachers have been learners in the past and draw on the memory of what their teachers did in the classroom. These 'borrowed' perceptions acquire, in due

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course, and in the process of teaching, what Prabhu calls "a sense of plausibility" (1987:109) in the teacher's mind and he or she comes to identify with them. It makes sense then, to predict that introducing new teaching methods may, in some ways, conflict with what teachers already know or believe to be true about effective teaching practice. It would be difficult for a teacher to adopt with conviction and internalise a teaching method which is new and seems to be in conflict with his or her 'sense of plausibility'. The fact that teacher beliefs are resistant to and threatened by curriculum change has been explored over a number of years (Freeman, D. and Johnson, K.E. 1998, Wickam, S.and Versfeld, R. 1998, Prabhu, N.S. 1990, Connolly, F.M. and Clandinin, D.J. 1988). Teacher beliefs, especially those which are not explored in genuine dialogue with researchers, remain a stumbling block to change and the introduction of new practices and they will impinge on any revisions or developments in teacher education. Prabhu warns that statutory implementation of an innovation is likely to distort all possibility of a shift in teaching practice which may have taken place by degrees and been modified and assimilated over time by the teacher. It is likely to aggravate the tensions in teachers' mental frames and under threat make many teachers reject the innovations out of hand as an act of self defense (1987:105). Alternatively, a strong sense of plausibility about existing practices may make the teachers believe that innovations are misinformed (theory without practice) and counter-intuitive, if not downright harmful to learners (1987:106).

It has been suggested that the way to challenge these beliefs, or at least explore them critically, is to involve teachers in reflective practice and consciousness raising activities. Wildsmith (1995) describes a cycle of "self-reflective attitude awareness activities" in

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order to raise a teacher's consciousness regarding that teacher's own attitudes and beliefs

and the ways in which they may affect practices in the classroom.

> Cognition (like evolution) is seen to occur in fits and starts, involving the simultaneous revision, reorganisation and reinterpretation of past, present and projected actions and understanding. For the constructivist then, cognition is not a process of 'representing' a real world 'out there' waiting to be apprehended, but rather, is a process of organising and re-organising one's own subjective world of experience.                    (Sumara, D.J. and Davis, B. 1997:312 )

A good system of education is not one in which all teachers automatically perform

similar recommended classroom procedures but rather a system in which :

1.      all, or most teachers operate with a sense of plausibilty about whatever procedures

they choose to adopt , and

2.      each teacher's sense of plausibility is alive, active and reflective and open to

further development (Prabhu, N.S. 1987).

Accepting that reflective practice is important in teacher education, what has been

discussed above are the beliefs which teachers adhere to which may get in the way of

teaching innovation: beliefs about 'best' practice, the importance of English, the role of a

'real' teacher etc.- Classroom Discourse, one could say. As explained earlier these could

be thought of as the 'internal' factors resisting change. However, as will be discussed

now, these 'internal' beliefs are based on an external, prevailing ethos. It is this ethos

which should also be challenged in critical reflection and one needs to take a step further

back than the debates surrounding beliefs in Classroom Discourse in order to look at it.

While the discussion which follows may seem to be 'flogging a dead horse' and

overstating the importance of reflection, it is pursued in some depth because in fact, it is a

perspective which challenges many of the earlier recommendations of this very report!

In taking that step further back, let us consider Bonny Norton Pierce's article regarding

the notion of 'People's English' (1989). Her article seeks to challenge the hegemony of

'communicative competence' as an adequate formulation of principles on which to base

the teaching of English. Her article could also apply, just as pointedly, to the

recommendation that all teacher education programmes carry a language development

component. If the intention is to revise an existing English course and enable teachers on

that course to practice CLT and develop their learners' 'communicative competence' in

English, then the 'external' factors affecting Classroom Discourse cannot be overlooked.

Pierce cites Kachru who describes the knowledge of English as being like "possessing

the fabled Aladdin's lamp, which permits one to open, as it were, the linguistic gates of

international business, technology, science and travel. In short, English provides

linguistic power" (in Pierce 1989:402). This view is strongly borne out by teacher

responses in this research. Many teachers supported the English Only rule in classrooms

as being 'good' practice because of the social and economic opportunities provided in its

mastery. Their responses corroborate similar findings (Gamede, T. 2000, Kerfoot, C.

1993).

