

**AN EVALUATION OF LANGUAGE MATERIALS DEVELOPED  
BY THE LANGUAGE IN LEARNING AND TEACHING (LILT)  
PROJECT IN TERMS OF THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE LEARNERS USING THEM, BASED ON WHAT THEY AIM  
TO ACHIEVE AND THEIR PERCEIVED FUNCTIONS IN THE  
LIGHT OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDER-PINNING THE  
LILT PROJECT.**

**by**

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*Dedicated to*

*Pierre, Stephen and Andrea*

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Research Focus**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The focus of the research reported on in this dissertation is an evaluation of the Language in Learning and Teaching project (LILT), in terms of its ability to facilitate English language development in schools where both educators and learners are second language speakers and where the Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT) is English. The research involved two main phases. During the first phase I established evaluation criteria from the literature review, from another project the English Language Education Trust, (ELET) and from my own experience and feedback from the end-users (i.e. teachers) and the observation of workshops. In the second phase I evaluated the LILT materials against the criteria developed in the literature review, analysed the feedback from end-users in the form of a questionnaire and made recommendations.

In this dissertation the following terms will be used interchangeably: teacher, educator, facilitator and tutor because in the quoted passages, the term teacher is largely used. However, in Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) the terms educator, facilitator and tutor are used.

### **1.2. Background and aims of the LILT project**

LILT is an applied research and development project of the School of Language, Culture and Communication of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The project was started in 1995 and the initial focus was on Language Across the Curriculum (LAC) with particular attention to the perceived needs of educators as far as Science and Mathematics were concerned. The focal point was language development as English is the LoLT, but not the Mother Tongue (MT). The LILT workers have provided support to educators in the field as well as running conferences for them. They have also assisted educators in the development of their own learning materials. The main focus of my study was on Grade 8 and 9 educators.

There exists a gulf between what is ultimately required by the Grade 12 examination and what the educators and learners are able to deliver. This gulf is exaggerated when one considers the differences between the rural child, who might be fortunate if he hears a radio at home and the urban child who might be exposed to radio, television and perhaps other electronic media like the Internet. It is this disparity that LILT has attempted to address by providing some scaffolding to the disadvantaged educators and learners to enable them to compete with their advantaged counterparts. Language acquisition does not happen in one year and, if the foundations and scaffolding of the language are appropriately established in the lower grades, considerable success can be achieved when the learners reach grade 12. LILT concentrates their In-service Training (INSET) efforts in the lower grades (grades 4 to 8) and also attempts to provide support to access textbooks. Of necessity textbooks cover very wide-ranging topics and proficiency levels, because of the variety of aspects of language learning that need to be included. The LILT tutors have attempted to assist teachers in using textbooks as resource material to develop their lessons. Many learners find it extremely difficult simply to communicate in English and yet they are required to write an examination in English. The LILT programme was established to mediate both the textbooks and the methodology for the teachers. Many of the OBE programmes established by the education authorities are “too short and the quality of trainers was inadequate” (Chisholm et al 2000 p 61). The courses last five days and because of the scale of the work covered, educators are often given only a very sketchy overview of OBE. Furthermore, the focus seems to be on terminology and there is consequently a limited transfer to classroom practice (Chisholm et al 2000). Educators need meaningful mediation in materials development and methodology simply to cope with OBE.

It is only through successful language usage that other subjects can be accessed successfully and the LILT project aims to improve this subject access by:

- identifying and responding to teachers’ stated needs
- developing sample lessons in all subjects incorporating a focus on language
- guiding teachers through the steps of planning and making materials themselves
- helping teachers to reflect on the success or lack of success of such material in their own classrooms

- sharing these materials more widely through workshops with other teachers
- revising the materials, in the light of feedback, from the trial lessons and workshops
- packaging successful materials into units of sample lessons for wider distribution
- disseminating information by means of public workshops, networking with other organisations engaged in similar activities and presenting findings at specialist conferences
- helping teachers to utilise Outcomes Based Education (OBE) and Curriculum 2005 (C2005), both of which facilitate language teaching
- exposing teachers to methodologies which will facilitate learning and which will reposition the classroom from being teacher-centred to more learner-centred in order to maximise learner input
- developing booklets as self-help guides for teachers.

Revised LILT Executive Summary (1997)

To date four booklets have been produced by LILT, one of which will be the focus of this report: *'How to organise and manage small groups in your classroom.'* This was evaluated against the above criteria, as well as against my own observations and the interventions introduced by another NGO, the English Language Education Trust (ELET). The other booklets include two resource booklets: *How to teach essay writing* and *Teaching vocabulary across the curriculum*, and a practical guide: *How to build a code of conduct in your school.*

### **1. 3. Background to the study**

Under the new dispensation, Education Departments have concentrated their efforts on the development and promotion of OBE and Curriculum 2005. The Chisholm Report (2000) proposed a simplification of the more obscure concepts of OBE, and the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS), (2001) is considerably clearer and more accessible than the initial guideline documents were. The facilitators, who have been tasked with the responsibility of cascading the OBE INSET to educators, have been instructed to continue with this implementation as it stands. Any changes which might

occur in the future will be conveyed to them as they develop. A notable exception is that a greater emphasis will now be placed on the curriculum support materials and their development. A further important change is that a large proportion of the assessment is formative, rather than summative. Furthermore, it has been established that teacher support is critical to its implementation. Prior to the 2001 RNCS educators were faced with a plethora of confusing terminology and little else, so they tended to implement the methodology by which they were taught i.e. what Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) call “apprenticeship of observation” whilst any new ideas were either ignored or treated with scepticism. Teachers working in Grades 1 to 4, 7 and 8 have received some material to assist in the teaching of OBE because of its gradual introduction into schools. Because of the daunting literature that has been provided by National Education, many educators have been thrown back on their own resources. Other possible contributory factors which influence teachers’ attitudes to teaching include lack of motivation, stressful school situations and lack of resources, which often lead to indifference. Many interventions have been initiated to try to empower educators to cope with this transition and to employ innovative and pedagogically sound methods of teaching (Wildsmith 1992, Bell, 1998). Examples of these are the Zikulise Project and NGOs like ELET. The majority of learners come from disadvantaged backgrounds (in KwaZulu–Natal they are mainly isiZulu speakers) and the medium of instruction is English, which is not their mother tongue.

This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the very educators are often products of an inferior education system and they consequently lack confidence and feel threatened by learners who keep asking questions to which they may or may not know the answers because they themselves are unsure. To compound this problem, the learners from these deprived conditions have to write the same examinations as do learners from schools that have all the infrastructure and expertise that they could wish for. In rural areas the needs are more basic requirements like sufficient classrooms or textbooks.

## **1.4 The Study**

### **1.4.1 Study materials (Appendix A)**

This study investigated how far the materials developed by LILT go towards addressing this need (i.e. the lack of facilities) in the education process of the disadvantaged learner. The LILT booklets are given out free of charge and the educators are given training through workshops so they have some form of teaching and learning material in the absence of text books. Another important part of this process was the way in which the educators were introduced to the material by means of workshops. Evaluation of the project took the form of a coherent, relevant set of criteria against which to measure these materials. These were based on insights from established research, from additional insights provided by the fundamental principles of LILT, from similar principles that form part of the rationale of another materials developer in this field, i.e. ELET and, finally, from my own observations of classroom lessons. The reason for choosing this project as a point of comparison was because ELET are an established project with a proven reputation countrywide and have credibility, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal. They have addressed and learnt to manage many of the technical complications of a project of this nature. These might be the problems of making materials accessible, mediating educational materials, equipping educators to make their own materials and/or doing follow-up on classroom activities.

From the literature and from these sources, I then attempted to establish a set of principles for the generation of materials with which to guide my research and subsequently used these principles to inform the criteria that were developed to evaluate the LILT materials. (see 2.3)

### **1.4.2 The workshops ( Field notes - Appendix B)**

A further investigation followed into the method of introduction to the educators i.e. how the booklets were mediated with the educators and ultimately presented to the learners. In the absence of familiarity with new methods, materials need to be promoted

to the point where educators perceive them to be accessible. If educators have not taken ownership of the material they will not use it. They might also be apprehensive in a classroom situation, which is fairly unstructured as far as students' responses are concerned, and they do not feel fully in control. They cannot completely control or direct everything that happens in the classroom and this could be intimidating hence the need for scaffolding in the workshops. (see2.1)

#### **1.4.3 Intended outcomes of the Materials developer (Appendix C)**

The next step was to evaluate the materials in the light of the literature, the ELET materials and my own experience. In order to do this it was necessary for me to interview the developers both of LILT and ELET to determine their intentions with the development of the materials.

#### **1.4.4 Questionnaires (Appendix D)**

The third aspect of the research was to investigate the perceived effectiveness of these materials on the part of the end users. This was followed by an investigation of the educators' perception of the relevance of these materials in their schools and whether these materials are in fact being used in schools. If used, then, how effectively are they being used? If they are not being used, then why not?

I then took the suggestions made by the course materials developer and compiled a questionnaire consisting of thirty two questions, which covered the responses of the educators who attended the workshop to the workshop itself and to the booklet's perceived efficacy in the classroom, with a view to finding out whether there is a correlation between the outcome that the developer wishes to achieve and the actual outcome that is realized in the classroom.

Following this, I developed a set of criteria for the assessment of the materials on the basis of the literature in comparison with ELET and my own personal experience. The LILT materials were then investigated and critically evaluated against this set of criteria. The publication evaluated was *How to organise and manage small groups in your classroom*. The introduction of the materials to the educators was subsequently observed in workshops. The objectives for doing this were:

1. To observe, first hand, how the educators respond to the materials
2. To establish contact with the educators for further investigation (questionnaire) and
3. To obtain feedback on the application of the skills learnt at the workshop.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature, from which are drawn a set of criteria against which to evaluate the LILT Project. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and observation of workshops while Chapter 4 evaluates the LILT materials against the criteria developed in chapter 2 and analyses the feedback from the questionnaire given to end-users. Chapter 5 offers recommendations for future research and interventions.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

#### **2.1 The status quo in South African schools.**

I drew my literature sources primarily from research on Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and group work and then I linked the relevant theory to C2005 and OBE. CLT grew out of Second Language Acquisition theory and group work is, in turn, an important aspect of CLT. This approach is compatible with the Critical Outcomes of OBE by virtue of the fact that the learner is required to think, reason and negotiate meaning. In this chapter I will give an overview of the status quo within South African schools. I will then extract five criteria for the assessment of materials based on the literature, on my own experience and on work done by ELET, a similar project. The reason for choosing the latter as a comparison is the relative credibility that this material has, because it has been in use in its present form since 1997 and because ELET addresses similar concerns to LILT. I will then outline 10 principles for the implementation of group work as taken from the LILT booklet which will then be evaluated against the above-mentioned criteria.

During the apartheid era the poor pass rate under the former Bantu education system was not really considered to be of great import. In the post-apartheid era this situation has changed where the education departments have been united in an uneasy marriage. Since amalgamation much more pressure has been exerted on the so called “previously disadvantaged” schools to perform well mainly because all schools now write the same examinations. Samuel (1998) states that:

Teacher education under apartheid education did not equip the teaching force with alternate conceptions of language teaching and learning, and many teachers within the existing school system feel inadequate to promote a more communicative and sociolinguistic analysis of language teaching and learning. The success of the new language policies thus entails a massive reskilling of the existing teaching staff via in-service education. (p579)



These previously disadvantaged schools have very limited facilities, but their learners are expected to write the same examination as their peers, who have far more resources. Many of the ex-model C schools are also able to employ additional educators paid by the governing body. An immediate consequence of this is that the ex-model C schools have, to a certain extent, been able to maintain the status quo of smaller classes and more administrative support. On the other hand, the schools which were disadvantaged in the past are still disadvantaged because they do not have the financial resources to pay for extra educators and additional facilities.

At present the language of instruction in schools is largely English and, as a result, many educators teach in their second language. Gamede *et al.* (2000 pvii) underscore the fact that the proficiency of both teachers and learners in the language of learning profoundly affects the teaching and learning of other subjects. Proficiency in language (in this case, English) will have a significant impact on the learners' access to and ability to reproduce what they have learnt in other subjects. Williams (cited in Gamede *et al.* 2000) has also highlighted this in Malawi, as did Macdonald (1990) ten years previously in South Africa. In both cases the researchers found that, where learners had not acquired enough of the Target Language (TL) to learn through it at the time of transition from the Mother Tongue (MT) to English as Language of Learning and Teaching (LoLT), this seriously affected learners ability to access other subjects. The importance of learning English under the present dispensation is therefore clearly evident.

A necessary distinction that should be drawn here is that between English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Ellis (1985) points out that whereas ESL is integrative because it is the LoLT, EFL "is a part of the school curriculum and therefore subject to contextual factors such as support from the principal and local community"(p7). In the South African context, particularly in the rural areas, we have the phenomenon that Krashen (cited in Long 1983) calls "acquisition-poor environments" (p376). In rural areas English is like a foreign language, because the language learners have no opportunity to exercise the language skills acquired in the classroom beyond the school grounds. Littlewood (1984) states that the proximity of

another language group may create, simultaneously, the need for the second language user to communicate in the TL as well as the opportunities for learning it through use. This proximity unfortunately does not exist in the rural areas where there is no need to speak English. By definition the learners are therefore learning EFL and not ESL notwithstanding the fact that English is the LoLT.

Large numbers of schools still function within a traditional paradigm. As a possible alternative, educators could assimilate the precept of group work and recognise the need to try different methodologies. Kennedy, cited in Freeman and Richards (1993 p210), suggests that “teachers acquire seemingly indelible imprints of teaching from their own experience as students and teachers’ imprints are tremendously difficult to shake”. Kerfoot (1993) supports this when she intimates that many teachers simply assimilate materials into traditional ways of teaching. In short, they teach the way they were taught. This is in the ‘*chalk and talk*’, lockstep mode where the educator is positioned in front of the class and the learners sit in neat rows facing the educator. In this classroom, the interaction that takes place is between the educator and the learners who, in turn, are actively discouraged from communicating with other learners. Savova and Donato (cited in Bell 1998), Hornberger and Chick (cited in Gamede *et al.* 2000) and Wildsmith (1992) also allude to the practice of ‘chorusing’ prevalent in South African teacher-fronted classrooms. Any interaction that takes place is invariably in the form of chorusing by completing a sentence, word or phrase, or repeating a model from the teacher, which is initiated by the teacher and is then completed in chorus by the learners. One consequence of this is that the learners are not really required to *think*, only to *respond*. This methodology is familiar and therefore very comfortable and non-threatening. There seems to be an instant recognition of what is to come and the entire class slips comfortably into a kind of pre-programmed automatic routine. Hornberger and Chick (cited in Gamede *et al.* 2000), label this “safetalk”:

chanting and using one-word answers maintains the dignity of both the learners and the educators by hiding the fact that very little learning is actually taking place. ... less authoritarian teaching styles require high levels of efficiency, but if these classroom’s power-relations are not changed, educators and learners will retreat into the safetalk mode at the expense of teaching and learning. This safetalk

also builds confidence and breaks down any awkwardness in the classroom on the part of both educators and learners.(p12)

Gamede *et al.* 2000) describe this interaction as “individual activity” in the presence of other individuals. Chick (1988) speculates whether the function of this chorusing may be social rather than academic. Chick cited in Wildsmith (1992) calls this “collusion” on the part of the teachers and the learners. In order to enhance communicative abilities, learners need to be taken out of this ‘*comfort zone*’ to be challenged in order for language acquisition to take place more effectively.

In the teacher-fronted classroom sketched above, learners do not learn to respond to or interact with text, or with each other, as much of the input from the educator is verbal, with a summary on the blackboard. Taylor and Vinjevoold (1999) in their Report on the President’s Education Initiative Research Project (PEI) concur with this view. They point out that PEI researchers found that lessons were dominated by teacher-talk, examples were superficial and that very little learner-learner interaction took place. Learners were also never required to investigate, enquire or exercise any higher order skills. These observations are particularly interesting when one compares them to the findings of Macdonald (1990) ten years earlier. She speaks of the “Rote Rhythm Method” and she expresses concern that this method can mask the absence of comprehension. Macdonald also observes the well-defined and stable features of the participants in the class where the teacher directs everything that happens within the classroom. The learners are confined to answering questions and following instructions. Most of the interaction is restricted to teacher-driven activities. One realises that very little has changed during the ensuing ten years.

Taylor and Vinjevoold (1999) report that, in spite of the desks in the classrooms having been arranged for group work, the classrooms were still dominated by teacher-talk and the physical changes did not result in a change of classroom behaviour. Kilfoil and van der Walt, cited in Bell, (1998) are of the view that “the physical characteristics of large classes make group work untenable.” They write:

if fifty or more learners are crammed into a classroom designed to accommodate thirty, there is unlikely to be scope for arranging the classroom seating more informally or for convenient movement to

divide the class for group work. Bell (1998 p6)

Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) identify a large portion of the problem as being failure to fully comprehend exactly what group activities entailed on the part of the educators. The teachers seemed to assume that once learners were physically placed in a group, participation and learning would occur automatically. It was in this setting that the LILT Project attempted to make an input.

