

4. How has audience interest been generated and maintained?
5. How has the tension/ suspense of the story been generated and maintained?
- 6.1 What is the actual time span of the ad?
- 6.2 How has the director succeeded in conveying all the information in this time frame?
7. Comment on the style and tone of this advertisement
- 8.1 How has point of view been established?
- 8.2 How has the viewer been positioned?
9. Which of your senses were used directly and indirectly? Explain each instance.
10. Choose one moment from the ad and describe it fully, using as many sensory descriptions as possible.
11. Which of this knowledge should I apply to my own creative writing?

Step 5: Properties of the advertisement that contributed to the impact of the commercial were listed as a result of the analytic process. The final stage of the viewing of the advert required the learners to actively reflect on their understanding of the structure of the advertisement, its effectiveness and then to compile a preliminary checklist of their own to use when writing. This final stage was used as a way of introducing the notion of transference.

Step 6: In a single 40 period, learners spent time reflecting on their own writing. This reflection was recorded in their journals and selections were read by volunteers to the class as part of a whole class discussion.

Step 7: Steps 6 and 7 occurred during a double 80-minute lesson. Learners were given examples of published student creative writing. (They were handling examples of a finished product.)

Step 8: Learners were given one example essay printed on an A3 page. Questions about the structure and imagery of the essay were printed around the essay with ample space for the learners to write on the page. After this was a group activity. (Groups of four). Different groups were then asked to focus on two or three questions only and to respond to those in a whole class discussion.

Step 9: As part of their homework, learners had prepared a checklist of desirable properties, which a good essay should reflect. These checklists were shared during a 40-minute period.

Step 10: All the checklists were combined by the teachers and a single checklist was given to the learners and discussed with them during one 40-minute lesson.

Step 11: The learners were given one essay topic and asked to prepare a draft for homework. Finally the learners applied their understanding to their own writing and began producing a creative work. The 40-minute lesson was spent brainstorming and preparing mind maps for the essay. Using their checklists, learners were to be able to identify whether or not they had structurally and stylistically matched their original framework.

Step 12: Draft essays were circulated around the class. This took a double 80-minute lesson. At this stage learners were required to engage in peer assessment of their writing. Again specific groups commented on selected items of the checklist. By the time the drafts had been returned all areas of the checklists had been covered by a second party. Learners were then asked once again to reflect on their attitude towards their own writing and the assessment of it and to indicate whether they had perceived any change in their attitude towards their work.

Step 13: For homework the learners reflected on this process in the journals. They also commented on how they felt about their work. They were also asked to indicate whether they felt that they had gained any new writing skills or improved existing ones. These comments were shared with the class once the finished, edited versions had been handed in the following week. One lesson of 40 minutes was spent sharing learning log comments.

Step 14: The essays were collected along with checklists, which the learners were supposed to use to indicate that they had complied with all the agreed criteria. They were then assessed by the teachers and returned. When the essays were returned, learners spent one 40-minute period writing responses in their journals. They commented on their expectations and the assessment. They were asked to identify factors, which influenced their performance.

Step 15: One double period on a Friday, and the following Monday single period, were used in discussing their responses, the teacher's responses and strategizing for solutions for future success. Even though few of the learners had experienced successful final teacher assessments, they were still asked whether they had at least understood why they had not been successful.

Step 16: A new essay topic was assigned during one single lesson and the cycle was begun.

3.6 Evaluation

The learners' checklists were collected and compiled. The learners' learning logs were collected and their attitudes toward their own writing and this process were recorded. The teachers, who

implemented this method in their classes, shared their impressions on the process in a meeting. These impressions were recorded. The learners' new writing was collected and assessed according to the criteria established by the learners through the activity. The results of the assessment were discussed with the learners. A new cycle of reflection and intervention was introduced based upon the results of this discussion.

3.7 Communication

The results of this process were shared with the other members of the English department at a weekly departmental meeting and at a faculty meeting about Outcomes Based Education.

3.8 Follow up

Alternative methods for improving learners' writing abilities and attitudes were considered in conjunction with the progress made thus far. Learners were guided to use their skills, as developed through the research process, and to transfer these to other genres of writing.