Another view is that English is like a "Trojan horse", a language of "cultural

intrusion…in a very real way, English is the property of the elites, expressing the

interests of the dominant classes" (Cooke in Pierce 1989:402). In discussing the

proposals for People's English in South Africa in the late 1980's, Pierce explains that the issues at stake here are not the linguistic features of English spoken in South Africa, but the central political issues of how English is to be taught in the schools: who has access to the language, how English is implicated in the power relations dominant in South Africa and the effect of English on the way speakers of the language perceive themselves in society, and the possibilities for change in that society. An example of this problem, which feeds into official notions of 'best practice' for language teaching, is inherent in the very issue of the medium-of-instruction. It is the controversy surrounding the choice of a medium-of-instruction which would impact on the languages developed in teacher education. Which language needs developing and why?

As pointed out in Chapter 1, this country has, in its constitution, adopted a policy of 11 official languages. However, financial constraints (and if Pierce is to be believed, lack of political will or the preservation of elite positions) has meant that in reality only two of those languages, English and Afrikaans get credence in classrooms beyond primary school. Teachers need to reflect on this critically.

Pierce argues that the teaching of English can be reconceptualised as a pedagogy that opens up possibilities for students and teachers of English, not only in terms of material advancement, but in the way they perceive themselves, their role in society, and the potential for change in the society. She argues strongly for a critical linguistic approach which can challenge historical and social constructs. What Pierce is suggesting is that teacher education, while initiating teachers into appropriate educational discourse, needs

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to encourage reflective practice. Not simply reflective practice into the difference between what was *once* done under the guise of Fundamental Pedagogics and what is *now* required by OBE, but reflective practice which will ensure that teachers recognise that much of the Classroom Discourse they buy into, even if it is substantially different and ostensibly more progressive than, say, Fundamental Pedagogics, is still historically determined to support the dominant group within a given society. Only by examining this and wakening the students to this, by the kinds of methodologies adopted in teacher education, can we challenge the existing inequalities in society. Critical reflection on education practice should be more than reflection on existing and past methodologies. It should be political and philosophical too. For example, reflection on teaching methods and beliefs is incomplete without a deeper reflection on social and political issues around race, class, gender or prevailing attitudes towards say, accents and pronunciation which inform personal 'internal' beliefs.

Leach identifies three interrelated phases of the transformation of practice which summarise the purposes of the reflective practices discussed above: The *context of criticism* which requires teachers to examine critically "familiar ways of working". Then there is the *context of discovery* in which learners must " design a way out of the practice under criticism, find a new model for their activity. Finally there is the *context of practical and social application* where the new expanded object of learning is implemented. (in SAIDE 1996 5ff). Critical reflection then, is seen as an important part of any education programme and is the final recommendation of this report.

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## 5.3 Conclusion

Recommendations in this report need to be made on two levels. On one level a problem exists because policy and methodology have changed in this country, and in language teaching generally, and some teachers are ignorant of, or simply do not know how to effect, these changes. On another, deeper level, a problem exists because teachers are aware of change and may be able to pay lip-service to new methods in order to receive an education diploma but, in reality, they resist the new methods because they do not find them practical or plausible. If a teacher education curriculum can be seen as an onion, the recommendations across these levels range from the most superficial and obvious external ring – the giving of information – to the most profound internal centre – critical reflection. The onion in between consists of structural support and general teacher development, implementing practice from theory, choosing a best method, enacting a process syllabus and so on. Many of the recommendations based on the findings in this research apply to researchers and those developing teacher education programmes, as much as they do to the content of those programmes: reflective practice, validation of learners' experiences, engagement with practical issues and constraints, learning as one teaches, recognition of one's own positionality in research and the choices made about knowledge etc. *these* are important.

A useful final word: " where knowledge (even critical and emanicipatory forms) is being produced there is always power and regimes of truth. The point is not to set out to empower or emancipate others, but to exercise one's power in ways which enable others to exercise power (Walker, M. 1995: 21).

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# APPENDIX A: First narrative task (1998)

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## Natal College of Education   ENG200P

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## ASSIGNMENT 1 1998

This assignment consists of three sections:1A, 1B and 1C. You must do all 3 sections.

## 1A:Thinking about good teaching practice in the Language Classroom

### Introduction

As teachers in the classroom we are at a greater advantage than many other professionals because we have all been learners in classrooms for many years. We have observed all kinds of teaching practice from many different teachers during those years of sitting behind desks. I am sure you remember the very good teachers and the terrible teachers. They are the teachers who have made the most memorable impressions on your mind. Even as a young child, you will have known which teachers were good teachers and which were poor teachers.