Group work breaks down the traditional roles of the educators and learners. What seems to be required is that educators need a deeper understanding of what group work demands of the educator as well as of the learners. If a lesson or learning activity is appropriately mediated and correctly scaffolded, learning can take place very successfully. The booklet on group work produced by LILT has been carefully developed in order to take the educators step by step through the various levels of skill required for the preparation of group activities. However, the material still needs to be studied and internalised by educators. This, however, is where a major problem lies. Group work demands that educators are able to manage groups. But in order to facilitate groups, they need to read the booklet. They are also in charge of a group of learners who have to read, which, in turn, has implications for learners who have to pass a written examination.<sup>1</sup> The way to assist educators in their access to the booklets seems to be through scaffolding and workshops, which is where the latter are important. Unfortunately the workshops were curtailed.

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<sup>1</sup> This reluctance to read material correlates with the findings by the Palmer Development Group (1999) which found that educators openly admitted their reluctance to read. A further dimension to this disinclination to read is found in schools where, at present, the examination that serves as a gateway to further education and training is a *written* examination. It is therefore essential that the skill of reading be encouraged and developed. If it is difficult to get the *educators* to read a booklet, how much more difficult will it be to instil a reading ethic in *learners*? If reading is the basis of learning and a way in to examinations, then this skill is essential for success. The resistance to the written word seems to be fairly widespread. This observation is borne out by the Ministerial Committee in their report on the investigation into the Senior Certificate Examination:

There is evidence that a large proportion of our schools do not give students enough practice in reading – that is to say, in developing critical, selective, analytical and interpretative reading skills – and writing - in developing critical, creative, interpretative, reflective, analytical and transactional writing skills. This lack of opportunity for practice appears to be particularly prevalent in the African Languages. As a result, questions involving these skills (in all subjects) often account for a large proportion of Senior Certificate failures.  
Ministerial Committee (1998 p12)

It is clear from the above that in order for more meaningful classroom interaction to take place, a radical paradigm-shift is needed in the majority of the classrooms, particularly with the introduction of C2005 and OBE. The Department of National Education has attempted to bridge the divide between the methodology of teaching African languages and that of English and Afrikaans by the introduction of the Further Education and Training Language Standardisation Policy (2001). The spirit of this document is that of CLT and an attempt is being made to contextualise questioning.

The introduction of CLT has been advocated by language acquisition experts like Walker (cited in Macdonald 1990), Littlewood (1991), Nunan (1999), Richards and Rodgers (1994) as one of the means to improve meaningful interaction. Many of the underlying principles of CLT also form the basis of the new Curriculum 2005 e.g. problem-solving, co-operative learning and negotiation of meaning. A classroom where the learners sit in groups and interact with each other, and where there is less teacher talk and more interaction between individual learners, is one of the objectives of Curriculum 2005.

Whether there is necessarily a 'best' method for learning a second language is questioned, particularly by Prabhu, (1990) who feels that the context, circumstances and purpose determine the method of teaching. I support his view that there is no one method that is suitable for everyone, but rather that variations of methodology depend on the social situation, educational organisation, educator-related factors like training, skill etc. and learner-related factors like culture and upbringing. When one then attempts to determine a best method one has to understand the specific context. The question that arises is whether as an approach, CLT would be the best method for all learners in schools. For example, Hart (quoted in Fotheringham, 2000) queries whether CLT is the 'best' approach in the majority of South African classrooms because of its Western middle class approach. He feels that:

It values children that determine the topics of conversation, are able to take and hold the floor in the presence of adults. What happens then to learners who come from backgrounds that do not value these practices, that emphasise that children should be silent in the presence of their elders, or that relegate women and children to places of silence in the presence of men? ... if we value diversity

and equity then we would have to see that CLT would probably disadvantage these learners, or at the very least they would feel alienated by the interactional expectations in a CLT classroom. Fotheringham (2000 p 3).

In the post-Apartheid era where constitutionally everyone is equal before the law, some racist and sexist attitudes still remain. Within Zulu society, many cultural strongholds still retain old hierarchical positions. This is particularly relevant to the place of Zulu women in society where they are still expected to defer to their male counterparts, who ostensibly espouse the principles of equality. A tension is thus created between what is expected of girls within the classroom when innovative teaching methods, such as group work are employed, where girls are required to participate actively, but they have to defer to their male counterparts outside the classroom. Hartshorne (1992) commented that “there is a sense that transition is a permanent condition and the change process a continuing factor in the life of society, certainly in the field of education.” (p331) This commentary still holds true today because many problems in education have not yet been addressed even after eight years of democracy. The process of transformation still continues.

Flowerdew (1998) seems to support the view that innovation in the classroom is necessary, when she suggests that teachers should consider adjusting their teaching style so that it is congruent with the students’ cultural background. In the light of Hart’s critique, the question is whether this would not cause a reversion to a ‘chalk and talk’ classroom. Schenke (cited in Bell 1998) refers particularly to the gender dynamic in a group, which would also seem to be relevant in the South African situation. Schenke notes: “ESL students are often (seen to be) caught in competing requirements about who they are meant to be and who they desire to be” (p3). Bell comments that: “This creates a situation where females, for example, are expected to be submissive outside the classroom, but are encouraged to speak out with confidence and authority in the ESL classroom” (Bell 1998 p3). This raises the question of how the practice of CLT (including the use of group work) would be received in a classroom where these conditions prevail. Lennard (cited in Wildsmith-Cromarty 1995) found that during her lesson observations of English language teachers in Soweto primary schools,

teachers appeared to pay mere ‘lip service’ to the communicative

principles underlying many activities. When questioned about the activities used in the lessons, teachers did not relate what they had been doing in the class to any particular pedagogic goal although they had been exposed to the principles underlying these activities during their course. It appeared that no transfer had been made from the course to the classroom. (Wildsmith-Cromarty 1995 p119)

What is important is that educators take ownership of what they present in class. If they cannot identify with or own what they teach in class, they will not have what Prabhu calls “a teacher’s sense of plausibility” which is the “teachers’ subjective understanding 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 p172). Kumaravadivelu (1994) makes the point that teachers’ sense of plausibility is not linked to the concept of method, but to whether the activity is active and productive. There is then a tension between what is taught and what is learnt. Larsen-Freeman (1991) asserts that teachers have developed the conviction “that no single perspective on language, no single explanation for learning, and no unitary view of the contributions of language learners will account for what they must grapple with on a daily basis.” (Larsen-Freeman cited in Kumaravadivelu 1994 p30) Savignon confirms this: “Just as there is no one set of ideal teaching materials, there is no universal teaching method suited to the many contexts of language learning” Savignon (1983 p178). (Criterion 6). However, CLT as a teaching approach is compatible with OBE, which is the broad context within which the current research is based and upon which the LILT project based its main principles.

## **2.2 Communicative Language Teaching and Group Work**

Many of the underlying principles of CLT also form the basis of C2005, e.g. problem-solving, cooperative learning and negotiation of meaning. Walker (cited in Macdonald 1990,) points out that within a CLT approach, the focus should be on meaning rather than form; that information gap exercises are effective ways of facilitating SLA, and that meaning should be negotiated based on information given to and used by the

learner. Littlewood (1991) elaborates on these when he identifies the purposes of communicative activities as activities which provide 'whole-task practice' in the provision of various kinds of communicative activities structured to suit the learners' level of ability and to improve motivation as each learner's ultimate objective is to take part in communication with others. Language learning is more likely to make sense if it can build on this concept. Furthermore, communicative activities allow for natural learning so that learners can make mistakes and struggle with concepts, which is all part of the total learning process and creates a context which supports learning. CLT claims to provide meaning and create positive personal relationships between learners and educator. Richards and Rodgers acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication in the teaching of the four language skills. They also acknowledge that CLT makes communicative competence the goal of language teaching. Moreover they point out that CLT starts from a communicative model of language use, and then seeks to translate this into a design for an instructional system for materials, for educator and learner roles, and for classroom activities and techniques. (1994). LILT works within the CLT framework and as the booklet on group work is to be analysed, it is necessary that CLT be mentioned here.

In order for group activities to be successful in the classroom, a systematic approach to language teaching is required. Various language acquisition styles need to be catered for in the methodology of language acquisition. Not all learners learn language in the same way. It is therefore essential that the educator varies the types of activities used in the classroom in order to cater for the diverse needs of the learners. The educator needs to integrate the various stages of language learning and the different levels at which learners are in their language development along the interlanguage continuum. Nunan (1991) stresses that the effective planning, implementation, and evaluation of language learning and teaching requires that all the aspects covered are interrelated in an integrated approach. In Nunan's (1991) introduction to syllabus design, he poses the central question as to what the learner wants or needs to do with the target language and which linguistic elements are to be mastered. An educator needs to be very clear about the needs of the learners in relation to the target language and her planning should be in line with these outcomes. Van Ek cited in Nunan (1991) lists the necessary components



of a programme of study for language teaching. These are: situations in which the language will be dealt with; notions and topics which the learner can handle; language forms to be used and the degree of skill of the learner; activities; functions which the learner will fulfil; and what the learner will be able to do with topics. I agree with Nunan's (1991) precept that a language acquisition syllabus should be content-based and contain functional skills. The LILT material does attempt to address this by providing a context for language acquisition.

I will now narrow my focus on CLT to group work because it is one of the preferred methods of facilitating language acquisition and it forms an integral part of both CLT and C2005. Nunan states:

“Group work is essential to any classroom that is based on principles of experiential learning. Through group work, learners develop their ability to communicate through tasks that require them, within the classroom, to approximate the kinds of things they will need to be able to do to communicate in the world beyond the classroom.” (1999 p85).

Brumfit, (cited in Ellis 1994) considers group work to be an essential feature of communicative language teaching. Current research in language acquisition seems to suggest that group work is considered to be one of the most effective ways of increasing learner-learner interaction within the classroom (Long and Porter 1985, Boughey, 1997, Flowerdew 1998, Long 1990, Bell 1998). A further consideration related to group work concerns the nature of the learning materials for effective learning and acquisition to take place and the integration of effective language acquisition skills. To address this one needs to question the purpose for which a set of learning materials or a programme of learning is designed. Is the purpose simply to help learners to communicate in the TL, or is the purpose to give them the means to study and access other subjects or Learning Areas, i.e. is the TL going to be the LoLT? Van Ek cited in Nunan (1991) echoes this concern when he suggests that the central question which needs to be asked is: “(w)hat does the learner want/need to do with the target language?” and “(w)hich linguistic elements should be mastered?” He points out that the content that is presented to the learners needs to be relevant to their lives. These materials will therefore “include the

types of activities that the learner prefers, their motivation for learning the language and will include ‘real-world communicative tasks’. Nunan (1991 p19). This view is endorsed by Savignon who suggests that: “The most effective programs will be those that involve the whole learner in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events” (1983 p187). Long and Porter (1985) list several advantages of using group activities, all of which are listed below and briefly related to the LILT booklet:

### **1. Increases language practice opportunities.**

Learners need to improve their aural-oral skills. The authors point out that in the average lockstep classroom each learner only gets about 30 seconds of speaking time per lesson, which translates into one hour per year. On the other hand in the group work classroom, learners speak for an average of five and a half hours per year. The authors say that this is still not the ideal, but it is an increase of more than 500%. This point is also made in the LILT booklet where the fact that the learners are looking at, talking and listening to each other during group work activities is highlighted. Ellis (1994) posits “small-group work has been found to provide more opportunities for meaningful negotiation than lockstep teaching, if the tasks are of the ‘required information exchange’ type.” Doughty and Pica cited in Allwright and Bailey (1991). found that there was four times as much negotiation of meaning within groups than in the teacher-fronted classroom. (Allwright & Bailey 1991; Long and Porter 1985).

### **2. Improves quality of student talk**

Language in a lockstep classroom is very conventionalised and a question normally has only one correct answer, already known to both parties i.e. there is no genuine information gap. Long and Porter (1985) call this ‘pseudo-communication’. Teachers correct errors immediately and the learners get the message that “what they say is less important than how they say it..” (p209). Learners do not develop the skills they need for interaction outside the classroom, where communication is more important than grammatical correctness. Van Lier (cited in Ellis 1994) says that group work is a case

where the teacher controls the activity but not the topic. The procedural rules are specified, but students are free to choose what they talk about. This is not strictly how classrooms are organised in the LILT model, because their topic is determined by the teacher – their response is, however, spontaneous.

### **3. Helps individualise instruction**

Long and Porter (1985) suggest that lockstep teaching reduces individual differences, but group work takes into account differences like “age, cognitive stage, sex, attitude, motivation, aptitude, personality, interests, cognitive style, cultural background, native language, prior language learning experience and target language needs” (p210). The LILT booklet also points out that a particular group can be attended to individually according to their needs and that group work allows for this. This is achieved by the educator moving amongst the groups and being able to attend to problems as they arise. Future activities can also be designed in order to address these problems. An activity given to two different groups can also move in different directions according to the needs and abilities of the group.

### **4. Promotes a positive affective climate**

In a relatively intimate setting there is usually a more supportive environment. Barnes (cited in Long and Porter 1985) speaks of the “audience effect” which requires a short, polished product to be presented to a large group, whereas, when learners practise their language skills in reality, there are false starts, changes of direction, hesitation and stumbling. In a small group the pressure of the “audience effect” is relieved and the language acquisition process takes a more natural course. The authors say that “freedom from the requirement for accuracy at all costs and entry into the richer and more accommodating set of relationships provided by small-group interaction promote a positive affective climate” (Long and Porter 1985 p212). The LILT booklet also makes the point that peer instruction is perceived to be more supportive.

## **5. Motivates learners**

Group work “allows for a greater quantity and richer variety of language practice ... conducted in a more positive affective climate” (Long and Porter 1985 p212). Group work is also advocated by Krashen – in relation to problem-solving and information gathering activities – though it does not seem to be considered a key part of his language acquisition theory. LILT links all five listed advantages with C2005 where it is stated that small group work underpins the objective of OBE which is to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Long and Porter cited in Ellis summarise the main pedagogical arguments in favour of group work: “It increases language practice opportunities, it improves the quality of student talk, it helps to individualise instruction, it promotes a positive affective climate, and it motivates learners to learn.” (1994 p598)

## **2.3 The development of criteria for the evaluation of the LILT learning materials**

In the next part of this review, I develop a set of criteria against which to evaluate learning materials for organising group activities. The LILT booklet is then evaluated against these criteria in Chapter 4.

### **2.3.1 Criterion 1**

**The materials should be user-friendly, accessible and well organised.**

Sheldon (1998) lists a number of questions to be asked when evaluating the accessibility and layout of a textbook. He stresses the importance of organisation, ease of situating the progress made within the book by the reader, indexes and signposting. His criteria for the physical characteristics are listed in terms of durability, robustness, weight and labelling. (see 4.2 below).

The preparation and planning of the lesson is also essential. It is critical that individual lessons are planned in order to make a coherent and developmental whole. (see 4.2 below).

### **2.3.2 Criterion 2**

#### **The materials should be appropriate to their users.**

Sheldon 1998 states that learning material should be appraised in terms of conceptual level, topicality, and in terms of whether it is pitched at the right level, in this case, Second Language Users who teach English. He also stresses the importance of appropriacy in terms of cultural bias and format (see 4.2).

### **2.3.3 Criterion 3**

#### **The focus of the materials should be on activities**

Activities are fundamental building blocks of group work. They can be looked at in three different ways, namely: that they should be authentic and meaningful and provide an opportunity for spontaneous speech and comprehensible input; they should support the learning process which allows learners to formulate their speaking and have something worthwhile to talk about and the materials should therefore provide support to teachers to help them create genuine communication. Furthermore, the expected outcomes of each activity should be clearly stated at the outset i.e. before the activity takes place. The teacher should be shown beforehand what concepts, structures, level of input, feedback and assessment will be required. (Macdonald 1990, Richards and Rodgers 1994, Gee 1966 Holderness cited in Brumfit 1991).

Prabhu (1987), Long and Crookes have somewhat disparate approaches, but they share the common idea of giving learners tasks to transact rather than items to learn and both view this as the best way of promoting the natural language learning process. The types of activities suggested are what Foster calls problem-solving, discussions, or narratives which will stretch and encourage the development of language (Foster 1999, Prabhu 1990). There seems to be general agreement as to the effectiveness of task based activities especially when they are applied to group activities.

Macdonald (1990) posits that small groups should make provision for comprehensible input and allow opportunities for spontaneous speech. Learners should be allowed time to formulate their speaking. One way to do this is to give them something worth talking about. This is where teacher support is necessary to help them to create genuine communication. Texts provided for group interaction should be selected with great care. They should be relevant, contextualised, coherent, take into consideration the children's context and interests and build on prior knowledge. This is what Ireland quoted in Macdonald (1990), calls "hybrid, interactional, transitional texts."