Chapter Four: Results and Interpretations

4.1 Introduction

The areas from which I have collected my data were the following:

My personal teaching journal, in which I noted the learners' attitudes, commented on the teaching methodology and responses to the process as a whole. I also noted the responses of my colleagues, Julia and Nikki, who are also engaged in this level of writing teaching. To differentiate from my comments as teacher and researcher, I have introduced my teacher journal extracts with my first name and have used a similar font to the learners' journal extracts.

My learners were asked to keep their own journals in which they recorded their own attitudes, struggles and development. As the pedagogy was based upon the visual media experience, learners were able to represent their attitudes through visual interpretations and oral, personal submissions, of which I kept notes in my personal journal.

The next area of data was the guidelines, which the learners constructed for themselves, in order to guide their own writing. These guidelines were to reflect the learners' interpretation of the exercise could be seen as a gauge of the success of their explicit nature of the approach.

The final data field was the actual samples of the learners' creative writing. These samples should reflect their ability to assimilate the structure taught and the application of their own guidelines.

I believe it was important to tell the learners that they were engaging in a research study that could

be used to assist other learners in their writing.

The processing of the data required collecting the learners' journals, their guides/ checklists and their writing, combining this with my journal and noting the process as recorded.

4.2 Analysis of the Data

For each field of data, I will first analyse generalities and then consider positive and negative responses. I must also point out that some students featured both negative and positive responses and some that responded positively to the process still performed poorly in the practical application.

4.2.1 Response to introduction to descriptive writing

The first item of data I collected was the learners' responses to the following questions:

1. How do I feel about my ability as a writer?
2. How do I feel about my ability as a creative writer?
3. What can I do to become a successful writer?

These responses were written down in the learner's learning logs. It was their first introduction to creative writing in this grade. The learners had not used their journals for such specific reflection on their work before. Previously their journals had been for any comments they wished to make; a vague and open-ended activity that had its value in the lower grades as it encouraged dialogue between the teachers and their classes in a different forum. Once the learners had written down their responses, they shared them with the class in an open class discussion.

In general, the learners felt that their abilities as writers were not what they had wanted them to be. Typical responses are Michael E's response: *"I feel that I am not such a good writer, this could be because I might not want to write at all."*

Some of the learners, like Nathan, Aphiwe and Michael B, were positive about their abilities as writers. The class was almost unanimous in the course of action that they should take in order to improve their writing: they should read more.

A number of the learners displayed mixed positive and negative feelings about the writing process, some of them seemed to use their journals in which to process their feelings about the matter.

Nathan: *I am confident in myself with writing. I think I do well with creative writing but I do not do well with descriptive writing. To be a good writer you have to be good in all aspects of writing like descriptive writing and writing autobiographies or just biographies.*

Aphiwe: *I think I am a great writer. I write very fast and have a great tolerance for writing... my vocabulary is great because I read Christopher Pike books, which had a good grammatical way of writing.*

Clearly this confidence matches the belief of the class that extended reading is a means for achieving results in the field of writing. This belief is shared by the teachers at the school where every classroom has a poster exhorting learners to read, as it will improve all of their skills, including creative writing.

Aletia: As a writer, I feel my ability to write should improve. I have difficulty with expressing myself the way I would like to when I write.

I think I have a very interesting imagination. Sometimes I have difficulty with putting it on paper but most of the time I'm very pleased with my creative writing abilities.

To become more successful I could try and write more descriptive essays in my spare time... To improve my creative writing, I could give it more attention and time.

Aletia has identified two areas of work that other learners did not mention at this stage: better writing comes with practice and good writing requires time. The latter issue was to become very important in the responses of the learners later in the project.

Werner: There was quite an excited atmosphere in the classroom as learners wrote down how they felt, some of them could hardly wait to share what they had written with the rest of the class. Some of the learners were anxious about what to write and did not really want to share their thoughts with any one at all.

After they had completed the writing exercise, I asked them to share what they wanted to with the class. As learners started reading from their logs, a genuine air of sympathy and community was made manifest. I think they have begun to see that they are not alone in this situation. The learners who initially were reluctant to share their ideas with other people suddenly realised that admitting to their difficulties was not at all shameful.