What I hope to do in this first section of Ass 1 is to start you thinking about good teachers and bad teachers you remember from your own school days. Once you have remembered those teachers, I want you to work out and analyse what those teachers did to help you perform better in the classroom. If you have chosen to write about a bad teacher, then you will do the same thing by analysing what you observed to be bad teaching practice.

### What you must do

➡    Take careful note of the marks awarded for each paragraph. Paragraph **3** is worth 3x as many marks as paragraphs **2** and **3**. Keep this in mind as you answer this section.

You must write three paragraphs.

1      One paragraph must describe a teacher who *helped you to learn a second language.*

      The questions below will help to guide you as you write.

      Who was this teacher?
      Where did s/he teach?
      How old were you when you were in this teacher's class?
      Why did you like this teacher?

What did this teacher do to make you feel good?

What work did this teacher do which particularly interested you?....give examples.

How did this teacher encourage you to speak/ read/ write in a second language?

What were your feelings about the second language while you were in this class?

Can you remember a time when you felt especially proud/confident/happy in this class?...describe what happened to make you feel this way.

Was this teacher successful with other pupils or not?

What was this teacher's secret to success with you or with other learners?

Write anything else you would like to about this teacher. (5)

2      You must write one paragraph about a teacher who *did not help you with your learning or any teacher whom you did not like in your second language classroom.*

Use these questions to guide you as you write:

Who was this teacher?

Why did you not like him/her?

How old were you in this teacher's class?

What did this teacher do which discouraged you as a learner or made you sad or angry in his/her class?.... give specific examples.

Write about an occasion which you still remember today about your time in this teacher's class.

Write about your feelings as you went into this teacher's class.

What did other members of your class feel about this teacher?

What, in your opinion, was the worst aspect of this teacher's teaching methods?

What were the worst parts of this teacher's lessons?

Write about anything else you would like to about this teacher. (5)

3      You must write a third paragraph in which you discuss your own classroom situation. Think about paragraphs 1 and 2 as you do this.

The following questions should guide your writing.

What things helped you to learn a second language in the classroom?

What things stopped or hindered your learning a second language successfully ?

What, in your opinion, are the criteria (the important things) for achieving successful second language learning and teaching?

What challenges or difficulties do you have in meeting these criteria in your own classroom situation?

Make some suggestions as to how you could overcome these challenges and difficulties.

(15)

Total [25]

# APPENDIX B:  Task 1 (1999)

## 1A: Teaching Practice in the Language Classroom
[70 marks]

### Introduction
As English teachers in the classroom we are at a greater advantage than many other professionals in service jobs, like nurses or police officers, because we have all been learners in classrooms for many years. We have observed all kinds of teaching practice from many different teachers during those years of sitting behind desks. I am sure you remember some very good teachers and some terrible teachers. These are the teachers who have made the most memorable impressions on you. Even as a young child, you will have known which teachers were good teachers and which were poor teachers.

### Purpose
What I hope to do in this first section of Assignment 1 is to start you thinking about good English teachers and bad English teachers you remember from your own school days. Once you have remembered those teachers, I want you to think about and write down exactly what those teachers *did* to help you perform well in English in the classroom. In the case of the bad teacher essay, you will do the same thing by analysing and writing down which particular things you observed to be bad teaching practice as far as the teaching of English goes.

### Outcomes
At the end of this section you will be able to:
- describe from your own experience examples of good and bad language teaching practice.
- identify *criteria which you think are important for good language teaching practice.

*Criteria, in this case, are the important principles which make good teaching practice. For example, a positive manner on the part of a teacher is one of the criteria for good teaching practice so is giving the learners many chances of reading English books or newspapers. There are MANY more.

**What you must do**
Complete Tasks 1,2 and 3 beginning on the next page.

**Task 1**  Write a short essay ( one page) about your memories of a **good** English teacher. The questions below are to help you remember your experiences as an English learner at school.  (25)

> The teacher who gave you a good classroom experience
> Who was this teacher?
> What sort of school was it?
> How old were you when you were in this teacher's class?
> What do you remember about this teacher's personality?
> What did this teacher do to make you feel good about learning English?
> Think about READING, WRITING, ORAL WORK, GRAMMAR and LITERATURE-
> What do you remember about this teacher's teaching methods related to the above?
> What work do you remember enjoying particularly? (Give examples.)
> How did this teacher encourage you to speak/ read/ write in English?
> What were your feelings about English while you were in this class?
> Can you remember a time when you felt especially proud/confident/happy in this class? (Describe what happened to make you feel this way.)
> Was this teacher successful with other pupils or not?
> What was this teacher's secret to success with you or with other learners?
> Write anything else you would like to about this teacher which you think shows her/his good teaching practice.