In this context I support Holderness' view that "when children are allowed to be themselves, they will be active. They are irrepressible *doers*, because it is by doing that they learn." He goes on to observe that activity-based learning focuses on making "the *how* of learning more effective, rather than the changing of the *what*." (Holderness in Brumfit 1991 p18). This is a valuable consideration for successful group activities. This notion is borne out by Gee who also agrees that activity promotes learning. He sees group interaction as a form of apprenticeship:

for anything close to acquisition to occur, classrooms must constitute active apprenticeships in academic social practices, and, in most cases, must connect with these social practices as they are also carried on outside the composition or language class, elsewhere in the institution.(Gee 1996 p147).

Larsen-Freeman (1984) indicates that in the classroom environment where learners are allowed to 'do', learners are active agents involved in a process of "creative construction". Errors are "regarded as welcome signs that learners were actively testing hypotheses...Thus, language learning was seen to be a natural, cognitive process with learners ultimately responsible for their own learning" (p4). Johnson (cited in Richards and Rodgers) also feels that "activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning." (1994 p72).

#### **2.3.4 Criterion 4**

**The materials should make provision for the development of specific skills needed for group work.**

In his research Bell (1998) observed that there is an awareness and recognition on the part of educators that group work is good, but that they lack a conscious knowledge of the specific skills needed for the management of successful group work. These are skills like turn-taking, interrupting, allowing someone to take the floor, elaborating, summarising, equitable gender interaction and peer-tutoring skills. Richards and Rodgers also mention further conditions needed to promote second language learning: “Activities that involve real communication promote learning ...Language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.” (1994 p72). In this regard, the LILT booklet emphasises training and preparation (see 4.2). The author suggests that initially it might be a good idea to provide some closed questions in order to build up the self-confidence of the learners and as they become more accustomed to the fact that their opinions are accepted and do count, they can then be exposed to more open-ended questions (see 4.1 Principle 5).

#### **2.3.4 Criterion 5**

**Materials should provide a variety of activities to cater for varying learning styles.**

No two learners learn in the same way. Some are comfortable in a teacher-fronted class, others like to be more active and involved. Some like to ‘do’ first and then learn. Others like to understand everything about what they are going to do before they venture into a new field. Activities that are given to the learners to do should therefore provide for a large variety of activities and approaches. Applebee, cited in Richards and Rodgers (1994) suggests that the unique styles, interests, needs and goals of individual learners should be considered and feels that teachers should be encouraged to develop materials according to the needs in their classes. These needs could also include different learning styles. For the above-mentioned reasons, planning is critical on the part of the educator so that her input is structured, scaffolded and varied.

### 2.3.5 Criterion 6

**Materials should be related to the specific needs of the learners. They should allow for language to be used functionally rather than merely as a means of responding.**

Macdonald (1990) suggests that different patterns of group work should begin with MT and then naturally move into the TL. In this way MT is used as a support to facilitating the acquisition of the TL. This seems to be an anomaly, but the LILT tutor also stresses that the MT can be used in interactions within the groups to eventually facilitate TL acquisition. Macdonald continues:

Formal instruction in language structures and vocabulary should be closely related to and justified by functional lessons in which the pupils naturally use what has been learned." i.e. language is first taught as an end and then later as a means.

(Macdonald 1990 p 79)

This looks at the metalanguage dimension of language acquisition where learners move beyond simply using the language, to the point where they are trained to understand how the language is used in meaningful activities i.e. moving from a mechanistic approach to an understanding of fundamental rules and structures. Language also becomes the means to access other subjects.

It is important to provide challenges within the classroom which will motivate learners to move from language acquisition to using metalanguage. Johnson and Morrow in Larsen-Freeman and Long (1984) assert that "motivation will be enhanced if learners feel that they are working on communicative skills, i.e. practising some function within a social context." They interact with their teacher and their fellow students by practising and activating this knowledge in the negotiation of meaning. This is therefore a fundamental need in learning an additional language because, as Larsen-Freeman states (1984) "language consists of three interacting dimensions: form, function, and meaning" (p4) "In essence, then, students learn how to communicate by communicating" (p6). Foster (1999) also feels that language learning is a developmental, organic process that follows its own internal agenda.



The majority of ESL learners want to acquire broad and fairly generalised language skills but they need the scaffolding on which to build their language development. Survival English does not necessarily mean survival only in the classroom. The TL needs to be used outside the classroom too. Because the activities presented in the classrooms are very often superficial and do not go beyond the 'what' to the 'how', Samuel (1998) calls these "rituals of disempowerment" which characterise schools that are unwilling to transform the way in which English is taught. Bell (1998) goes on to point out that the textbook still remains the model of correct English. Consequently many second language learners develop a kind of fossilised and stilted (textbook) language which often bears little relationship to the spoken English of first language speakers. For these reasons classroom activities should move beyond the 'how' to the 'why'. Even though the LILT materials do not state this explicitly, there is an awareness of the necessity to learn about language (metalinguage), but this is a part of the future plans of LILT where they want to hold follow-up workshops to assist educators in developing their own materials.

It is necessary also to look at how language is acquired. Gee (1996) draws on Krashen's distinction between acquisition and learning. He states that acquisition is a "process of acquiring something (usually subconsciously) by exposure to models, by trial and error and not within formal social groups. This is how first language is acquired." Learning on the other hand is a "process that involves conscious knowledge gained through teaching. This is a more conscious process and involves explanation and analysis." (1996 p139). Ellis defines acquisition as "the internalisation of rules and formulas which are then used to communicate in the L2" (1985 p292). The same distinction is also drawn by Krashen and Terrel (1985), who posit that error correction does not influence acquisition to any great extent. Krashen, Terrell and Gee believe that most of our learning happens through a mixture of acquisition and learning. "We are better at what we acquire, but we consciously know more about what we have learned" (Gee 1996 p139). He is of the opinion that true mastery of a discourse is achieved through acquisition and not learning i.e. "not by overt instruction, but by enculturation into social practices through scaffolded and supported interaction with people who have already mastered the discourse." Gee (1996 p139.) He feels that there needs to be a balance between acquisition and learning. This is where group work is so effective because even if the interaction is not at a

particularly high level initially, the less stressful situation that pertains within small groups helps with acquisition and learning. The language acquisition and development that takes place in the classroom in group work is probably largely conducive to acquisition as opposed to learning. (See Gee above). In a small group in a classroom there are always some learners who are further along the interlanguage continuum than others. Peer language teaching and development takes place through the interaction of learners at various levels of language development within a group. Long and Porter support the concept of peer teaching because there is a “freedom from the requirement for accuracy at all costs and entry into the richer and more accommodating set of relationships provided by small-group interaction which promote a positive affective climate.” (1985 p 212). One of the criticisms of small group interaction is that the quality of input and output is not improved because all the other members of the group are at almost the same level so in a way they are perpetuating an interlanguage. Plann (cited in Ellis) suggests that if learners are exposed to incorrect peer input this will lead to fossilisation. However, Porter (cited in Ellis) counters this in her findings that “learners do not appear to be unduly disadvantaged by exposure to deviant input from other learners” (Ellis 1994 p599). They go on to say that although learners cannot provide each other with the accurate sociolinguistic input that Native Speakers can, learners can offer each other genuine communicative practice, including the negotiation of meaning that is believed to aid SLA” Long and Porter (1985 p217). In fact these researchers found that learners produced more talk with Non Native Speakers than with Native Speakers.

## **2.4 Challenges for the facilitators of group activities**

### **2.4.1 Group work is demanding**

When moving from the traditional classroom into small group activities the demands made on educators are very challenging both physically and creatively. In one response to the questionnaires one of the reasons given why an educator had abandoned small groups was because she found them very exhausting. The LILT booklet on small group management stresses that group work is demanding. The learners seldom slip effortlessly into the small group mode because it is foreign to them.

### 2.4.2 The Challenge of extrinsic factors

Many researchers point to problems that could be encountered within the school environment in the implementation of this methodology. Beeby, cited in Macdonald (1990), mentions the dominant extrinsic factors which might hinder the teacher's task:

- Lack of libraries and the skill in using them
- Lack of strong administrative support
- Lack of moral support where the innovation initiative is not broadly-based and supported
- Professional isolation in the classroom, a quality peculiar to education.” (Beeby in Macdonald (1990 p99).

This last factor is also mentioned by Denscombe (in Wildsmith 1992), who identifies:

four common features of classroom experience that account for all significant similarities in teachers' work: social pressures from peers and colleagues to conform to shared expectations about appropriate behaviour; reliance on personal qualities to establish control; adverse staff-pupil ratios and a level of isolation between classes that fosters a belief in individualised practices and the autonomy of teachers in the classroom.

Briefly, an educator who introduces group activities is often in the minority and is regarded as unusual by colleagues. Noise levels are higher in this classroom and there is peer pressure to conform. Wildsmith (1992) concludes “classroom experience has a ‘pervasive’ influence on the pedagogical practices of teachers and probably causes many innovative strategies to be unrealistic or impractical” (p84). Macdonald supports this in her conclusion that “The process of institutionalising change is a slow one and may take a decade or more.” She goes on to say that:

the process of curriculum innovation is a dialectic between changing attitudes and supplying new materials; the central task of teachers is to reconstruct the actual teaching/learning task that is developed in a new curriculum in terms of what they are implicitly used to doing. (Macdonald 1990 p105).

### Summary

In view of what I have mentioned here about second language acquisition research, there seems to be overwhelming support from many language acquisition experts for the selective and intelligent utilisation of small groups. Long and Porter (cited in Ellis) summarise the main pedagogical arguments in favour of it: “It increases language

practice opportunities; it improves the quality of student talk; it helps to individualise instruction; it promotes a positive affective climate and it motivates learners to learn” (1994 p598). The principles underlying group teaching are summarised in the LILT booklet. I will list these in Chapter 4 and discuss their correlation with the ideas expressed by researchers cited in the literature.

In the current Chapter I have reviewed literature pertaining to SLA. From there I moved on to a review of literature about CLT and focussed on group work. I then developed a set of criteria for the critique of the LILT booklets based on the literature, my own experience, and finally I touched on some of the extrinsic factors that impact on the implementation of group work in schools.

The next chapter will examine the research methodology employed in this study.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methodology

#### **3.1 Reason for choice of material**

This research into the LILT booklet and its application was selected because of an approach made to me in my capacity as English Additional Language Adviser of the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture (KZNDEC). The project's host department, the School of Language Culture and Communication at Natal University, Pietermaritzburg campus, felt that research on the LILT project would earn it some credibility. It was therefore necessary to gauge its efficacy and impact on schools within the Pietermaritzburg Region. This research would also be useful for seeking possible future funding of the project. The Pietermaritzburg Region was the target area of the LILT tutors because of its proximity to the University. My advisory work for the KwaZulu- Natal Department of Education and Culture could also be informed by the project and information gained from the research could inform further educator training.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study was qualitative interpretive educational research, with a small quantitative component. Muoly, cited in Cohen and Manion (1989) summarises the nature of research as the process of arriving at:

dependable solutions to problems through the planned and systematic collection, analysis , and interpretation of data.” (1989 p42)

Cohen and Manion narrow the definition of educational research down to “the application of the principles of a science of behaviour... to the problems of learning within the formal educational framework and to the clarification of issues having direct or indirect bearing on these concepts” (p43).

The present research falls within the interpretive-critical research paradigm with the collection of qualitative data. The reason for this positioning is because it consists of a critical evaluation of materials based on a set of criteria that has been developed from the literature, which looks at SLA, CLT, and group work. Within this context the research can be more specifically described as interpretive educational research. Cohen and Manion posit that the central concern within the interpretive paradigm is an understanding of the subjective world of human experience. Within the framework of educational research, the broader focus is on developing and improving teaching practice in the classroom. An evaluation of the LILT materials is thus appropriately placed within this paradigm, focusing, as it does, on improving the delivery of INSET materials in order to improve teaching praxis.

Another way in which this research falls within the ambit of the interpretive paradigm is the fact that the research is based on action. I interpret action here as classroom practice, as well as the workshops in which the material was presented to the end users. (see 4.3)

The research methodology appropriate to this research is a Critical Pedagogical one. Pennycook, cited in Cumming (1994), describes the Critical Pedagogical Approach as focussing on “social and cultural inequality in education”. He stresses that the motivation for this observation is its concern with social and cultural inequality with the aim of being transformative. One of the reasons for this research is to evaluate an intervention in the formerly disadvantaged schools and to bring them in line with the methodologies employed in the former Model C schools. In the South African context there is an urgent need to move from the old teaching methodology to OBE. This would then make this research critical pedagogical.

The main research focus was project evaluation. In 1996 an independent evaluation was carried out on the project by an Organisational and Training Consultant. It was evaluated under three headings, namely its structure, its nature and organisational aspects and, finally, the programme aspect of the project. Kroon (1996) makes the point that projects are set up for a short time to test policy or to develop models. She found that the LILT Project had been set up “to develop an INSET model or programme to enable content

teachers to implement a language in learning approach in their classes” (1996 p3.) The evaluation of such a model will necessarily provide qualitative, rather than quantitative data.

Cohen and Manion (1989) describe interpretive or qualitative research as being subjective, where there is the personal involvement of the researcher. This was true of the present research where, during some of the workshops, I took the role of a semi-participant observer when I circulated amongst the groups during discussion time and answered queries. I also sat in on a group on one occasion and fully participated in the group discussion (see Appendix B). (This is discussed in more detail in 3.9).

The main qualitative component in this research is the matching of criteria (listed above) with a critical assessment of the LILT material. In addition there is a second component which supports the qualitative component with quantitative data collected from the end users. This section of the analysis is not purely quantitative, because many qualitative responses are alluded to and quoted in the analysis. The analysis of data was done in percentages to facilitate comparative responses to my questionnaire. The questions were based on the perceived effectiveness of the materials and their application in the classroom. Finally data was collected in the form of field notes (Appendix B) during my observations of the workshops.

Figure 1 below, illustrates the various phases of this research. The first phase involved the development of criteria based on the theoretical framework, CLT and group work. Cohen and Manion (1989) state that:

The review of literature in other forms of educational research is regarded as a preparatory stage to gathering data and serves to acquaint the researcher with previous research on the topic he himself is studying (p56).

From this framework six evaluation criteria were derived, against which the LILT booklet was evaluated. Further data were gathered from the observation of the LILT workshops. After the presentation of the LILT material to educators in workshops, educators were asked to apply the principles learnt in their classrooms. Their responses and experiences were then elicited by means of a questionnaire. The findings were then evaluated against

personal experience as an English Language Adviser and the findings from another NGO carrying out similar work to that of LILT, the English Language Education Trust (ELET). A part of this comparative study was also an interview with the Director of ELET, where I questioned him on the principles underpinning the ELET material. These were found to be very similar to the principles undergirding LILT.

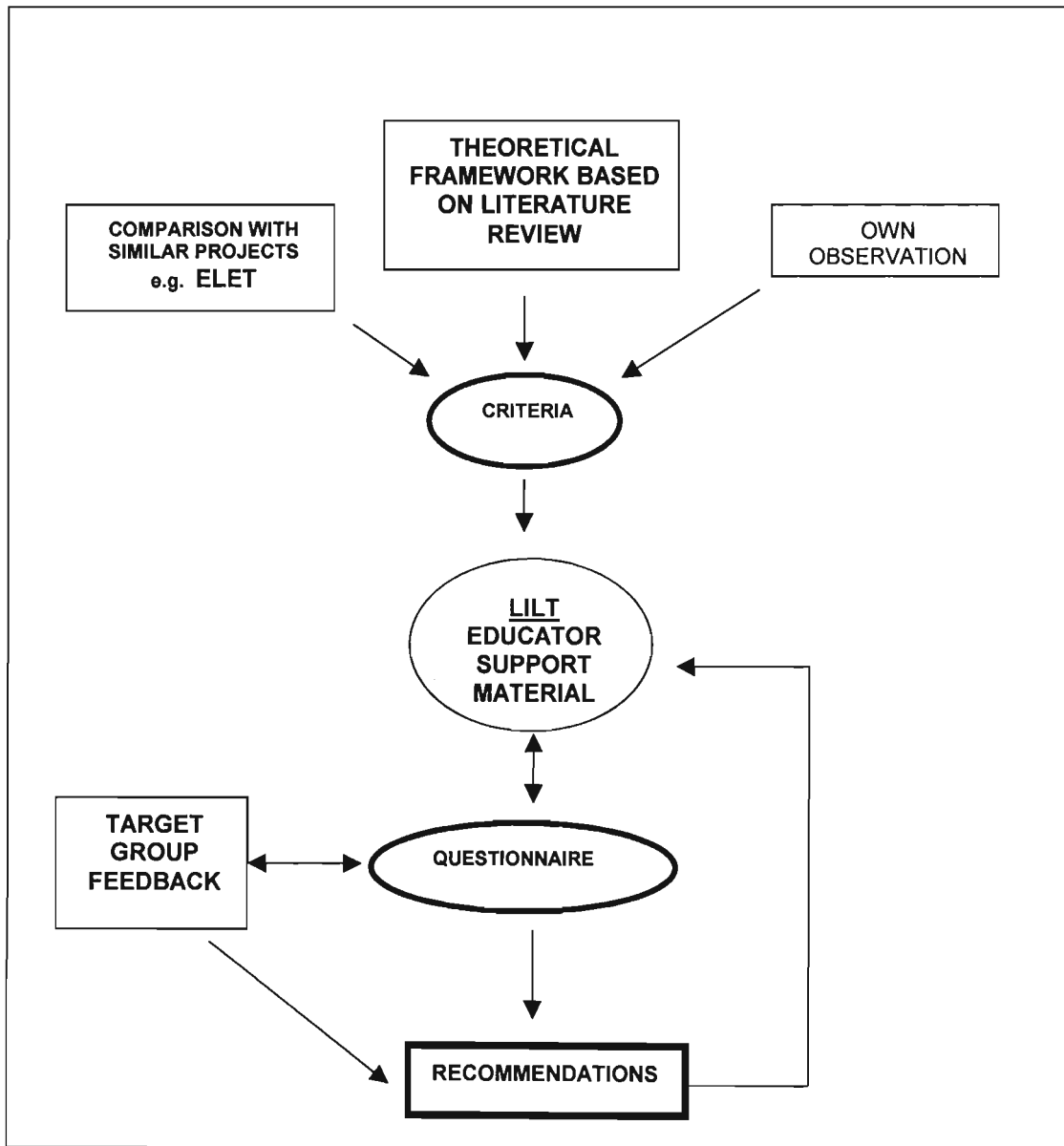


Fig 1 . Diagrammatic representation of the multiple sources of evaluation in this project.