Aphiwe's comment drew a certain amount of laughter from the class, he is so confident in his style. He is rather articulate. Lauren's struggle is the most dramatic, we enjoyed laughing with her about her anxieties, I was pleased that she was so vocal about her issues as she is seen as being a better performer in the class, her openness I hope, will lead to the others realising that she too struggles and that it is work that makes success possible.

I had hoped that this exercise would take away their fear of writing. I suspect it may just have done that. I have deliberately not addressed what seems to be quite a gap in their understanding of the difference between a writer and a creative writer. I am hoping that their understanding of this issue will develop further. Perhaps this is just a way for me to cop out of saying that this is a bad question, which needs clarification. Surely the only difference is the style of the end product, hardly a significant distinction.

At certain points in the shared readings I gave the class my opinion about the process which they had begun. I tried to make it quite clear to them that this was the beginning of a long journey. They found it quite amusing that I was very pleased with the comments that expressed difficulty with writing. I tried to explain that this confrontation and exploration of learning problems was what I believed would lead to change. I sense that they have a sceptical "let's wait and see" attitude about what we have begun here.

This journal entry shows that the process of individual learners reading aloud their own comments to the whole class helped to develop an atmosphere of solidarity. The learners discovered that they were not alone in their struggle with the creative process. The reaction of the learners to the teacher's comments supports the idea that they were focusing on the value of the end result and not

the process itself. It would appear that they had never really explored their difficulties with writing before and this new openness was leading to the apparent scepticism. One of the key areas of this research was to determine whether this experiment led to a change in attitude of the learners towards their writing and their abilities as writers.

As co-participants in this research project, the learners had been asked to give their input into the whole process so that it could contribute towards this work. Their comments do not appear to be geared towards an artificial audience. They have focused on the task and hand and provided fresh, natural analyses of their writing skills.

My journal entry reflects that the introduction to the whole project was achieving its desired end. The learners were beginning to demonstrate a meta-awareness of themselves as writers. The intention was that this would take them to a stage where they would be able to produce work of a radically different standard.

Virginia: I think that my ability as a writer is not that good because I don't get the marks that I expected. Sometimes I don't put much effort to get good marks, sometimes I hand in work that is not edited and I mean that's careless...sometimes I hand in work that I worked very hard for it but instead of getting good marks, I get bad marks lower than 50% and I don't know why.

A lot of the learners focused on assessment and marks. The obsession about the end result is a direct product of the whole educational system, which still requires a final summative examination where the only valuable result is a grade. The curve of learning, the developmental process the individual, is rendered meaningless. This has led to learners concentrating on the result and not on

the process. This procedure had also intended to challenge that perception as once the process had been understood and developed, then the grade would change. That was the thinking. Some learners would stop working beyond a certain point as they sensed that they had achieved "their" grade 60% is considered to be average and several learners feel that is acceptable and therefore do not need to progress beyond that point.

Several learners like Virginia and Priscilla believe that they have been "pigeon holed" by their teachers. In other words, the teacher has a mental grade for that learner and no amount of real change will change that assessment. It had been hoped that the transparent nature of this study and the fact that the learners themselves participated in determining assessment criteria would address this belief. If the learners were able to state what should be in their work for it to be successful, and if they were then able to incorporate that into their work, they should have been in a position to determine their very own assessment. Even if they did not score 100% they would at least have been in a position to know why.

Omphile: *I feel very nervous about how I am going to start writing and sometimes whatever I write doesn't make sense. The creative writing is the most difficult because I have to find my own topic to write about. The real problem about writing is the introduction. I think I should read more books, which can improve my type of writing.*

Precious: *I think and I know that I am not a good writer I get low marks like fifty or fifty something for my writing. I think this is because most of the time I don't know what to write about. As a creative writer I don't think I'm very creative because I run out of ideas quickly.*

Priscilla: *I feel bored when given homework to write a page about something. The problem is I don't know how to start my writing sometimes when I can start my writing I end up in clichés, leaving the main point then remembering it at the end of my writing. The other problem when one does the most beautiful writing the teacher intends on giving on lower marks than one expected.*

Omphile, Precious and Priscilla's journals reflect anxiety towards writing. The fear of the empty page and the pressure of producing new work with the effort that requires are clearly visible. It is interesting to note that only Omphile appears to have a strategy for improving his work. Priscilla uses the word "bored" in a typical way for the school community. Often when work requires effort, it is labelled "boring".