**Task 2**  Write a short essay ( one page) about your memories of a **bad** English teacher. The questions below are to help you remember your experiences as an English learner at school.  (25)

> The teacher who gave you a bad classroom experience
> Who was this teacher?
> Why did you not like him/her?
> How old were you in this teacher's class?
> What do you remember about this teacher's personality?
> What did this teacher do which discouraged you as an English learner or made you sad or angry in his/her class? (Give specific examples.)
> Think about READING, WRITING, ORAL WORK, GRAMMAR and LITERATURE-
> What do you remember about this teacher's teaching methods related to the above?
> Write about any particular events which are negative memories for you in this class.
> Write about your feelings as you went into this teacher's class.
> What did other members of your class feel about this teacher?
> What, in your opinion, was the worst aspect of this teacher's teaching methods?
> What were the worst parts of this teacher's lessons?
> Write about anything else you would like to about this teacher which you think shows his/her bad teaching practice.

**Task 3**     Answer these questions using your own memories which you have written in 1) and 2).     (20)

a)     When you think about the **good** second language learning experience you have remembered in 1)

      i)     What FIVE things did your teacher do which especially helped you learn English? Give reasons for your answer.

When you think about the **bad** experience you have remembered in 2)

      ii)     What FIVE things made it particularly horrible for you when you were learning a language?

      iii)     Describe the main differences between the *teaching methods* of the teachers in 1) and 2).     (20)

## 2A: Teaching Practice in the Language Classroom
[30 marks]

### Introduction
In Assignment 1A, you wrote down your memories about good and bad experiences you had with teachers when you were a school child. Now I would like to ask you for your opinion about some of the experiences of other students on this course.

### Purpose
What I hope to do in this section of Assignment 2 is to encourage you to compare your learning experiences with the experiences of other learners. This means that you will be thinking critically about classroom experiences in general. I hope that you will be able to relate your own experiences and your reaction to the experiences of others to your classroom where you are a teacher at the moment.

### Outcomes
At the end of this section you will be able to:
- respond and comment, personally, on a general learning experience.
- give a clear explanation for your response above.

### What you must do
1.  Read the extracts A - G below which have been taken from other students' essays about their classroom memories of good and bad teachers. All these extracts come from essays about The Good Teacher and have been given as examples of experiences which helped the writer to learn English as a Second Language.

A   *She praised me because I could talk like an English woman. Listen to Lulama, she would say, she is not like the Zulu girl.*

B   *Every morning we were singing the poem in difficult, advanced English, The Alchemist, The Echoing Green....this helped us to get the words.*

C   *I was shaking but I had to read aloud. Even when the other pupils laughed, he would not say sit down. So I read and have no fear for reading from that time that he forced me.*

D   *The way she did the lesson successfully was to group us according to our intelligence.*

E   *I learnt the grammar and the tenses in that Grade. We had tenses after break everyday, drills and more drills, even after Friday.*

F   *Mr Gumede was number one on speaking English in the classroom. If you spoke in the mother tongue he had the prefect who would give you a yellow paper. That was for punishment.*

2    You must write 5 short paragraphs giving your own response to each of the experiences, B,C,D,E,and F which have been recorded from other learners. Use the following questions to guide you as you write your paragraph:

What is your opinion?.....Would this have been a bad learning experience or a good learning experience for YOU? Explain why you think this.
Do you agree with the writer that this experience could be good generally for all learners. What about the learners you have in your class today?
Carefully explain the reasons why you agree or disagree with the writer.

Set your paragraphs out like the examples below.

(5 x 6 = 30)

A note before you start: Read the two responses to question A. Notice that they are different: one student agrees and one disagrees. Question 2) is asking about your opinion, so there is no right or wrong answer. Set your answers out in the way that these two students have done . First decide whether the experience would have been good or bad for you (Choose only one ...do not write good AND bad!)  State clearly whether you would find this good or bad before you give your explanation/discussion in the rest of the paragraph.

**Example: Question 3**

---

A    She praised me because I could talk like an English woman. Listen to Lulama, she would say, she is not like the Zulu girl..