With the introduction of OBE in South Africa, there is a great need for transformation in classroom teaching methodology in order to get away from the '*chalk and talk*' mode. It is important for educators to break out of the lockstep mould and to experiment with different methodologies. This is something that LILT is attempting to do. The focus of this research is thus on the use of the small group.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

From the **literature review** (Chapter 2) the first research instrument, i.e. the **six criteria** for evaluating the LILT materials, were developed. This was followed by a **critical evaluation** of the material through **comparison with** a similar project (ELET). Finally **observation** of the workshops with informal **field notes** (Appendix B) was undertaken, where these materials were introduced to the educators. Educators' perceptions of the value of the materials were assessed by means of a **questionnaire** (Appendix D). Another research instrument was the **interviewing** of the director of ELET and the coordinator of LILT.

### 3.4 Research Context

The context for the research was the previously disadvantaged schools. The schools that were included in this research project were schools from the Pietermaritzburg Region where educators teaching Grade 8 were targeted. Although educators from ex Model C schools attended the course, those who were mother-tongue speakers of English were not included in the research as the focus was specifically on Second Language English educators. This is what Cohen and Manion (1989) call 'purposive sampling'. The schools ranged from well resourced urban schools to deep rural schools, the latter including schools which had only a few classrooms, no electricity, no staff room and very limited facilities. Furthermore, in rural schools the educators are often under-qualified, as a result of the urbanisation of the better-qualified educators.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It must however be noted that there are some under-qualified educators who have many years' experience and are excellent at what they do.

The particular circumstances prevailing in schools have been adequately dealt with in the section on the status quo in Chapter 2. However, what is important to highlight is that whilst we need to move towards a transition to more innovative teaching methods, this is not happening. Part of the reason for this is the gender issue (see 2.1). The majority of the educators currently are women, even in Secondary schools where traditionally there were more male educators. With Restructuring and Redeployment (R and R) educators are insecure and uncertain of their future. Numerous educators have been deployed to schools far from their homes and consequently they go home at weekends with the result that the only activities that take place in the schools over weekends are community activities. This often leads to vandalism and theft of school property. The itinerant nature of educators' lives also arguably undermines their level of commitment because their arrival and departure times at schools are determined by the availability of public transport, which does not necessarily consider school hours. Furthermore, communities often reject 'outsiders' who teach at their schools. Transformation of education is the cry of many, but in schools, educators tend to teach as they were taught and to resist change. Very often the changes desired do not reach down into the classroom and if the educators were taught in the lockstep mode, this is perpetuated in spite of the innovative methods that they might have been exposed to during their college education and through INSET. It is in this educational context that LILT's work takes place. This is important for my evaluation of LILT because it is necessary to evaluate it in terms of its sensitivity to the teaching context and to the very real constraints on the educators it is trying to reach.

### **3.5 Research Process**

LILT developed four booklets related to classroom practice. The current research consisted of the evaluation of one of these booklets related to classroom practice: *How to organise and manage small groups in your classroom*. This was developed by the coordinator of the LILT project. This booklet was chosen because group work underscores many of the underlying principles of OBE viz. learner participation, activity-based education, critical thinking and integration. Furthermore, the booklet espoused the methodology used in the other two booklets on classroom practice. Criteria for

evaluating the material were developed through the principles governing CLT and small group work, as well as extracted from the literature and from other sources such as ELET and personal experience. The booklet was then evaluated in Chapter 4 in the light of these criteria.

In March 2001 the booklet was introduced to the educators by means of workshops, run by the LILT tutor, which I observed as researcher. (March 2001) These workshops were conducted in small group format and each educator was given a copy of the booklet at the end of the workshop. Upon enquiry at the workshop, it was found that many of them had never attempted teaching small groups to date. Others had tried it once or twice but had abandoned the exercise because of disciplinary problems and peer pressure from their colleagues. At the end of each workshop, educators were handed a pre-survey letter (Appendix C), requesting them to teach at least five lessons in this format and informing them that a questionnaire would be sent to them for their responses. The questionnaire was disseminated six weeks later requesting a response to the workshop and information in their experiences in the use of small groups in their classrooms. The questionnaire was scheduled to be returned to me by the end of June 2001. This allowed approximately two months for educators to implement what they had learnt. Responses to questionnaires were then analysed and triangulated against data collected from the evaluation of LILT against various criteria, personal observations of the workshops and from comparisons with the other project.

### **3.6 Observation of workshops: introduction of booklets to educators in the field**

The workshops were the context in which the booklets were introduced to the educators. There were two phases to these workshops, a pilot and a major research project. As things turned out, the pilot was more comprehensive than the major project.

### **3.6.1 Pilot vs. Major research Project**

This was the beginning of phase two of the research. Initially there was a pilot and an intended major research project. The main research was curtailed owing to circumstances beyond my control and therefore the pilot yielded far more data and was more valuable as there was sufficient time in the pilot to develop the scaffolding. The initial pilot project was run in August and September and October 2000. The turnout was not very good. Because a total of 47 grade 8 educators attended the four workshops, I felt that this was a representative pilot group. Four workshops were conducted over four Friday afternoons. The workshops were conducted in group format thereby exemplifying 'best practice' and allowing the educators to experience the methodology.

In March 2001, the second round of workshops was planned for the major research phase. Schools from all five districts in the Pietermaritzburg Region namely Umvoti, Pietermaritzburg, Vulindlela, Midlands and Pholela were invited to attend the workshop. Grade 8 educators were again to be targeted. The research and fieldwork would take place in two stages. Firstly there would be input from the LILT tutor, in the form of a workshop. This would then be followed up with a questionnaire.

At this time, introductory OBE workshops were organised by the KZNDEC throughout the province as a part of the ongoing introduction of OBE in South Africa. In the light of the underlying principles of OBE of creating critical thinkers, co-operative learning and exploration, this seemed an ideal opportunity to introduce the small group methodology, which enshrines all the OBE skills, to educators. Altogether, one hundred and twenty educators, representing 109 schools attended the courses. The attendees were a mixture of first language and second language speakers.

Initially the LILT workshops were to be held independently of the OBE courses. Owing to pressure by the Teacher Unions, the LILT input was incorporated into the Language, Literacy and Communication (LLC)-OBE workshops. The LILT tutor was given just one

hour to present a truncated version of her original two-hour workshop. On two occasions this was reduced to half an hour. The irony of this was that many educators approached me afterwards to thank me for the fact that the LLC-OBE workshop was the only one that they had attended, from which they could take away with them something worthwhile to use in the classroom. Here they were specifically referring to the LILT input.

The immediate consequence of this curtailment of the workshop was that only the principles governing the use of small groups could be workshopped and the LILT tutor was unable to present the second part of her workshop, i.e. the application of these principles to actual lessons. The educators consequently had to do a great deal more reading on their own after the workshop and they were denied the opportunity of hearing some of the tutor's insights based on her own experience. The tutor was meticulous in her observation of the time constraints, which meant that she had not even completed the report-back session by the time her half-hour was up, which was very disappointing and discouraging for her. This action also placed severe constraints on my research because the educators merely got a hint of what could have been a truly worthwhile workshop and therefore they were obliged to read the booklet without any scaffolding. Unfortunately there was no time to take action for recovery, so I had to work under the constraints mentioned above.

### **3.6.2. The Workshop Process**

It is necessary to present the workshops in some detail because the success of the workshops contributes to LILT's value, in that they provided scaffolding and support for the booklet. Another reason for presenting the workshops in some detail is because I am of the opinion that the booklet will be ineffective unless it is supported by an INSET workshop in view of the reluctance on the part of educators to read. (Palmer Development Group 1999).

With two exceptions (to be explained later, see 3.7.2), the same type of workshops were held during the pilot and the main research project, so I shall discuss the workshops in my review of the major research project.

The courses that were used to introduce the concept and methodology of group teaching were taught in group format. The LILT tutor's model is probably a combination of Wallace's Reflective Model and the imitative Craft Model described below. Wallace cited in Mc Donough and Mc Donough (1997), gives three models of language teacher training: "(1) The ... imitative Craft Model, where trainees learn from experts; (2) the Applied Science Model ... a one-way procedure leading to a ... separation between research and practice; and (3) the Reflective Model, where knowledge is experiential rather than received" (1997 p29). Richards and Lockhart, cited in McDonough and McDonough speculate that teachers "have a 'personal construct' but that 'unaware' experience alone is insufficient for development." (1997 p30). The authors feel that critical reflection is essential for personal development. Samuel (1998) states that many of the teachers from previously disadvantaged schools in South Africa "have not been socialised into seeing the teaching profession as one that does research or into sufficiently confronting their own thinking about the teaching and learning of languages." The results of this are a reluctance to innovate and do additional reading and self-improvement, and an expectation that anything new has to be provided by the authorities or by the Department of Education.

### **3.7 Questionnaires**

These workshops were followed by a pre-survey letter addressed to educators who attended the workshops, requesting that they teach five lessons in group format (see Appendix E) They were also informed that a questionnaire would be sent to them to record their findings and experiences in the implementation of small group activities.

In mid May the questionnaires (Appendix D) were sent out to 91 educators. The selection of responses was that of "purposive sampling" (Cohen and Manion 1989) where I selected responses to be included in the sample. I selected educators who were isiZulu speakers because I wanted to include only L2 English speakers in the research. In the covering letter that accompanied the questionnaire I stressed that I wanted the educators to be honest and not to write what they thought I would like to read. In spite of

this request, the authenticity of the answers cannot be guaranteed because of respondents' awareness of my position as Subject Adviser. Respondents were not compelled to place their names on the questionnaire but were told that their names would be put into a lucky draw for a box of books if they appended their names.

The initial response from the educators was fairly poor so I had to do a lot of follow-up to schools and request that the educators fill in the questionnaire. Thirty-one responses were analysed quantitatively (see Chapter 4) and also qualitatively. I have used some of the responses in my analysis. I was also concerned to establish some recommendations from these responses for future planning.

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have situated my research in the broad research paradigms and indicated that the research was mainly qualitative with a small quantitative component. I have listed the three main procedures of my study, namely the development of criteria from the literature review, observation of the workshops where the material was introduced to the educators and the questionnaire that was sent out. This was followed by a critique of my research.

The next chapter will evaluate the LILT booklet in the light of the criteria developed, taking into consideration the ELET material. This will then be followed by a critical examination of the workshops where the material was introduced to the educators.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Evaluation of the LILT materials and Workshops**

In Chapter 2, a set of criteria for the evaluation of the LILT project was developed and a theoretical framework was provided. In this chapter I present ten principles drawn from LILT undergirding group work and then examine them in relation to the theoretical framework. This is then followed by a critical evaluation of the booklet in the light of the six criteria listed in Chapter 3.

#### **4.1 Principles of group teaching according to the LILT booklet**

##### **Principle 1: There is a shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred classrooms.**

In the LILT booklet, the coordinator points out “We no longer assume that teachers are the source of all wisdom. Learners bring their own existing knowledge and experience to the classroom, on which we base new learning.” (p1). Small groups create a more learner-centred classroom situation and where learners in a traditional classroom get very little opportunity to discuss their views with their peers, the small group provides this opportunity. Specific Outcome No 1 for LLC requires learners to “make and negotiate” meaning. Varonis and Gass (cited in Kumaravadivelu 1994) state that: “Small-group arrangements by nature produce more negotiated interaction than do teacher-fronted activities” (p34). The educator stands back and allows the learners to work independently of her within their groups. Gamede *et al.* (2000) state that the shift from the teacher-centred approach to a more participatory, learner-centred one demands more communicative language teaching techniques and a language-rich classroom environment. Long 1988, however indicates problem areas which educators might encounter in this regard when he says that:

It is difficult for the teacher, trained and practised in the lockstep system, to learn to circulate unobtrusively among groups as they work, checking that guidance or assistance is forthcoming from a group member when it is needed, but resisting the temptation to jump in with a correction or



the 'right' answer, thereby undermining the confidence of the group in its own ability to seek out 'right' answers. (Long cited in Bell 1998 p8).

The LILT booklet stresses that educators need to make this transition from the teacher-fronted classroom to the group classroom.

**Principle 2: Learners are trained to take responsibility for their own learning and become independent problem-solvers.**

This principle links directly with Criterion 3 in Chapter 3 (Skills development). Long (1990) suggests problem-solving and simulation exercises for learners in small groups. Prabhu also refers to the advantage of this type of activity as he posits that it “brings about a more sustained preoccupation with meaning than information transfer does on its own” (1987 p48). If learners are to take on this responsibility, it is important that the answers to questions generated by the educator should not be pre-determined, but open-ended, thereby providing a genuine information-gap. Varonis and Gass (cited in Kumaradivelu 1994) state that open-ended responses could generate more meaningful exchanges among participants than questions that have pre-determined answers. Holderness supports this view with the statement that “open-ended activities where the outcome or answer is not known leads to problem-solving. Children really have to think rather than simply remember. This makes them more confident and creative.” (Holderness cited in Brumfit *et al.*1991 p24). Learners also develop the skill of justifying their own particular point of view. In this way their critical thinking skills are developed. Nunan adds “Learners are trained to assess their own learning progress, and can identify their own strengths and weaknesses” Nunan (1999 p89) (see Criterion 3 in Chapter 2).

**Principle 3: They learn the skills of team work**

The booklet stresses that learners learn to work together towards a common goal which means that, when this goal is achieved, they all succeed. This is one of the precepts of OBE. This principle also links with Criterion 3 (2.3.3) i.e. the development of group work skills. Some of these skills include turn-taking, interrupting, strategising and negotiating meaning, in other words **cooperative skills**. The impact of cooperative

learning is mentioned by Nunan (1992 a) because he feels it provides a workable and often more effective alternative to the competitive ethic which dominates much of educational thinking. The necessity for co-operation comes about when a group begins to interact around a set task and there is a group responsibility to solve the problem. Boughey (1997) sounds a note of caution when she states that in the group activity participants prompt each other by providing links or by questioning. When they do this, she feels that they might construct a meaning which is not shared by all the participants. They thus need to “negotiate the new input by output to ensure that the language in which it is heard is modified to exactly the level of comprehensibility they can manage” (Long and Porter 1985 p214). A further consideration is the difference between a successful group activity and a mere token re-arrangement of desks in a classroom. Often, learner-learner interaction in school is fairly superficial and is not constructive as there joking, playing and distracting occur. It is consequently important to provide learners with activities that are meaningful in order for them to develop these interaction skills.

**Principle 4: They learn information-gathering skills and self-discovery learning.**

In the LILT booklet the author stresses that, when learners access information for themselves, it often becomes more meaningful and is also retained for far longer than something which is simply memorised and ‘regurgitated’. Schaffer suggests that learners’ effectiveness in accessing information will be greatly enhanced by doing research themselves. He points out that empirical studies show that self-discovery improves learners’ comprehension and retention more readily than explicit presentation of structural patterns regardless of the learners’ language ability (Schaffer cited in Kumaravadivelu 1994). This is because there is better internalisation. In a constantly challenging world, teaching knowledge alone is insufficient. Pupils need the skills to gather, organise and use information. They need to learn **task-based skills**. Nunan (1999) points out that when learners are exposed to authentic texts they learn to use language outside the classroom (see Criterion 5, Chapter 2). The learners have to take responsibility for their own learning and, as Nunan states “task-based learning helps learners to learn real language for use in the real world” (Nunan 1999 p88).