Augusteno: *I feel that I am creative but lack structure and energy, I enjoy making up stories and plays but I get tired before starting a big piece of writing. One of my other problems concerning writing is the way I organise myself and my piece of writing.*

Augusteno's comment reflects that the writing process requires work and careful planning. He has identified the fact that good work does not happen spontaneously. While the inspiration might be quickly available, actually developing that inspiration demands effort.

The ability to structure writing to produce a dramatic, descriptive piece of writing was exactly what the next session was designed to address. The fact that learners often write long narrative passages without any rhythmic variation should have been challenged through the analysis of the video of the Levi's commercial.

4.2.2 Learners' response to the Levi's commercial

Werner: *I am very excited about starting this lesson, I have bounced this idea around for two years now, I hope that it has been sufficiently fine tuned to work successfully. When I presented this idea at the teachers' conference at the Johannesburg College of Education under the auspices of the Association for Professional Teachers two years ago, it was very well received. All the teachers who spoke to me afterwards were quite enthusiastic. I have modified certain aspects of the lesson since then to streamline the whole process.*

The other two grade 10 teachers, Julia and Nikki, who will be facilitating this same lesson with their classes, seem to be as pleased about the idea as I am.

The above entry clearly shows the enthusiasm with which a new idea was approached. This particular lesson was supposed to be the beginning of a whole new way of looking at teaching writing.

The following learners' comments show how they responded to the content and structure of the commercial. It is interesting to note that their commentary was directed at the structure and style of the commercial rather than the details of the plot. The commentary that was made about the plot was limited to the effect that it had on the audience because of the way it unfolded, rather than what it was about.

Mitchan: *I feel I can set an atmosphere of confusion for the reader, but they will want to read on*

to find out what happens in the end and everything will become clear towards the end. I want the reader at the end of reading my piece to reflect back and say, "that was powerful."

Mitchan's remark, typical of the other's comments, demonstrates his understanding of suspense writing. The plot itself was not clichéd and the conclusion of the commercial was unexpected, this last aspect had obviously caught his attention. He has articulated an approach to writing that will lure the reader along. These remarks also show that he understood the direction of the questions to which they were asked to respond. (See the methodology in chapter 3).

Aletia: I still feel the same about my writing. What I thought was nice was to keep the reader in suspense and on the edge of his seat.

Jonathan and Bontle have both discussed the value of varied structure. Simply by introducing a few sentence and paragraph variations they will be able to alter the predictable rhythm of their writing. Bontle has begun demonstrating a link between the structural variation and the application of that to writing.

Jonathan: This exercise hasn't really taught me much more than the previous exercise, but what it has taught me is that short sentences are exciting, long ones get boring, so you should always surprise your readers.

Bontle: The ad really surprised me. I never expected it to end that way and advertise jeans. The new ideas that I got from the ad are that you don't have to give the reader the whole story at once. The other thing is to keep the reader[']s attention] and learn to surprise the reader. Coming to

paragraphs, they must have different matters and the shortest paragraphs you can have are one word. The other thing is that you need to have lots of cuts.

Omphile: *The advertisement made it easier on how to make your writing longer. You do this by not getting to the point at the beginning and when you come to the climax you should build more and more curiosity among readers. The only problem is the longer the story the more boring it gets; you mustn't try to concentrate on one point for a long time.*

Omphile is wrestling with an issue, which was raised by several of the learners. They are troubled by the stipulation of length. Many found the idea of writing 600 words intimidating and depressing. Here he has mentioned a possible solution to this dilemma, however he is also aware of the pitfalls of unnecessary development of narrative. His final sentence reflects the idea that variation is essential in an interesting story.

Precious: *The ad helped me quite a lot because it actually advertised one thing, but it did not focus on that thing only. So just like when I am given a creative writing, though I have to write about one thing I don't have to focus on that one thing only because it is quite boring. That is why it's called creative writing. So I think that the advertisement was quite creative.*

Precious has identified the focus shifts in the commercial. The shifting point of view has inspired her to consider introduced varied perspective in her writing. This is a sophisticated analysis shared by Aphiwe although he appears to have combined "opinion" with perspective. His last sentence, does, however, show an understanding of multiple points of view within a piece of writing.