**Mrs Z. from Pomeroy answered:**

A

Yes, I agree with this writer. I would have liked a kind teacher like this teacher who praises me and says good things about me. I believe that praise is important in this language learning classroom. I did want to talk English perfect like an English person and I would have found this encouraging so that is why I agree that this was a good teacher.

---

ANOTHER STUDENT GAVE A DIFFERENT OPINION:

---

A    She praised me because I could talk like an English woman. Listen to Lulama, she would say, she is not like the Zulu girl.

**Mrs B from Umlazi answered:**

A

NO. I must say that this comment would not have been a good one for me as a pupil. I am a Zulu speaker and I am also a Zulu person. To tell you the truth I would have found it discouraging to be thought of as the negative if I am Zulu girl. Teachers have a job which is to give the good self esteem to learners not to suggest that maybe it is better to be an English speaker than a Zulu person. All my learners are Zulu children and I want them to be proud about that thing.

---

# SACOL

## (South African College for Open Learning)
### *"Teacher empowerment through Quality Education"*

**Springfield Centre**
Private Bag
Dormerton
4015
Ph: 031-2087136
Fax: 031-2087130

**Pietermaritzburg Centre**
Private Bag X9007
Pietermaritzburg
3200
Ph: 0331-551711
Fax: 0331-945303

**Umlazi Centre (Greyville)**
Private Bag X08
Mobeni
4060
Ph: 031-3097227/8/9
Fax: 031-3097275

30 November 1999

Dear Student

## PERMISSION TO USE YOUR RESPONSES FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

We have been very delighted with your enthusiastic and informative responses to Question A in Assignments 1, 2 and 3. You will remember that these questions dealt with your memories of good and bad language teachers as well as your views on language teaching in general.

In all three assignments you have expressed strong and well justified opinions and taught us a great deal about your feelings on language teaching and the methods you use in your classrooms.

We would like to use your ideas to help us to improve the ENG 200P course for future students.

We would also like to use your views and ideas towards research into language teacher education beyond NCE. Some of your responses may be quoted in this research. However your views will appear anonymously (neither your name nor your student number will be published) and be one of many different student responses, nobody will be able to identify you from this research. If you have named a teacher or a school inn your response, those names will also be hidden in the research and will appear as in the example on the next page:

*My best teacher was <u>Mr G.</u> who was a teacher at <u>X Combined School</u>. He had very good methods for teaching language to us learners.*

We are asking for your permission to use some of your responses in the manner described above. If you feel that it is okay for us to do this then you can ignore this letter.

If, however, you <u>do not wish</u> for your responses to be published in anyway, then you need to complete the tear off slip below and post it to us or phone Ms Dora Mtembu on 0331- 551769 and tell her that you do not wish to be part of this research.

Many thanks in anticipation of your co-operation

Jo Stielau

.........................................................................................................................................................

**REPLY SLIP**

I <u>do not</u> wish my responses to be made public in a research paper.

Student Number................................................................

# APPENDIX E: Tutorial response to Task 1

# SACOL

## (South African College for Open Learning)
### *"Teacher empowerment through Quality Education"*

**ringfield Centre**
rivate Bag
ormerton
15
..: 031-2087136
ax: 031-2087130

**Pietermaritzburg Centre**
Private Bag X9007
Pietermaritzburg
3200
Ph: 0331-551711
Fax: 0331-945303

**Umlazi Centre (Greyville)**
Private Bag X08
Mobeni
4060
Ph: 031-3097227/8/9
Fax: 031-3097275

23rd June 1999

Dear Student

Despite many, many difficulties for students who registered late or received their Study Guides late, you have all managed to do very well. Congratulations you have made a good start to the year.

I would like to go through Assignment 1 section by section to advise you about common errors. Please read these comments as well as the comments of your markers and this will help you to improve your work for Assignment 2. When you see *X this means that a common weakness has occurred.*

## 1A: Thinking about good teaching practice in the Language Classroom

This question was well done by almost everyone. Here were the guidelines which we used when marking these three paragraphs:
The purpose of this exercise was to develop self-reflection on you as a teacher now who had once been a learner.

Paragraph 1 aimed to stimulate thinking about *good* teaching practice which resulted in *good learning experiences* for our students. **(5)**

Paragraph 2 aimed to stimulate thinking about *poor* teaching practice which resulted in *bad learning experiences* for our students. **(5)**

Both 1 & 2 are only worth 5 marks and were set as exercises to stimulate thought on the topic. They were marked as a paragraph, noting organisation, details which support the *good* or *bad* teaching memories, control of language, expression and originality.