### **Principle 5: Planning and preparation**

The LILT booklet stresses that group work requires a considerable amount of planning before the activities actually take place in the classroom. This is supported by Bell's (1998) view that it is very important that teachers be tutored on how to conduct group work, as they often prefer teacher-fronted classes. Another point in favour of planning is mentioned by Bell (1998) who feels that educators lack specific knowledge of how to teach and manage the 'mechanics' of group work. The mastery of the latter would enable them to present more worthwhile activities. Educators also feel that group work requires more preparation, which will take a lot of time (which they do not have) and many are under the impression that textbooks do not allow for group work. In sum, educators need to learn to integrate planning and preparation in the programme for the year in order to make them challenging and pedagogically sound. This is why the booklet goes through the preparation for activities and also stresses the importance of being clear about the intended goal when preparing and planning.

Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) indicate that, before the learning experience is presented in class, a great deal of planning and preparation needs to take place. "Group work takes time and where used without very careful planning and guidance from the teacher, is an extremely inefficient pedagogical tool" (1999 p151). The educator can plan the type of activity to be presented as well as a variety of challenges for the group to tackle.

Littlewood (1991) cites two different types of communicative activities i.e. the functional communicative activity and the social interaction activity. The first type is an activity in which the learners have to solve a problem or to exchange information in whatever language they have at their disposal. Grammatical accuracy is not critical and the important aspect here is that of getting meaning across as effectively as possible. (Long cited in Bell 1998, Prabhu 1990). Success is measured by their coping with the communicative demands of the situation. The second type of activity is one of appropriacy according to the requirements of the situation. Success is measured according to how acceptable the social interaction is. Teachers need to be made aware of how the different pedagogic goals lead to different learning outcomes.

### **Principle 6: Introduction of group activities**

One of the points made by all the researchers and which links closely with Principle 5 (planning and preparation) is the fact that small group work should be introduced *gradually* to the learners. This is also related to the development of group work skills which takes time (see Criterion 3). The LILT booklet gives detailed steps to follow in order to introduce the small group approach. These are discussed in more detail in the critique of the LILT booklet. (4.1 Principle 3) Nolasco and Arthur (1988) suggest that learners need to learn to adjust to working in groups. Some of the adjustments suggested are that they learn to start and stop when instructed to do so; to switch quickly from one activity to another, to work quietly and listen carefully to instructions. Littlewood (1991) also stresses the importance of introducing a group activity gradually:

Too sudden a transition to undirected activity may...create difficulties and tensions which could undermine confidence, both in themselves and in the teaching methods being used (p18.)

### **Principle 7: Communication and clear instruction**

The LILT booklet stresses that it is very important that learners should know exactly what they are expected to do prior to the commencement of each activity. This would obviate the educator having to stop learners after they have commenced their activity in order to give them additional instructions. This principle is also clearly linked to Criterion 3 (2.3.3), the development of group work skills and also links with the maintenance of discipline (4.4.7), which point was raised in the workshop. The teacher must make very sure that the learners understand exactly what is expected of them. They should start with relatively easy tasks and gradually adjust the level of difficulty. Once the activity has been set in motion the teacher may need to intervene if the learners experience difficulty in carrying out an activity e.g. by providing the necessary support, and can also monitor their strengths and weaknesses or there might be an error which the educator feels needs immediate intervention.

Finally, Nunn (2000) stresses that “because it is more difficult to participate in small-group interaction in a foreign language, extensive practice is required” (2000 p70). This might be in the form of repetition of similar activities and also by the introduction of similar activities to build on previously acquired skills. Long and Porter (1985) also support the notion of practice and repetition in ESL acquisition.

### **Principle 8: Group sizes**

These may vary from classroom to classroom and are invariably dictated by the number of learners in relation to the size of the classroom, and usually also by other physical constraints. A larger group often leads to the shy learners retreating into silence and a group that is very small is often not feasible, given classroom constraints. This view is supported by Long who suggests that “Group size has a direct effect on the amount of interaction each group can have” (Long, cited in Bell 1998). The smaller the group the more interaction (and productivity) is possible, while the larger the group the more chance there is that certain individuals will become marginalised and excluded, or start with ‘groups within groups’. Groups of four or five learners seem to be an ideal balance” (Long, cited in Bell 1998 p6). This idea is clearly stated in the LILT booklet, where it is stressed that the ideal group size is from four up to ten. It is stressed that, the larger a group becomes, the more restricted the interactions among the participants.

### **Principle 9: Types of activities**

The LILT booklet takes the reader through a number of different possible types of activities that can be tried in group format. It suggests that the educator starts with familiar activities, similar to ones that the learners have done in the past, or else straightforward, even simple exercises and then moves on to more challenging activities. The activities must be sufficiently challenging to hold the attention of the participants. If this is not the case the learners might learn more effectively in a whole-class situation. This view is also supported by Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) who warn that group activities:

if not carefully structured and guided by the teacher, succeed only in passing the time without engaging the cognitive faculties of participants

and thus result in little or no learning. Furthermore, it is also possible that active learning may occur in a whole-class situation where learners are totally absorbed, sitting still and listening to a teacher who engages their attention and imagination through force of personality, delivery and interesting content. (Taylor and Vinjevold 1999 p65).

Even though the LILT booklet does not exemplify various types of activities, these could be included in follow-up workshops which will be focused on the development of Learner Support Materials (LSMs). It also needs to be stated that the LILT coordinator makes the point that small groups are not the *only* way to teach, implying that educators need to vary their presentations.

#### **Principle 10: The composition of the group**

The LILT booklet mentions that both homogenous groups as well as groups consisting of learners of varying abilities can be set up (see 2.2). The need for flexibility according to individual circumstances within the classroom is also stressed. In this regard, both Ellis (1994) and Long (1990) favour heterogeneous groups. Ellis states “The quality of interaction ... appears to be enhanced if the learners comprising the pair/group are heterogeneous with regard to sex and proficiency level. Group work may be the best way to develop sociolinguistic competence” (1994 p602). Mixed ability groups are favoured by Long, cited in Bell (1998) because they are an existing feature of the education system, they produce a higher quality of input, they ensure a more equal distribution of opportunities to practise language and they are enjoyed as much by students as other types of groups (1998 p7).

## **4.2 Assessment of the LILT material according to the Criteria developed**

In this section I will assess the LILT material in the light of the five criteria developed in Chapter 2. Another example of a South African intervention with a similar target audience is ELET. I will be introducing the ELET booklet by way of comparison. Allwright cited in Sheldon (1998) posits that “the whole business of the management of language learning is far too complex to be satisfactorily catered for by a pre-packaged set of decisions embodied in teaching materials” (p238).

The implication here is that materials need to be specific to individual needs within particular circumstances. The LILT booklet *How to organise and manage small groups in your classroom* (Appendix A) will be evaluated against the ELET booklet *Teaching English the Communicative Way*. The ELET booklet was printed in order to 'troubleshoot' problems that may have arisen when small groups have been introduced and also to assist teachers in their planning and implementation of small groups.

The LILT booklet is essentially a practical guide for educators if they wish to introduce small group teaching in their classrooms. It opens with a rationale for group work and looks at group activities in the light of Curriculum 2005 and OBE. It opens with a *definition* of small group learning. This is followed by *instructions* on how to introduce group work to the learners for the first time, *how to tackle* small groups with practical issues like size, composition, discipline and the preparation of activities. This is followed by an explanation of *features* of small groups, types of activities and a short guide on how to prepare activities. In the next section, I will list the criteria developed in Chapter 2 and then examine each criterion in the light of how it is grounded in theory, and then consider the extent to which this can be applied to the LILT booklet.

**Criterion 1: The materials need to be user-friendly, accessible and well organised.**

Two questions need to be asked here: Can one find information readily; and is there clear advice about finding your way around the book? Sheldon (1988) states that materials should address what users need. Macdonald (1990) asserts that teaching and learning materials (in this case for the use of L2 educators who teach in their second language) and the related activities should be selected with great care. They should be relevant and contextualised, coherent, taking into consideration the children's context and interests, and should build on prior knowledge. The LILT booklet does not provide actual activities, but rather acts as a guide to the development of materials.

Sheldon (1998) notes the tension between what is educationally desirable and what is financially viable. This is obviously an area where the LILT team had to make a

decision. The booklet is a low-cost production, in an A4 format, bound with glue and tape which binds the cover to the body of the document. This means that the binding is fragile and if the booklet is used frequently, this could be problematic. It could however be transferred to a ring binder when the original binding disintegrates. The ELET booklet, in contrast, had a higher budget. The booklet consists of A3 pages stapled down the centre making it comparatively strong. It must also be noted that the LILT booklet was prepared as a desktop publication, whereas the ELET book was printed commercially and is also meant for a wider audience than the LILT booklet.

In terms of the LILT booklet being user-friendly, the index is clearly laid out, and some headings are listed as 'how' questions or as problems which might arise for quick reference, e.g. "How big is a small group?" This allows for easy orientation when a problem arises. Sheldon (1998) stresses the importance that the organisational sequencing chosen and the selection of materials should follow a coherent framework. Individual items should be sequenced logically and they should be clearly 'signposted'. This is the case in the LILT booklet where the font is large and the pages are therefore not crammed with information. LILT compares favourably against the ELET booklet. There is far more information in the ELET booklet. In terms of layout and user-friendliness, the ELET booklet is divided into three parts, listing the introduction, organisation and planning of CLT, but the information is still fairly dense for non-readers. If one considers the reluctance of educators to read, the LILT booklet is far more relevant to its target audience.

The layout and design of the LILT booklet aid access because the pages are not 'text dense', but its illustrations are nondescript. For example the illustration on page 9 at the end of the section of "What is the teacher doing?" does not add to the booklet but seems to have been placed simply to indicate a break between two sections. By contrast, the illustrations enhance the ELET booklet's accessibility by providing a meaningful conceptualisation of the text. The icons in the ELET booklet provide clear signposting indicating the type of activity in the booklet. There should be enough white space on the pages to make both booklets easy to read and understand plus enough space for notes. In both of the booklets, wide margins have been left for note making and additional



information and the text in both booklets is easy to follow. The signposting is fairly problematic in the LILT booklet, because new headings do not always start on a new page or stand out clearly. While one realises that this is probably a result of financial constraints within LILT, the headings would nevertheless have been more conspicuous if they had been underlined or even in a different font (as is the case in the ELET booklet).

**Criterion 2: Materials need to be appropriate to their users, i.e. here largely second language users of English who also teach in their second language.**

The style of writing of the LILT booklet is relatively uncomplicated, straightforward and conversational. An example of this is in the description of a traditional classroom in contrast to a modern classroom (p5, 6). Its syntax and vocabulary are uncomplicated, its sentences are often short and to the point and there are few complex sentences. For example, when the author sketches what a group work classroom would look like she states “But be careful. Changing your desk arrangement is not enough. There are teachers who move their desks and then proceed to teach in exactly the same way as ever” (p10). The booklet shows considerable insight on the part of the author into the conditions under which many educators function. While the booklet is primarily written for isiZulu speakers, it also needs to be appropriate for the minority of Afrikaans speaking educators who teach ESL to mother tongue Afrikaans speakers. This is where the LILT booklet is versatile and multifaceted.

The opening line of the LILT booklet clearly locates the pamphlet as material for teachers. On the first page, the aim of the booklet is clearly stated: “To provide helpful new ideas and practical suggestions for organising and managing small groups in a classroom” (p1). The ELET booklet also has an opening which introduces the teacher to CLT. The correlation between OBE and group activities in the classroom is outlined. Bizzell (2000) makes the point that the LILT booklet has been designed for “South African teachers who are working in a second language and therefore carry a double load of difficulty” (p2). It is also stated that the material is designed for teachers of grades 5, 6 and 7 but that it can be adapted to suit other grades. This is valid, because

the principles which apply to small group teaching are universal and could be applied across the board, even up to tertiary level. The difference lies only in the complexity level of the activities.

Bizzell (2000) warns about the danger of simply changing the physical arrangement of the desks (p10), without the learners engaging in real negotiation of meaning. She is also careful to state that the traditional classroom (where desks are in neat rows) is not “wrong”, but that different learners learn in different ways and therefore the educator needs to cater for all learning styles. Bizzell also stresses the importance of “active” learning (see Holderness in Brumfit *et al.* 1991). She does, however, point out that noise levels will rise as learners talk, walk around and interact. Finally, the material is relevant because it is linked to Curriculum 2005. Bizzell clearly explains how the programme of study links into the Specific Outcomes of C2005. The learners learn social skills and attitudes, they learn to negotiate meaning and they learn to think and work independently and gain knowledge of time management and other skills in a non-threatening environment, at a pace set by the group (also stated in Long and Porter 1985).

Holderness cited in Brumfit *et al.* (1991) suggests that one of the questions to be asked while designing materials is whether they are cognitively challenging and relevant. In the light of the fact that the materials have been developed for teachers and not for learners, it is difficult to gauge whether the materials are at the right level, both cognitively and academically. However, in the questionnaire responses, 85% of the educators declared that they found the LILT booklet easily accessible. The tone of the booklet is supportive, without ‘talking down’, so this makes it eminently accessible to both L1 and L2 speakers.

**Criterion 3: The focus of the materials should be on activities.**

Activities, which challenge learners to investigate, enquire and probe also require them to be active and retention is better when they have come to a conclusion themselves within their group. An extensive list of active verbs is given in Bizzell (2000 p56).

This is a useful and practical guide for educators to use when they design their own activities. There are numerous suggestions for things to do in the classroom. Bizzell makes the point that activities are not simple to prepare but that, once they have been developed, they should be kept and can always be used again in some form at a future date. Macdonald (1990) states that activities for group work should provide an opportunity for spontaneous speech, which should allow for comprehensible input and, in the group context, the negotiation of meaning. Bizzell supports this principle where she states that activities are more meaningful when there is some code-switching which, in turn, aids understanding (p20).

It is necessary for the educator to prepare activities according to the level of interest and competence of her learners. Bizzell underscores the fact that the textbook is no longer the basis of teaching, but should be used simply as a resource. Sheldon (1998) bemoans the fact that teacher-generated material, which has a dynamic and maximal relevance to local needs, is often regarded as having “less credibility than a published textbook, no matter how inadequate that may be” (p238). When one uses teacher-generated materials, the activities will be authentic, meaningful and should support the learning process (Richards and Rodgers 1994). Activities should allow for learners to formulate their speaking and have something worthwhile to talk about. The materials should provide support to teachers to help them to create genuine communication (Macdonald 1990 , Long and Porter 1985). These principles are clearly stated in the LILT booklet:

Small group learning requires specially designed activities.  
Performing these activities in small group conditions  
is the way learners will achieve the outcomes you want.  
This is how learners become active, how they learn to  
problem solve, how they learn to work in a team.  
All these new outcomes we are now aiming at are achieved  
because the children are given the opportunity to actually  
practise and experience these skills and attitudes. The activities  
you design must let the learners experience processes or  
thought patterns from which they can construct new knowledge.  
(Bizzell 2000 p37)

Although the above example is in fairly complex language, in their responses to the questionnaire, 85% of the educators said that they had found the booklet readily accessible. (see Analysis 4 and Criterion 1)

**Criterion 4: Activities should allow for language to be used functionally rather than merely a means of responding.**

Bizzell (2000) mentions a number of factors that need to be considered when introducing the use of small groups. She suggests that initially it might be a good idea to provide some closed questions in order to build up the self-confidence of the learners and, as they become more accustomed to the fact that their opinions are accepted and do count, they can then be exposed to more open-ended questions. (p 57). The author also mentions that the use of small groups should be introduced gradually and with much preparation beforehand, so that the learners know what is expected from them from the beginning. She also mentions that the skills that need to be learnt for group work are: turn taking, interruption, summarising, negotiation of meaning (an OBE principle) and facilitating participation from others within the group. Other skills learnt are those of keeping to a time schedule and the discipline of stopping when told to do so by the educator.

**Criterion 5: The expected outcomes should be clear at the outset i.e. before the activity takes place. Materials should provide for a variety of activities to cater for the various learning styles.**

Bizzell stresses that, before any planning or preparation takes place, the educator should be clear about the outcome she wishes to achieve. This will then inform the nature of the activity that she prepares.(see Principle 5) The teacher should know beforehand what concepts, structures, and the level of input, feedback and assessment will be required. This is supported by Holderness, cited in Brumfit *et al.*(1991). The concept of design down, deliver up, is also one of the cornerstones of OBE. This is also mentioned by Jackson *et al.* (1997), who stress the importance of structure and planning before a

series of activities are set in motion. However, the LILT booklet does not concentrate on specific activities but only provides broad outlines. Educators will be expected to use the booklet as a guide to the preparation of their group work activities.

**Criterion 6: Materials should be related to the specific needs of the learners and activities should allow for language to be used functionally rather than merely as a means of responding.**

This is a clear link with the LILT principles, listed in the first chapter, to support language development through the materials. The booklet states that activities should start with language learning and the function of language. “The activities you design must let the learners experience processes or thought patterns from which they can construct new knowledge” (p37). I support the view of Richards and Rodgers (1994) who posit that language learning should be meaningful and involve real communication. Tasks should exploit learning in a ‘real world’ way (Long and Porter 1985). To this end, Bizzell (2000) lists ten essential features of activities for small groups (p38 fol.) to guide educators when they design a course of action for their learners. These are that the activities should:

- be interesting
- be problem solving
- include a balanced selection of the skills, knowledge and attitudes cf. C2005
- involve all the learning skills
- be related to something the learners already know
- be designed to stimulate activity
- include collaborative work
- encourage talk
- involve writing
- include skills of categorising, classifying, generalising and hypothesising.(this

- particular skill is specifically focused on science activities, but could also be used in language activities).