Aphiwe: I will write with my story line unknown to the reader and make sure that the plot is very unusual and surprising one just like the Levi advertisement I will make more detailed paragraphs to give depth to my writing just like the advertisement The ad increased my English perspective because everyone had different thoughts about different ads, which helped me realise that in writing you can write about more perspectives.

The comments of the participants reflect that they have grasped a number of stylistic elements with regard to their writing. They show that a variation of structure produces rhythmic and stylistic interest. Withholding the more obvious elements of a plot can be used to lure a reader into the story. What the learners have not commented on directly is the value of imagery or the use of strong verbs. This is probably owing to the fact that there were no specific questions in the discussion questions relating to these features and that this element was not addressed during the process of analysing the commercial. Strong verbs and imagery formed the basis of a previous handout driven lesson. If imagery and strong verbs are to be expected it would be more consistent to explore ways of including these elements in the film analysis or to explicitly limit the scope of this activity.

What was important to this research, however, was that this visual challenged their perceptions of themselves as writers and that this visual became a tool which they used to change the way that they wrote and thought about their writing. This indicated that a step had been taken in the direction of the initial intention about challenging learners' attitudes towards their writing.

While some of the findings appeared to be meeting the intentions, there was doubt expressed in my journal. I was dealing with a subjective sense about the overall project.

Werner: I am disappointed, something is not working the way it should be working. I can't help shake the feeling that the kids are trying to guess what I want them to say. The hesitant pauses in the class discussion suggest to me that some guessing or anticipation is taking place. I feel that they are watching my face for visual clues. I must be more supportive of the overall process and emphasise that their honest responses are more important than the quest for a "right" answer.

They certainly seemed to enjoy what the advertisement was about; it seemed to hit the right target audience. I hope the connections are made between this and their writing. Some of the individual responses seemed enthusiastic. I wish they would write more in their journals.

Julia and Nikki, whose classes joined mine in the lecture theatre for a joint 80-minute lesson, both felt that this was extremely exciting and stimulating. Nikki thought that the idea was "brilliant" and believed her learners had participated meaningfully and would certainly produce better writing.

In a discussion with her class after the viewing, Nikki wrote:

I discussed with my class how the advert could directly help them with their first descriptive writing task. Some of their responses were: have an interesting beginning, keep the pace moving (by using short sentences), be descriptive - using images that appeal to the senses (esp. sound -inspired by the soundtrack), story should have a twist/ unexpected ending. It appeared that the learners had understood clearly and that learners had "got out" from the lesson what they were meant to.

Julia was concerned that perhaps the size of the group was too large for the best possible impact. Unfortunately our facilities are limited. Julia did add that I should not be disheartened, she still thought it was a good idea.

Perhaps a more intimate lesson with only our 21 learners each would have a better impact. Unless the other teachers involve themselves thoroughly and move around the whole venue, meaningful learner's participation must be questioned.

I find Nathan's consistent negativity troubling:

Nathan: It did not give me any new ideas to improve my creative writing.

He is quite new to the school but why did this video not work for him? He loves visual material and has already borrowed several of my own videos. I had hoped that this lesson would appeal to him.

Again I find myself struggling with the sense that although I have been told that this has helped, that although the learners have responded by and large in the way that I had hoped, that the transition to practice will not be what I want it to be. Perhaps this is because writing is a process that the learners have not fully grasped yet. I think that they think that this will simplify the task for them. I do not think that they have understood the amount of effort involved in the upcoming editing stages. Julia and Nikki have expressed a more optimistic "wait and see" attitude.

The discrepancy between the expectation of the teacher and the responses of the learners is quite apparent in these reflections. Although the learners generally responded in a very positive way

towards the lesson, my own reaction was not as enthusiastic. I understood that this was but the beginning of a process and that it would require a lot more effort than learners had ever expended on their writing before. Perhaps the excitement of initiating a new approach to teaching; the expectation that is generated with a new idea, is what produced the initial disappointment when the world was not changed tangibly, at that very moment.