✗ *Some of you did not refer to your teacher's teaching practice and spent time writing about what your teachers wore, their looks and so on.*

Paragraph 3
We used these criteria to judge the paragraph.

1   Student outlines clearly the factors (3 or 4) which are helpful in learning a second language in the classroom. Eg confidence, motivation, access to the second language, encouragement, interest, etc
2   Student outlines clearly the factors (3 or 4) which hinder the learning of a second language in the classroom.eg low self-esteem, lack of motivation, no contact with language outside of the classroom, fear to perform, humiliation/embarrassment
3   Student attempts to define the criteria for success in second language learning (may be similar to (1) )
4   Student has identified problems for meeting these criteria in their own teaching situation. Eg hard to give access to language in a rural area.
5   Some solutions to overcoming(4) are offered.
6   Final paragraph links with (1) and (2)
7   There is evidence of editing eg spellings correct etc.
8   There is clarity of expression and ideas
9   There is evidence of original and enthusiastic effort in the work.

**(20)**
**Total 30**

✗ *Some of you did not really identify the criteria for successful second language learning. Instead you simply listed* <u>*activities*</u> *eg debates. One of the criteria for successful language learning is PRACTICE in that language... an activity that can help learners practice the language is the debate. But a debate is not a criteria or a factor for successful language learning; it is an activity which can promote the criteria.*

# APPENDIX F: Tutorial response to Task 2

## SACOL
### (South African College for Open Learning)
*"Teacher empowerment through Quality Education"*

**Springfield Centre**
Private Bag
Dormerton
4015
Ph: 031-2087136
Fax: 031-2087130

**Pietermaritzburg Centre**
Private Bag X9007
Pietermaritzburg
3200
Ph: 0331-551711
Fax: 0331-945303

**Umlazi Centre (Greyville)**
Private Bag X08
Mobeni
4060
Ph: 031-3097227/8/9
Fax: 031-3097275

18th Sept 1999

# Tutorial Letter 3
# Feedback on Assignment 2

Dear Student

Well done to those of you who got your assignments in on time. There were plenty of interesting answers for me as a marker and I must just say how I enjoyed hearing your strong opinions in the first exercise.

## 2A: Teaching Practice in the Language Classroom

Students were about equally divided in explaining why these statements would be positive or negative in their experience. Some students did not read the question carefully - it asked for YOUR personal response and some discussion about your own learners- and these students wrote about theory or about teaching generally and did not give a personal response.

B    *Every morning we were singing the poem in difficult, advanced English, The Alchemist,*
     *The Echoing Green....this helped us to get the words.*
YES: This method helps students gain confidence and vocabulary. It is a pleasant and non stressful activity in the second language.
NO: It is a meaningless rote learning exercise.


C    *I was shaking but I had to read aloud. Even when the other pupils laughed, he*
     *would not say sit down. So I read and have no fear for reading from that time*
     *that he forced me.*
YES: It is important for pupils to read individually for teacher assessment. Pupils gain courage by trying to read allowed.
NO: This experience is humiliating. Teacher needs to control other pupils laughter. Language cannot be learned when there is fear.


D    *The way she did the lesson successfully was to group us according to our*
     *intelligence.*
YES: Group work is important. Grouping this way allows the bright learners to get ahead and the slow ones to be helped by the teacher. Suitable tasks can be made for each group.
NO: Learners lose self esteem in the 'slow' group. The intelligent group will get more attention.


E    *I learnt the grammar and the tenses in that Grade. We had tenses after break*
     *everyday, drills and more drills, even after Friday.*
YES: Drills are important in learning a language. Drills help learners to memorise structures of language for use.
NO: This is a boring rote-learning way of teaching grammar. Learners will sing the tenses and not know how to use them.


F    *Mr Gumede was number one on speaking English in the classroom. If you spoke*
     *in the mother tongue he had the prefect who would give you a yellow paper. That*
     *was for punishment.*
YES: The teacher can set a good example by speaking English. Learners must be encouraged to speak English at school because they will not speak it at home. It is important to practise a language orally to learn it well.
NO: It is cruel to punish children for speaking their mother-tongue. Children should be made proud of their culture. This method only allows those who are good to speak English and the others are silent and hate the language.