By contrast, ELET's basic principles on which they build their communicative material are: connecting, practising and extending. **Connecting** refers to the need to establish the 'known' and sketch the context by tapping into the experience of the course attendees. **Practising** means putting into practice what has been learnt and finally **extending** is building on the first two principles to assist learners to develop and extend themselves. Bizzell's requirements listed above are more extensive and more accessible to the educator than in the ELET booklet. When one looks at Bizzell's requirements, what is regarded as functional for rural learners is not always functional for urban learners. This point relates to the functional principle. Bizzell suggests that materials should be designed with the particular needs of learners in mind. They also need enough scaffolding (ELET's 'connecting') in order to engage in meaningful discussions. This underscores that it is essential for educators to design their own activities that address the needs of their particular milieu, thus making them functional. This would also address the need for materials to relate to the known experiences and interests of the specific learners. Another point Bizzell highlights is the fact that the activity should include writing. In my own experience I have found that educators use the fact that they are involved in a communicative exercise as an excuse to *exclude* writing activities from the task. It is critical that educators understand that group activities must *include* writing and that they are not purely oral tasks. This again makes the activity functional. However, educators need practice in designing materials and this can only be done with follow-up activities and additional workshops. This is a shortcoming of the LILT booklet as it only gives guidelines (see recommendations, Chapter 5).

Long and Porter (1985) list ways in which group work can assist the learners' communicative abilities. Two of these are that learners are able to "practice a range of language functions". They can "suggest, infer, qualify, hypothesize, generalize or disagree" (p209). They also learn "topic-nomination, turn-allocation, focusing, summarising, and clarifying". If the materials provided to work with are appropriate,

“students can engage in the kind of information exchange characteristic of communication outside classrooms”, where the focus is on meaning rather than form.

Language is thus learnt as a means of communication. What is also meant by this criterion is twofold, namely language as LoLT i.e. LAC and also learning about language, i.e. metalanguage skills. Firstly, if English is the LoLT, then the language acquisition that takes place acts as a means to the end of learning other subjects. This is where the LILT booklet suggests a number of LAC activities (p53 & 54 fol.).

Bizzell (2000) also lists a number of different types of activities that can be used as a means to achieving different ends. These can be developed into metalanguage activities where the learners need to decide why a particular word or phrase functions as it does in a particular context. Bizzell suggests that, when group work is first introduced, educators start with an activity where learners are given familiar exercises similar to those they used in the past, and that these exercises can become increasingly more difficult and challenging as learners become accustomed to the discourse. Later, metalanguage skills can be developed from here. Other activities suggested by Bizzell are charts, friezes, surveys, models, drawing, games, diagrams, games, puzzles, lists, charts, food and written exercises (p43 fol.). Here again further in-service training, beyond the scope of this research, is essential to equip educators to design activities specific to their needs. In my opinion, and backed by the Palmer Development Group report (1999), there is a need to contextualise these activities according to educators’ specific needs.

### **4.3 The Pilot workshops**

The pilot workshops were two hours long. In both the two-hour and the abridged workshops the same format was followed for the first hour. I have tried to summarise and draw together general comments and responses, as the educators’ responses were fairly similar at all the workshops, including the abridged ones.

Educators were arranged into groups of between five and eight. After an introduction in which the relevance of small group work within the context of OBE was established and explained, the tutor presented each group with a question to discuss pertinent to the use of small groups. (See Appendix D for field notes). The second task was carried out only during the pilot project. The educators were given a number of activities to do within their groups. Altogether twelve activities were placed on the front table in the classroom. First, the educators were introduced to the tracking sheet, which is designed to help participants keep a record of their activities. During the curtailed session, it was not possible to introduce this sheet. The LILT tutor pointed out that this sheet also serves as an effective assessment tool as educators can use it as a control of work done as well as an assessment of what has been done within the groups. Participants were given the tracking sheets and three of the assigned activities were marked as compulsory, but the course attendees were free to choose a specified number of assigned activities from the remaining list. The tutor stipulated that at least six activities had to be done. They were also given a time limit in which to complete the activities. A timekeeper, who had to monitor the group's use of time, was appointed within each group. A second report-back session was held and the LILT tutor responded to and expanded on the educators' responses.

#### **4.4 The Major Research Project**

During the major research project, the courses were one hour long. I will give an overview of the workshop as it had originally been planned and base this report on the one-hour sessions. In groups of between 8 and 10, the educators were given the following questions to discuss:

1. What are the benefits of using small groups in a classroom?
2. How would you introduce small groups to your class?
3. How big should a group be?
4. Who chooses the groups?
5. What rules are made for group work?
6. Do you mix ability levels?
7. What happens to discipline in a small group classroom?



#### **4.4.1 The benefits of using small groups**

##### **Educators' input**

Some educators admitted that they could see little benefit from group work. This was not so much from their own classroom experiences, but that they had shied away from using small group work in their classrooms because of peer pressure from colleagues who questioned whether they were 'working' or 'playing'. Some of the points raised were that learners are 'scared' to ask questions in front of their peers and that they have to solve problems within their groups, so they really had to work things out by themselves. Some of the other perceived benefits were that the learners would teach each other and that this was a 'safer' environment because teenagers are very self-conscious. Many of them raised objections to small groups because they felt that the learners just play, they speak their mother tongue and they discuss subjects which are not relevant to the task in hand.

##### **Tutor's response**

The LILT tutor pointed to the fact that the focus had changed from teacher-centred to learner-centred activities and that much more interaction took place within a small peer group than was possible in a teacher-fronted classroom. In this way it was indeed a 'safer' environment. She also pointed to the fact that C2005 demands that learners need to learn problem-solving skills which cannot be learnt by listening, rote-learning or by simply regurgitating lists of facts. The small group is the ideal vehicle to develop interaction skills, which cannot be learned unless they are practised. Learners learn to manipulate facts while they work together. An additional benefit of group work is that the learners develop social skills and attitudes like turn taking and listening. They also learn to think independently while problem-solving. They learn to pace themselves and therefore they learn time-management. The tutor also said that there was no harm in 'having fun', as long as some learning was taking place. When learners got to understand the dynamic of this methodology, there would be less play and more work. This response by the

LILT tutor places the group activity squarely within the OBE paradigm. Many of the tutor's responses are reinforced in the booklet, so educators' queries could be answered when they referred to the booklet after the workshop. This response also complies with Criterion 3 (4.2.3)

#### **4.4.2 The introduction of Small Groups**

##### **Educators' input**

Educators' inputs mainly concerned the mechanics of moving desks. This they found problematic because of the size of the classrooms relative to the numbers of learners. Many also said that the group work exercises that they had attempted had deteriorated and become somewhat chaotic. They also said that they found that learners did not seem to know what to do when placed into groups and usually spoke in their mother tongue.

##### **Tutor's response**

The tutor stressed that small group work should be introduced slowly and gradually. Learners should be warned ahead of time that they were going to move into a different mode of learning. This complies with criterion 3, the development of group work skills. She stressed that learners should be prepared beforehand and that the initial activities should be small, fun and not too challenging. In this way they would gradually develop the skills required of them and would then know what to do when they started working. She also stressed the importance of laying down rules for groups, but suggested that the learners themselves should compile these rules so that they 'own' the process. She also mentioned that if the learners interact in their mother tongue instead of English, this was not too serious. It was important though that the report-back should be done in English (the medium of instruction). The LILT tutor displayed much understanding and empathy for the educators' difficulties. She did not dismiss them but explained how she had

overcome problems in her own experience. She tried to address each difficulty in a friendly and non-threatening way. This shows sensitivity to educators' difficulties which elicited a positive response from the educators.

#### **4.4.3 The size of groups**

##### **Educators' input**

The educators reported that they were often constrained by the size of the classroom in relation to the number i.e. many learners per classroom. Furthermore, the furniture did not lend itself to proper interaction as the desks were either fixed to the floor, or they were too large to permit satisfactory interaction. Educators believed that they should abandon group work and rather do pair work. They did, however, agree that a group of about five was the ideal number, but that this was often logistically impossible in their particular situation.

##### **Tutor's response**

The LILT tutor stressed that the group size should be dictated by the size of the classroom relative to the number of learners. There was agreement that five was probably the ideal number (cf. Long and Porter 1985). She discussed the advantages of various group sizes and pointed out the pitfalls of groups that were too large e.g. the quiet learners do not participate. She said that in a class of seventy, educators should try to get groups down to about ten, but stressed that fewer than ten was the ideal. She also addressed the problem where the dimensions of the classrooms made it impossible for all the learners to work in small groups at once. Her suggestion was that educators create a space in the classroom where one small group would work in group format while the rest of the class carried on with other activities or perhaps even a 'fishbowl' activity where the majority observed the group interaction. Again the LILT tutor tried to assist the educators to see beyond the problem and to work pro-actively to see difficulties as opportunities rather than as insurmountable obstacles.

#### **4.4.4 The choice of groups**

##### **Educators' input**

The educators felt that the choice of group members should be left to the educator, as the learners would only want to be with their friends if they were given the option. Educators suggested random selection of groups.

##### **Tutor's response**

The tutor pointed out that the groups could be chosen either by the learners or by the educator. She stressed, however, that while the learners were still getting used to group activities, the educator should choose the groups. She questioned whether it was necessarily *undesirable* that learners be placed in the same group as their friends. She suggested that the interaction would be more relaxed and less threatening if some friends were together. The tutor suggested a few possible selection techniques, for example birthdays, or selection by numbers. She also questioned the mixing of sexes in groups, concluding that flexibility was critical and that non-functioning groups (for whatever reason) should be changed as circumstances dictated. This was a response which showed empathy with the educators and helped them to see problems as opportunities.

#### **4.4.5 The rules governing small groups**

##### **Educators' input**

The educators were concerned about the noise level and loss of control in the class. They felt that rules were essential for successful lessons. Some of the rules decided on by educators were that the learners should speak English all the time and that they should not be allowed to code-switch. They also spoke of heated arguments developing, interruptions and one person dominating a group.

### **Tutor's response**

The tutor pointed out that even though a class engaged in group work was fairly noisy, they need the discipline of coming to order whenever the educator/facilitator needs their attention. She introduced them to the “noisemaker”, in this case a wire ring with bottle tops strung along its length, which rattled when shaken. Group work skills were acquired gradually not instantly. She stressed the importance of code-switching within a discussion and pointed out that as long as the report-back was in English, the use of mother tongue during the interaction was acceptable. Cognition is more meaningful in mother tongue than in a target language, especially where proficiency levels are still fairly low. For my part, I observed that when the educators themselves were placed into groups, *they* all switched to speaking isiZulu, except where there was an English first language speaker in their midst! This might help them to understand the learners' difficulty in interacting in the TL.

#### **4.4.6 The mixing of ability levels.**

### **Educator's input**

Educators were not sure about whether to put learners with varying abilities together. They felt that the better children would dominate the discussion, leaving the shy learners silent and not participating. However, if one placed only weak learners in a group, there could be no interaction at all because of lack of confidence in their ability to use the target language.

### **Tutor's response**

The advantages of both types of groups were discussed. The first type of group was the mixed ability and secondly, the homogenous group arranged according to their individual levels of competence. She highlighted aspects of both types of groupings. The stronger learners would tutor the slower learners but this should be closely monitored in order to obviate non-participation on the part of the quiet learners. As far as putting the slower learners together was concerned, she pointed

out that slower learners might be “more comfortable talking about their problems in front of a small group of their peers” (Bizzell, 2000 p24). Long and Porter (1985) favour mixed ability groups (see 2.2). It was stressed that the most important thing was that the constitution of groups should be flexible and dynamic. This response links with that given by the LILT tutor previously in response to the problem of non-functional groups.

#### **4.4.7 The question of discipline**

##### **Educators’ input**

Discipline was probably one of the main concerns among the educators. They were concerned about discipline, the noise levels and the lack of control of the educator over what was happening in the classroom. The educators spoke of the principal’s questioning their ability to maintain discipline because of the noise levels in their classrooms.

##### **Tutor’s response**

The LILT tutor acknowledged that this was a sensitive issue among the educators who have already tried small group teaching. She encouraged the educators not to give up. She pointed out that with persistence, the group would eventually work well and that discipline would not be problematic. She also stressed that if learners are involved in challenging activities, their discipline also improves. This point of view is endorsed by Jackson *et al.* (1997) “Well-prepared, interesting activities hold students’ interest. Interested students are seldom disruptive” Jackson *et al.*(p59) She did however point out that noise levels are greater in a classroom where small group activities were taking place. She also stressed that the classroom could be messy, but that the learners would have to develop the habit of tidying up after their lessons. This would also encourage better work habits and self-discipline.

#### **4.5 The researcher's role – a critical perspective**

My role as observer could be challenged on two counts. The first could be that the observation of workshops was not planned in any systematic way because I wished to play a different role in each workshop in order to obtain a more holistic perspective. The second was because of my position as a language adviser. Spada, cited in Cumming (1994), lists a number of ways in which interactions can be recorded, namely through observation, audio or video recording and/or written transcripts of the lessons. For example Allen, Frohlich and Spada's 1984 observation scheme namely the Communicative Orientation of Language Teaching (COLT), consists of two parts. The first part looks at the activity type, the participant organisation, the content, the student modality and the materials. Part two is the use of the target language, information gap, and sustained speech, reaction to code or message, and relative restriction to linguistic form. I became an observer in my role as researcher in these workshops. This role as an informal researcher could be critiqued in that it deviated from the more rigorous techniques cited above (Chaudron, cited in Nunan (1992b p97, 98)). On the other hand, the LILT tutor conducted the workshops by exemplifying to the educators how they should teach in their own classrooms. The LILT tutor delivered the same input at each of the workshops whilst I took on a different role at each session. These roles are outlined below.

The different roles I took at the training workshops gave me the opportunity to view the interaction from a number of viewpoints and therefore my observations hopefully gave me a more holistic picture of the workshops. However, the fact that I was present could have caused some difficulties, because of my position as Subject Adviser. At the first and second sessions my role was that of a non-participant observer (possibly, 'semi-participant', because I did answer questions directed at me). While the group discussions were taking place, I circulated amongst the educators during the discussion time and listened to their group interaction. I sat with each group in turn to listen to their interaction. I found it extremely difficult to maintain my role as a non-participant observer because I was often questioned and asked for help when I joined a group.

During session three, I joined one of the groups and took the role of participant observer even further because I engaged in the discussion with the educators within my group. Cohen and Manion (1989) describe the role of the participant observer as one who engages in the very activities he sets out to observe. Bailey, cited in Cohen and Manion identifies one advantage of the participant observer which is relevant to this particular research in that the investigator is able to discern ongoing behaviour as it occurs. The opposite argument to this is the criticism that participant observation studies are “subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic, and lacking quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research” (Cohen and Manion 1989 p129). While admitting to some subjectivity, my observations were of necessity also supported by the responses of the educators attending the same workshops. This would counteract a critique of lacking quantifiable measures.

I made field notes in the first three sessions. During session four I tape recorded the interaction that took place (see summary in Appendix B). This is a summary because the sound quality was not always good owing to recording equipment and sound interference during group interactions. I think that it might have been better for me not to have participated in the group discussion in session two, because of my position as subject adviser. I am not sure that my presence did not inhibit the discussions by educators in the group. My position as English Adviser could have influenced responses in two areas, namely the observation of the workshops and in the responses to the questionnaires.

#### **4.6 Field Notes – Comments and observations during Workshops**

Educators did not always apply the discipline of strict time keeping. (Appendix B) Some groups were rigorous about keeping time, but most of the groups did not. Consequently they did not always complete the required number of activities. During her interaction with the educators, the LILT tutor stressed that time keeping was a discipline which had to be learnt with practice.

Most of the communication in groups was in isiZulu except where there was a participant in the group who might not understand isiZulu. Some of the interactions



were quite animated and there was also laughter during the group interaction. This was hopefully a sign that they were enjoying their session. The report back was always in English.

The questions for discussion were pasted onto cards and given page references which referred to the booklet. Many participants immediately took out their booklet to look for the 'right answer' before any discussion had taken place. They did not discuss the question first. This may be as a result of anxiety about 'getting it wrong' and a concern that they might be found wanting. Many of them come from a background where answers are either 'right' or 'wrong'. There is therefore some concern on their part about knowing what is 'correct'. The booklet presents a number of alternatives, so this might be a move in the direction where a more open-ended approach and less concern about being correct.

The 'noise-maker' was received with much interest and initially amusement. The educators acknowledged its advantages in bringing a class to order.