The comments of the learners reflected a positive attitude towards the lesson and they articulated new writing strategies directly related to the visual material:

- *Their new understanding of a gripping plot structure is clearly derived from the video.

- *The variation of sentences and paragraphs is exactly connected to the structure of the video.

A connection had been made between understanding the visual mode and planning the written mode. The learners had articulated a link between their understanding of the visual mode and its application to their written mode.

What still needed to be determined was whether or not this transmodal connection would be displayed in the production of the learners' written mode.

4.2.3 Learner's responses to example descriptive essay and related exercise.

This session was intended to develop the analysis of the commercial and link it to an analysis of an example of writing. The learners were presented with an example of the genre with which they

themselves were working. The questions placed physically around the descriptive essay were intended to develop what had been understood from the visual and extend it to incorporate other aspects of descriptive writing, which might not have been considered.

The questions were structured in such a way as to guide the learners toward understanding how structural features, such as how rhythmically varied sentences and paragraphs enhance the quality of their descriptive writing. The questions relating to imagery were not as well developed as they could have been because this feature had been dealt with in a separate and detailed activity not contained within this research.

Almost all of the responses were positive ones. Even Nathan, whose dry remarks had become customary, claimed to have learned something. The response of the teacher was also far more positive. This session certainly challenged the attitudes of all the participants.

The following difficult, and unanswered, questions emerged while analysing the responses to this activity: Were the responses mostly positive because the example was taken from a younger student's writing and therefore less intimidating? Were the students more comfortable working around the written mode? Was it easier for them to connect between the written and the written?

Virginia: The work helped me not hating writing because I can see that writing each and everything that you experience can improve your writing. It helps me to listen to other people's stories and to read other people's writing in order to write interesting and perfect writing.

Virginia has returned to the theme of reading. She has seen the value of reading not only literature

in the broader sense, she now perceives the value of reading and listening to the reading of the writing of peers. Her last comment suggests the value of the genre model. She has seen examples of successful end products, which she now feels able to emulate because she knows what they should look like.

Jonathan: *This exercise has really given me the confidence for writing, especially creative writing because if a guy in grade 8 wrote this outstanding essay, which made me, think "why can't I?" It's also taught me how to use figures of speech effectively. It's helped me quite a bit.*

Nathan: *the only thing that affected me was the use of dashes because the thought of using dashes wasn't even triggered till I answered the question.*

Werner: *I gained the impression that this lesson consolidated what we had discussed with the advertisement. Now they have seen an example of what a peer has produced. Will this be enough?*

The groups spent quite a lot of time discussing each of the guiding questions around the example writing, some of them showed enthusiasm when they realised that this was written by a junior student. I hope that this will inspire them.

The following commentary is interesting because it implies a direct link between the previous lesson and this one. Bontle has connected the use of punctuation and paragraphing to the stylistic elements that the class had extracted from the commercial. In the previous session she had commented on the need for these variations, here she has identified how to create them in practical terms.

Bontle: *I got some help from the work sheet. I learnt that sometimes your writing can be unbelievable and that your introduction has to be effective as well as the conclusion.*

The other thing is that long sentences make the rhythm slow and short sentences make the rhythm fast. All sentences don't have to be true. The full stops, commas, hyphens and dashes can be used to make the story interesting.

Aletia: *The activity we did in class today put my mind in a muddle. The piece of reading material is very confusing. I never thought it was creative and I never thought there was a point to it. If that form of writing was creative then I am really not doing any creative writing. The conclusion or point I'm trying to get across is that I am very confused after today's activity.*

Aletia's conflict seems to arise from her perception of creativity. She had previously produced work in the third person narrative style. Her plots were usually romantic clichés. Her writing lacked imagery. While her attitude towards her writing had been a positive one as recorded earlier, she had not developed as a writer. Her writing had been based on the models she had viewed: the romance literature in the Danielle Steele style.

Writing a new story is indeed a creative process, a new work has been created, however, the transition to producing descriptive writing is complex and requires a changed perspective. Cognitive conflict has been introduced. Aletia had begun to see the difference between her genre of writing and the descriptive writing genre.

4.2.4 Learners' checklists

The next item of data that was collected was a checklist produced by the learners. This checklist was produced after the advertisement had been screened and systematically discussed. The learners were then also presented with an example of a piece of descriptive writing with a series of questions structured around it. The questions around the example essay complemented those questions used in the discussion around the advertisement. The checklists were constituted out of a combination of criteria derived from both of these sessions. The production of these checklists was particularly inspired by the work of De Fina (1992)

The purpose of these checklists was for the learners to be able to determine whether or not they had incorporated all the features of descriptive writing, all the features of good writing into their own essays. The power for "knowing" the difference between successful and unsuccessful work was to be placed in the hands of the learners themselves as they would determine the criteria to be included in the checklists.

Once the checklists were compiled, individual learners shared their checklists with their groups and selections were shared with the whole class. The learners made supplementary notes based on this session.

All checklists were combined by the teacher, in consultation with the participants, to create one standard checklist for the whole class to use. This checklist did not vary significantly from the individual learner's checklist.

Werner: *This is the crunch lesson, I hope that they don't forget to look at the imagery worksheet, which we discussed in detail a while back. I am not entirely certain that simply ticking of a block next to effective imagery will suffice. The originality that teachers seek might still be difficult to pin down in a list. Even if all the other stylistic elements are met, there might still be an artistic gap. This must be probed further.*

The reflections of the learners appear quite positive. They consolidated all the previous knowledge through means of this session. I have included quite a number of the participants' comments and checklists to convey the depth of the learners' understanding of the process so far. At this point there appeared to be no doubt at all that the learners had grasped the concept of determining their own grades by adhering to criteria which they themselves had identified. Learners were now responsible for determining the quality of their work because they had defined exactly what "good" work entailed. Ideally they should even have been able to give their own grades based on their checklists.

Michael B: *it emphasised points about creative writing or writing in general, that have been emphasised on numerous occasions. It is however, helpful because it asks questions on certain points and you must answer them. This then tests what you have learned and that which you still have difficulties with is reflected back by the worksheet. This then tells you which parts of writing you must concentrate more on.*

Michael's comment is self-empowering. He has articulated the route he needs to use to succeed with his writing. He no longer appears to hold the belief that assessment of writing is based upon

the disposition of the teacher.

Bennitta: *the exercise gave me criteria that go into writing. It has also increased the list of things I should do when writing. The exercises have also helped me know how I should "mark" my own work when I'm done in order to make sure that I have all the things that are usually marked for. It also showed me that a good piece of writing doesn't go by quantity rather by quality.*

Bennitta has understood that the length of the work is not nearly as important as the way in which it is written. She has shown an awareness of the substance of writing: it is not merely about filling a page or two with words. Her positive attitude is shared by Nonhlanhla who wrote:

Nonhlanhla: *I think my creative writing skills have improved greatly. The assessment requirements sheet helped a lot. I now know how I'm going to be assessed. I know what is required of me. The little exercises we do in class really help.*

Lunga has reflected the factors that influenced his original checklist production. It is interesting that he has not referred to the advertisement activity at all. Perhaps it was too removed in time from this activity.

Lunga: *I wrote this checklist using certain sources. For instance I used the big page we got for Creative writing analysis. Also teachers usually inform on such things before we go on to write our Creative writing. Also the class discussions we had on essays that were written by other people and I remember a time when we had it analyse on essays written by a child.*

The brief list that Theo produced might have been more effective than the longer lists produced in the end because it has an intense focus although some of his terms are vague.

Theo: *The main fault when I write an essay is my use of punctuation. I have trouble with the use of tone and style. I sometimes don't know how to end an essay properly.*

Problems

Need to edit properly

Use of proper verbs

Use of common adjectives

Write a little and keep it short

Can not link paragraphs

I use clichés sometimes

Omphile has shown that he has connected all his previous writing experiences with this one. The most obvious question that is raised by his response is that if these are comments repeated so often, why has he never taken them into account? Why has transference not taken place?

Omphile:

Why I produced the checklist: to actually see what I think is expected. What I produced due to what I hear teachers repeatedly asking for and saying what is missing from our pieces. Also, common sense had to do with it, so most of the points are from what is understood of pieces long ago.