The discipline of time-keeping was interesting to observe because the educators experienced first-hand the difficulties of trying to remain within a rigid time-frame. The fact that most of the interaction was in isiZulu also shows the educators how much easier it is to communicate and interact in their MT. It is hoped that they will view the learners' interactions with more sympathy in their own classrooms. The search for the 'right' answer is always problematic because it does not place the participants in the situation where they do not seem to know the 'right' answer. This will hopefully give them some insight into the awkward situations that might arise in their classroom. If there is concern about discipline within classrooms where group work is being applied, the 'noise-maker' is a valuable aid for the educator to retain discipline in the class.

There is arguably a different dynamic in a group of adult educators who do not necessarily know each other very well because they come from different schools and a group of learners who know the other members of their group fairly well and interact with them every day at school. I feel that whereas educators are often resistant to new concepts and are reluctant to try new ideas in their classrooms, a workshop like this

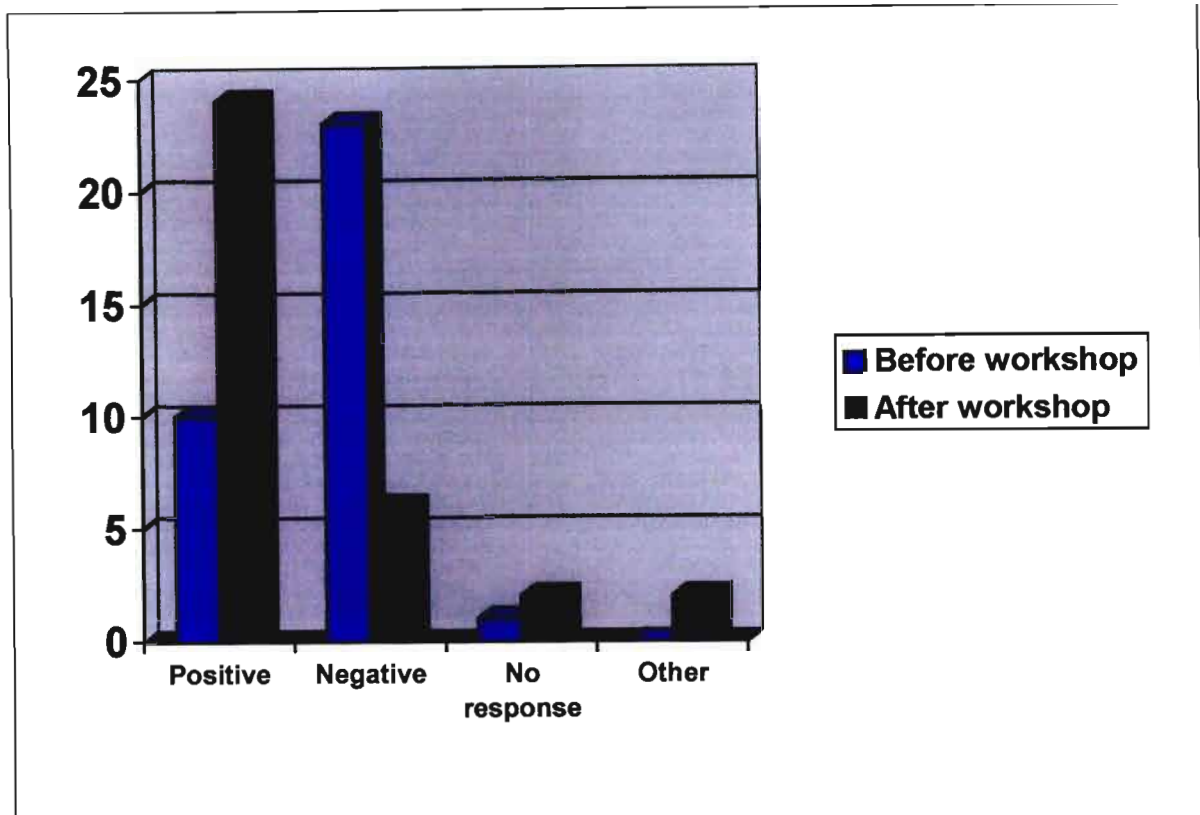
serves as a method of removing the unknown and motivates them to attempt it in their classrooms.

#### **4.1 Analysis of data collected in the questionnaires**

At the conclusion of each workshop, educators were encouraged to try to teach five lessons in group-work format. In May 2001 I sent them a questionnaire to question them on their experiences in trying out group work. I felt that this data could then be a further set of opinions which could be used to triangulate my evaluation of LILT. This also yielded the quantitative data to support the qualitative data.

Altogether 91 questionnaires were sent out and 32 (35%) educators responded. The questionnaire included closed questions with either a 'yes' or 'no' answer. These were usually followed by an open 'why' question which challenged educators to justify their answer. The majority of the questions were open with free response questions. In some of the responses, more than one answer was given and the numbers therefore do not always add up to a total of thirty-two. This was particularly the case with questions about problems and difficulties encountered by educators within their schools. The analysis of the responses has been done in percentages for greater uniformity. I have analysed only a selection of questionnaires in order to narrow down the focus to include only isiZulu speakers who teach English. Furthermore, I did not analyse all the questions in the questionnaire, but selected questions which yielded interesting information and which contributed directly to the evaluation of LILT. A copy of the questionnaire is attached (Appendix D).

The opening question explored attitudes of educators towards the concept of small group interaction, both before and after they had attended the LILT workshop (Fig 2).



**Figure 2. Comparison of the attitudes of educators to the idea of group work before and after the LILT workshop. [Questions 1 & 32]**

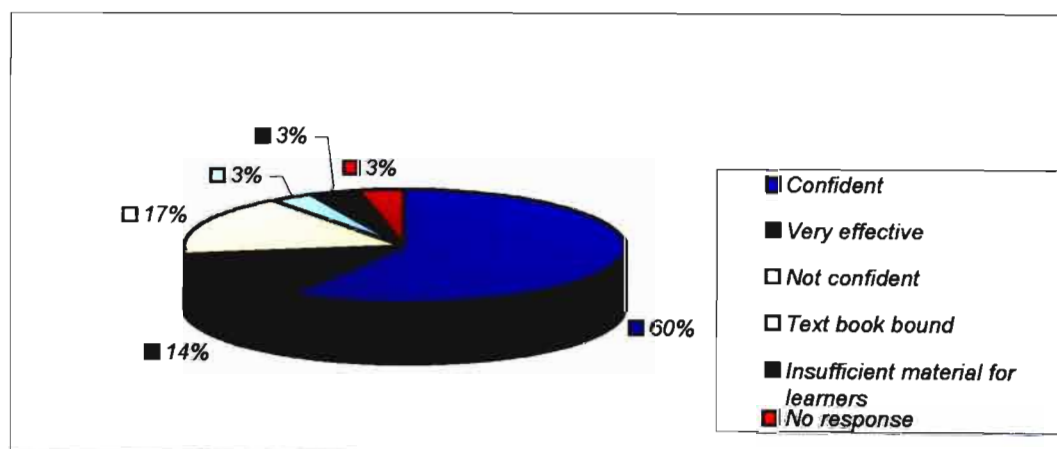
Many of the objections to the use of small groups prior to the workshop were based on concern about discipline and noisy classrooms. The educators also felt that they needed more information in order to be effective facilitators of group work. Many believed that they would have liked to try to use small groups, but that they needed more training before they could feel confident enough to implement this technique. After the workshop there was greater confidence about implementing small group work and a willingness to try it. According to the responses, many of them did try. Altogether, 88% of the respondents changed their attitude towards group work as a result of the LILT workshop. A possible reason for the change in attitude is arguably the logical, clear, well-scaffolded lively presentation by the LILT tutor (see Appendix B). Her presentation was practical and realistic and there was a healthy mix of lecturing and interaction. Another possible reason for this change of heart was a realisation that it was not as difficult as it had seemed. To quote one respondent “I have discovered that there is more self discipline and a good participation (sic) in small group teaching than a large

group”. Another reply was “I now know how to divide the groups, how to organize groups, how to do the icebreaking (sic) and a bit of assessing continuously”. The practical application was not as difficult as they had originally expected.

Only a few of the educators who attended the workshop had ever taught or been taught in small groups and therefore most of them had to move into unknown territory. They found it helpful to experience first hand how a small group classroom functioned. I feel, however, that a great deal of INSET needs to be done in order to assist and teach educators to develop really meaningful activities that go beyond the superficial. One of the most heartening responses came from the educator who answered the question “Do you think you could use small group teaching to a greater extent in your classroom now?” The reply was “No, but I am prepared to try”.

A further question examined the reason for the above response to using group work in the classroom in future (illustrated in Fig 2). Because the responses were so wide-ranging and open-ended it was impossible to graph the responses. Some of the more frequent responses were that there was more participation of individuals and that group work was a confidence-building exercise. They were also appreciative of the fact that they had learnt how to organise group activities. They still, however expressed concerns about discipline, lack of facilities and crowded classrooms.

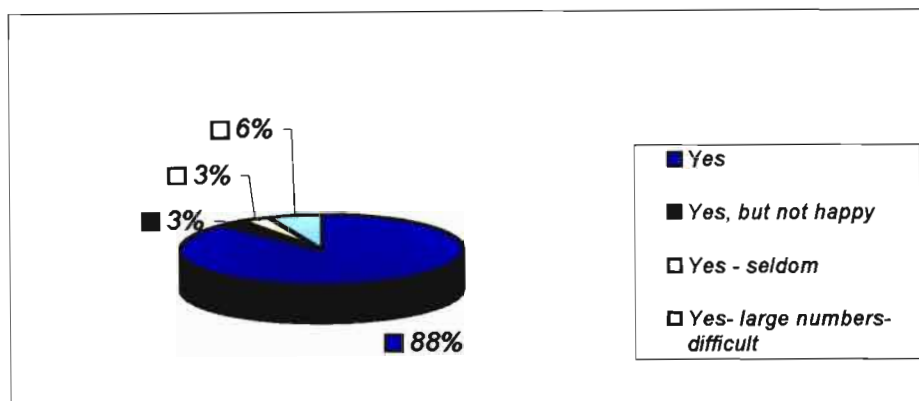
The next question (2, Fig 3) examined the perceived effectiveness of the workshop



**Figure 3 . Perceived effectiveness of the LILT material and confidence to introduce it in the classroom. [Question 2]**

Sixty percent of the responses were positive (Fig 3) and one educator said that she now had much more confidence, and that the group work exercise was no longer such a mystery. Some concern (3%) was still expressed about abandoning the textbook, and 17% did not feel confident, but were at least trying to effect some changes in their classrooms. This improvement in their self-confidence I would attribute to the interesting and well-presented format of the workshop.

In the following question 88% of the respondents said that they had acted upon my request to try to apply small group teaching in their classrooms (Fig 4). The reasons for this might be the fact that this was deemed to be part of OBE and that there is some merit in this new paradigm. Educators are often open to trying a new approach that has been presented to them in a worthwhile and interesting way. The remaining 12% of the respondents have all actually tried the methodology, but with less positive responses.

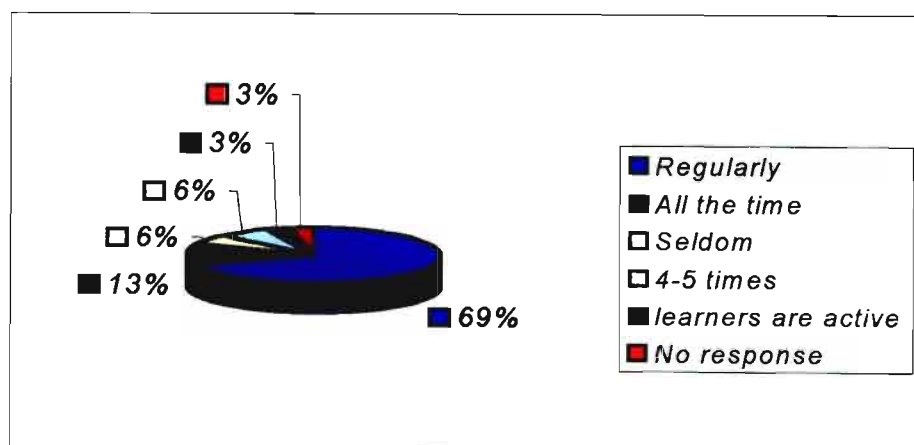


**Figure 4. Use of small group methodology subsequent to workshop. [Question 3]**

They have tried it but have not felt happy about the result. This methodology is such a radical shift from the teacher-fronted classroom that it does take time for success to be achieved. Bizzell (2000) also points this out in the LILT booklet. Other respondents have found the large learner numbers in small classrooms (and the consequent unfeasibility of moving the furniture) to be an impediment to progress. I feel that the 88% positive reply is a fairly high percentage and is possibly inflated. A possible reason for this high percentage might be because it is the perceived to be the expected answer. The question that followed, asking educators the extent to which they had used small groups was also an opening for a 'polite' answer rather than an accurate one.

Of the 32 respondents, 69% said that they often used small groups in their classrooms (Fig 5). The regularity varied from two to five times per week. One response was 8 lessons per programme organiser. It is hoped that through regular implementation group teaching will progressively become part of the educator’s regular programme. I am concerned about the 13% responses that stated that they used the small group **all the time**. My feeling is that this might not signify ‘every lesson’, but rather ‘very regularly’. Bizzell (2000) states that group work is not necessarily suitable for every lesson and that some lessons are to be taught with the educator lecturing or teaching in the classroom with the learners listening (Prabhu 1990, Richards and Rogers 1994, Ellis 1985).

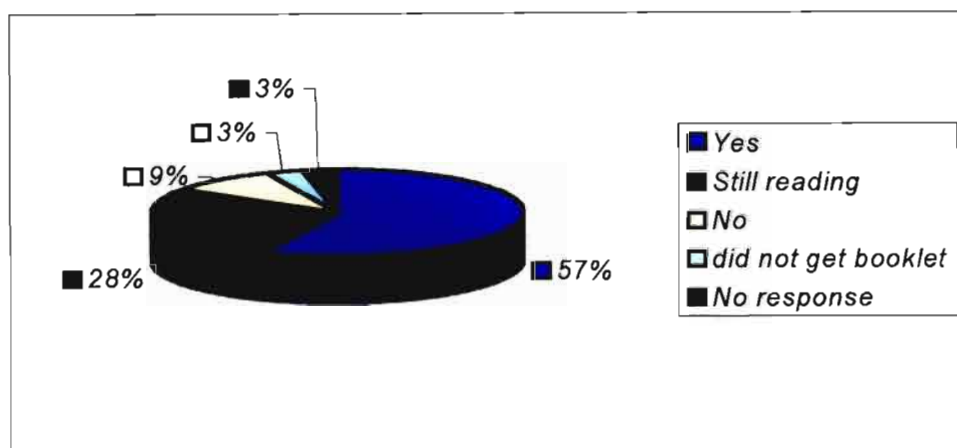
In the initial letter that was sent to the educators, they were asked to undertake to teach five lessons in the group format and 6% of the respondents took this literally and only taught groups between four and five times. It had originally been hoped that, if educators found this practicable, they would use the method more often than just the minimum of five times. However they did do what they were requested to do for the sake of this research. This is a critique of this research, because once again they might simply have complied with my request without really being interested in giving the methodology a fair trial.



**Figure 5. Frequency of use of small groups in class since workshop [Question 4]**



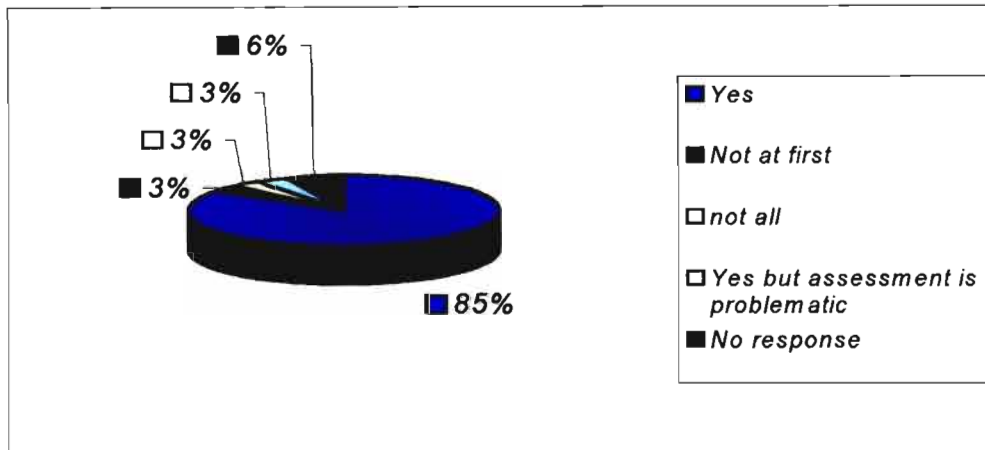
The following question enquired whether the educators who attended the workshop have studied the LILT booklet subsequent to the workshop. Of those who responded, 57% answered that they had read through the booklet and 28% replied that they were still reading it. (Fig 6) The booklet is very accessible and the highlighted passages



**Figure 6. Question whether booklet has been read subsequent to workshop. [Question 5]**

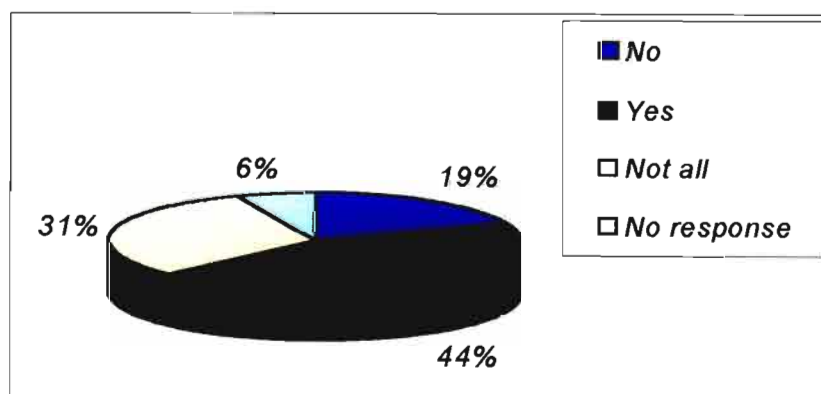
make a marked impact. Only 9% had not studied the booklet at all. Circulars and other information are often sent out to schools with instructions containing input on school related matters. . In my personal experience, when a follow-up is done, educators deny having received this information, but on closer inspection, they do have the information, having placed it in their teacher’s file, but have not read it through. This reinforces the findings of the Palmer Development Group report (1999): “teachers readily admitted in focus groups that they do not like to read” (p iv). Therefore, an unmediated, unsupported booklet is not an effective communication strategy when attempting to change the behaviour of teachers in the classroom” (1999 pvi). Only 6% did not respond or said that they had not received a copy of the booklet. At the workshop some of the latecomers in fact did not receive a booklet and were not aware that one had been handed out.