The ideal behind using a checklist is reflected in Precious' remark. If the work improved by use of these guidelines then her effort would have been meaningful.

Precious: *I produced this checklist because I wanted my writing to be perfect. I wanted to improve my English mark.*

Michael has commented on the elements that helped him construct his list. The process of having read peer's draft essays appears to have been instructive.

Michael: *The things that helped me write the checklist down were, reading other people's essays there I could see the things which I did not include.*

The learner checklists were similar in any ways and I have included two typical lists. These reflect the general level of thoroughness that the learners used.

Mitchan: *Criteria used for marking an essay.*

Do paragraphs link?

Is the intro. Good?

Is the conclusion short and sweet?

Have you a large amount of characters?

Have you written from own experience?

Have you researched topic if required to be researched?

Does the story have a point of view?

Does story relate to topic?

Does story get off the point?

Is the story interesting?

Are there any interesting words?

Has the writer used any clichés?

Has the writer used any abbreviations?

Was it edited?

Has point of view changed during essay?

How are hyphens used in the essay?

Mahlatsi:

Check List:

Do you have any evidence that tells you the work has been planned first?

Does the structure of the essay have introduction, development, and conclusion?

Does the story link to the main topic?

Did they use punctuation correctly?

Did they use strong verbs, adjectives, and adverbs?

Did they use clichés?

Did they make their sentences vary in length?

Does the paragraphs vary in size?

Do the paragraphs link together?

Does the work have grammar mistakes?

Did they use formal or informal language?

Did they use figure of speech?

Does the work have spelling errors?

Did they use period of time?

Both of these lists reflect the previous activities without specific reference to structure. These were included in other lists and in the final one.

The following comment reflects the perceived need for careful editing and drafting. The learners are clearly aware of requirements and appear to have disregarded these in previous writing.

Virginia: *The thing for me that helped me to make the checklist is the essays discussion in the class and the things that teachers moaned about, such as spelling mistakes, editing your work. The*

things that the teachers moaned about, they are the things that I do not correct every time when I am writing

Meagan showed that she attempted to include concepts from the advertisement. Her comment is shared by Priscilla.

Meagan: *The ideas for the checklist for my essays I thought of in the terms of interest. I thought what will keep you interested in reading an essay and I decided on the points in my checklist. I also thought of grammar and punctuation.*

Priscilla: *The things that I mentioned me were the discussion we had on the advertisement and the songs teachers sing.*

It is interesting to notice the frequent refrain to the comments about teachers' "songs". What many of the learners appear to have done is to include not only the information developed through the process of this project, but also the accumulative commentary from teachers in their past experiences. Clearly teachers have repeatedly commented on certain areas that do not show improvement. Hence the old song being sung again.

The final comment on the process of producing checklists is taken from Michael's journal. Unfortunately Michael has not explored how he was able to learn imagery from the advertisement. A comment about this would have been enlightening.

Michael B:

The discussion of essays and advertisement helped with the checklists. The advertisement also helped me with the imagery part of my essay. I wrote the checklist so that when I write a story I can look back at the checklist and correct my mistakes in my story and improve my story so that it

can be useful.

The learners' responses had made a significant impression on me. I was feeling far more optimistic about their writing now because they had begun to demonstrate their metacognition about language.

Werner: *This is it! Judging by the checklists that were shared with the class, I do believe they have got it! This is real empowerment in action! Now they have told me what they should be doing, it is no longer a mysterious process in my head. Now they know what to do, to do well. To use the jargon of Outcomes Based Education, they have determined the performance indicators themselves. We have established, as a learning community, what it is that needs to be done in order to succeed in this area.*

Every feature that would be useful in a successful piece of descriptive writing was identified and noted in these checklists. The combined checklist should have become the invincible inoculator against low or mediocre grades. No one should have produced work of which they were uncertain. This had not occurred. This was when the Action Research model became most valuable. It was at this point that a new cycle had to begin. A second intervention had to be introduced. Something had gone horribly wrong and I needed to know what it was.

4.2.5 Learners' reflections on their first piece of writing

The next batch of data was drawn from the learner's reflections on their essays, which they had just completed, ostensibly using the checklists. Before the learners produced a final draft, three sessions