The question on the subject of whether the educators had found the booklets (plural) easy to read, was flawed. The reason for this was that **two** booklets were handed out at



**Figure 7. Perceived facility of reading booklets. [Question 6]**

the workshop, one on OBE and the other on LILT. The responses (Fig 7) were therefore not specifically directed towards the LILT booklet. An example of this confusion was in a response about having problems with assessment. The OBE booklet had a section on assessment but the LILT booklet did not have an assessment focus. Here the respondent was referring particularly to OBE assessment. Only 6% of the respondents found the booklets problematic, but half of those only had problems initially. I was told at two of the courses that the LILT booklet *was* helpful and useful. The 85% of respondents who had no problems with the booklet constitutes a high percentage and this response could be because of politeness.



**Figure 8. Perceived appropriacy to conditions in schools.[Question 7]**

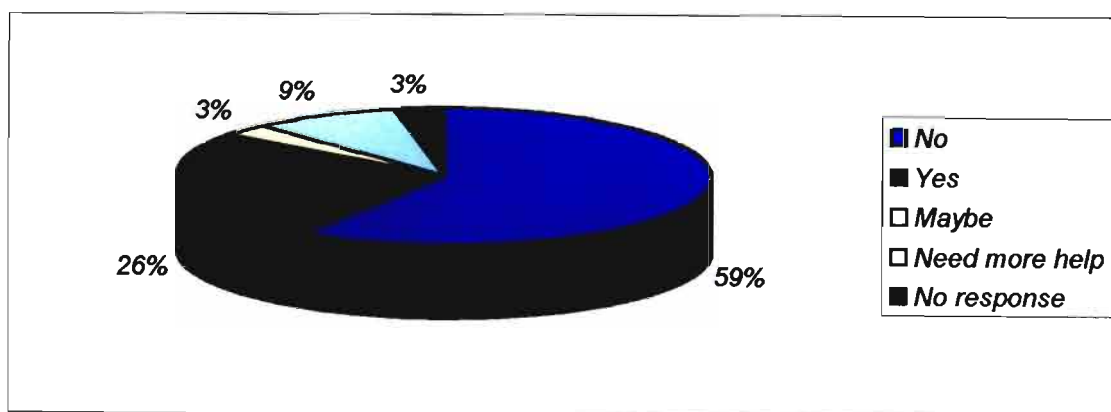
The question as to whether the educators found the LILT booklet appropriate to the conditions in their schools elicited a varied response. Only 44% of the respondents



found the booklet appropriate (Fig 8). A small number agreed, but with reservations. In the main those who gave an unequivocal ‘no’ (19%) felt that the material was inappropriate to their particular conditions. Of the remainder, 31% felt that only some of the material was appropriate. Six percent did not respond. This question was also flawed because it again referred to the ‘booklets’ in the plural, thus creating confusion among the teachers. The same problem could arise here as a response could refer to both of the booklets. If however educators find only a part of the LILT booklet appropriate and they put that part into practice, then it is a start and possibly, with further training and empowerment, they will come to grips with the booklet’s entire contents.

The next question {Question 8} asked if the respondents would recommend the booklet to their colleagues. Eighty four percent replied that they would recommend it to their colleagues. This reply is very problematic because of the response to the previous question where only 44% found the booklet appropriate to conditions in schools. This difference in the percentage (40%) might possibly be because they feel that what is not necessarily appropriate to them personally, could be useful for other educators. This is arguably a major pointer to the fact that the principles of group work are applicable across all the Learning Areas.

Twenty six percent of the respondents felt that they would be confident to teach groups without having been trained, while 59% were not confident (fig 9).

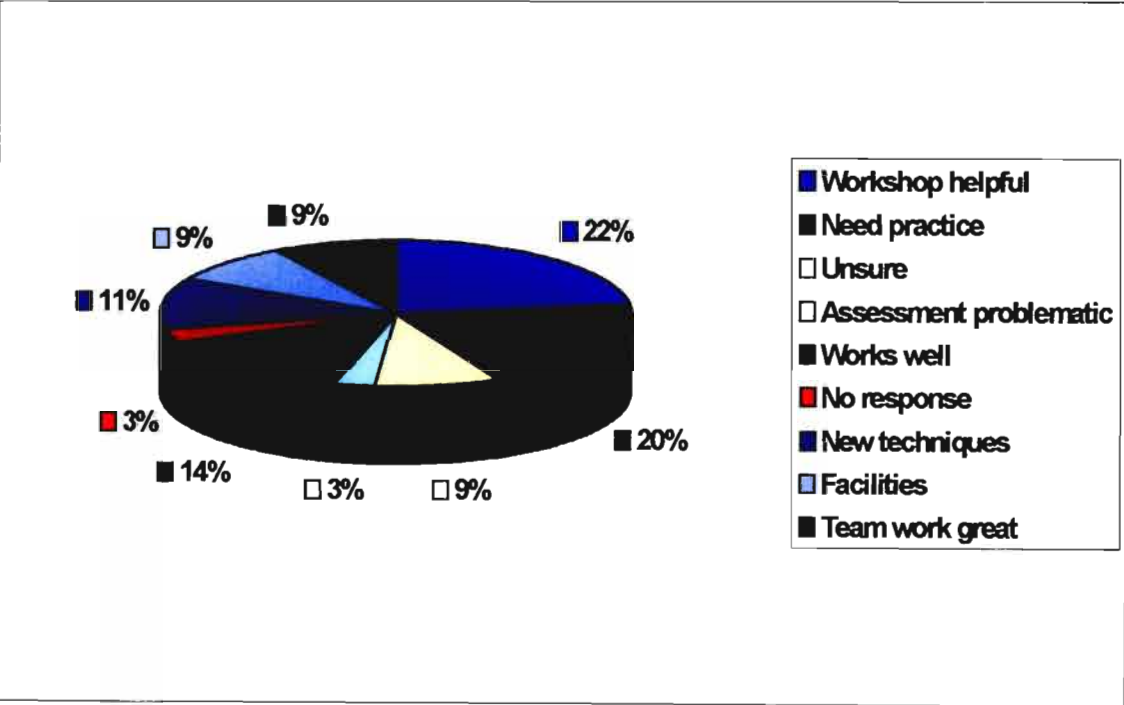


**Figure 9. Confidence levels to teach methodology without an INSET Workshop. [Question 9]**

The level of diffidence and lack of scaffolding on the part of the educators is clearly illustrated by this response. This question interrogates their belief in teaching this methodology without prior training (Fig 9). Of these, 6% responded that they had been taught the method in the past, so they did not answer the question. This may be because the question did not explicitly refer to this particular workshop. Some of the educators had been trained in the past and were relatively familiar with the methodology by now. There was a request for further INSET from 9% of the respondents and in the light of the curtailed sessions that the LILT tutor was forced to present, this is not surprising. In the limited time allowed, the LILT tutor was not able to do any kind of in-depth training.

The next question [Question 9] required a justification for this perceived lack of confidence. A wide variety of responses were evident here. I have tried to categorise them fairly broadly, but shall discuss individual responses in more depth below. The 22% who felt that the workshop had been helpful, but who needed practice in order to hone their skills, felt that because this was still a new concept much practice was needed. Another perceived advantage of regular workshops was the sharing of ideas with peers and the support gained from the knowledge that many problems in the classrooms are not unique, but are shared by other colleagues. This is supported by the 20% who responded that they need practice and that new techniques need to be practised and reinforced and there should be report-back sessions, in order to address mutual problems. A concern about doing the 'right thing' was also found in 6% of the responses. This is also a manifestation of insecurity and a desire to 'please'. The mindset that there is only *one* right answer or *one* right way of doing things is a legacy from the past. It might also be linked to the idea expressed by Kerfoot (1993) that teachers teach the way they were taught. Richards and Lockhart, cited in McDonough and McDonough (1997) speak of a teacher's 'personal construct', but that unconscious experience alone is not sufficient for development. Richards and Lockhart feel that critical reflection is essential for personal development (1997 p30). It is therefore necessary for educators to reflect critically on their experiences, to share them with colleagues and share mutual problems. The LILT booklet mentions that educators should file used activities in order to them, or variations of them if they were not

successful, for future reference. This is a form of self-reflection, (see 4.5) because an educator would not use a failed activity for a second time. At these forums, educators can collaboratively develop ideas which can then be tried individually. Fourteen percent of the responses were confident that they were now familiar with group work and that the workshop had simply reinforced their prior knowledge. The educators found the introduction to *new techniques* (i.e. group work) positive (11%), but if one considers all the positive responses, 56% of the responses are affirmative. One educator responded by saying that the workshop had been helpful, “(b)ecause I never knew some other (sic)



**Figure 10. Level of confidence to teach small groups without a workshop and reasons for this [Questions 9 and 10]**

techniques which are used.” It is necessary for educators to be exposed to new and different techniques to help them break away from the “culture of lecturing” as expressed by one educator. There are still complaints about the lack of facilities (9%). Interestingly, some of these complaints were from schools that do have some basic facilities such as photocopiers and electricity. There seems to be an inability to tap into these facilities and to utilise them to their full potential. Nine percent of the educators found the group activities in which they were involved useful and even “great” .

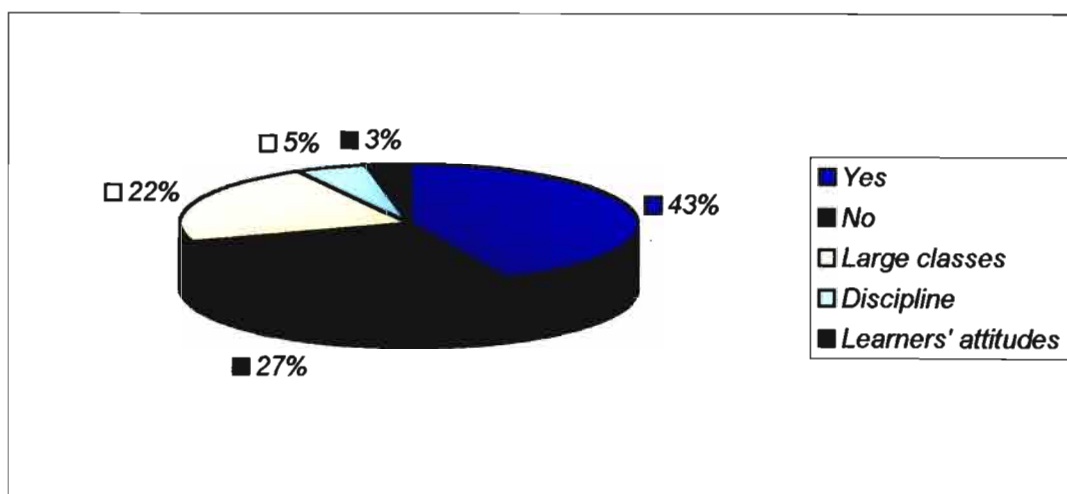
The next three questions as to whether the educators had used the tracking sheet are not analysed because, at the abbreviated courses, the tracking sheet was not introduced. The educators did, however, express an interest in its use, and this will be addressed later (see Recommendations Chapter 5).

The next question [Question 13] has not been represented in graph form because there were only three different types of responses. It asked whether any of the educators had developed their own classroom LSMs. Here the responses were 58% 'yes', 33% 'no' and 9% did not respond. It is very encouraging that nearly two thirds of the teachers had made LSMs on the encouragement of LILT. Many of them elaborated on what they had used. These consisted of handouts, charts, Zikulise materials, magazines, newspapers and books. Although only the handouts and charts were actually developed by the educators themselves, the bulk were pre-existing and adapted. Many educators still feel that the textbook is the most important source of information and are afraid to develop anything else, a finding which is borne out by Bell (1998). I feel that this is an important step in the right direction and, as the confidence of the educators grows, more and more original materials will find their way into the classrooms. The quality of the interaction with the materials does not fall within the scope of this research but it is still indirectly linked to LILT's impact and could be an interesting follow-up to this particular project.

The next question [Question 14] tried to discover the extent to which the use of the methodology had been disseminated and whether there had been discussion on the information that had been shared amongst colleagues at work. The reason for posing this question was to test the impact of LILT on the respondents. Often, when educators are excited by material, they tend to share it with colleagues. Only 19% of the educators who had attended the workshop had shared any ideas with colleagues at work and only 16% had spoken only to colleagues who had attended the workshop. This could arguably be for a number of reasons. They might not have found the material interesting enough to talk about; they might have been concerned about peer pressure and the reaction of their colleagues or they might even have been unconvinced by the workshop and had not thought that it was worth sharing. Finally, it could also point to a

lack of interest or commitment. The implications for LILT are that unless the project is fed into schools on a regular basis, the impact of the project will not be a lasting one.

Educators were now questioned on whether there were factors which hindered small group work in their classrooms (Fig 11). Where they cited large classes, many of them pointed out that they have classes of 70 learners. In my personal experience I have found instances where educators complained of large classes but upon closer inspection of their timetables, it was found that they had combined classes in order to give themselves more free periods. I am not saying that this was the case here, but this practice is definitely found in schools. Nevertheless a class of 70 learners *is* difficult to handle. This difficulty with very large classes, is also discussed by Kilfoil and van der Walt cited in Bell (1998).



**Figure 11. Perception as to whether there are factors in a classroom which impede group work. [Question 15]**

colleagues to a feeling that healthy competition was good for the learners.

Forty three percent of the respondents were of the opinion that there were no factors in their classrooms which made it impossible for them to work in groups (Fig 11). They commended group work because they felt that it saves time as well as builds confidence in the learners. Many of these responses were obviously from educators who already use small groups in their classrooms. An objection which often emerges and which was voiced here too, is the problem of discipline. Although only 5% of the educators voiced this objection in this question, in the following question where educators had actually

implemented group work and were asked to list difficulties that they had encountered, 37% responded that they had found discipline to be problematic. I believe that this is closely related to the perceived negative attitudes of the learners (3%). In the following responses, there were other manifestations of this objection. Learners were reluctant to work together, or their social skills were undeveloped, consequently they wanted to work on their own. If learners do not have a positive attitude towards working in this format, they would be very difficult to control. Bizzell (2000) stressed that training is very important. Learners need to 'own' the process and believe that they are in fact learning something. Some of the responses are that educators do not get any support from their colleagues or their principals. Educators themselves have to be convinced, and they also have to convince their colleagues and in particular their principal, that learning is actually taking place in the classroom.

Further questions interrogating problem areas were answered as follows. Nineteen percent responded that they did not have enough space in their classrooms. Bizzell (2000) suggests in the LILT booklet that only one group should be placed at the front of the classroom to do group work and that the rest of the class then carry on with individual activities. She suggests that this group be rotated so that every learner gets the opportunity to experience working in a group. Another objection (13%) was that the learners do not take working in groups seriously and consequently they do very little or nothing. The educators also feel that the learners do not take it seriously. They also feel that the shy ones do not participate (16%). Bizzell (2000) suggests that this happens when groups are too large. The challenge here is to give the learners something really worthwhile to do in the group, so that the exercise is constructive and meaningful. It is relatively simple for a shy learner to withdraw and to allow everyone else to do the talking. Closely linked to this problem is that the learners are very dependent on the teacher and are reluctant to work on their own. Bizzell (2000) clearly states that educators cannot just spring group work on the learners on a given day and instruct them to start working in groups immediately. She stresses the importance of preparing them and gradually introducing activities. She also emphasises that the initial activities should be fun and fairly straightforward.

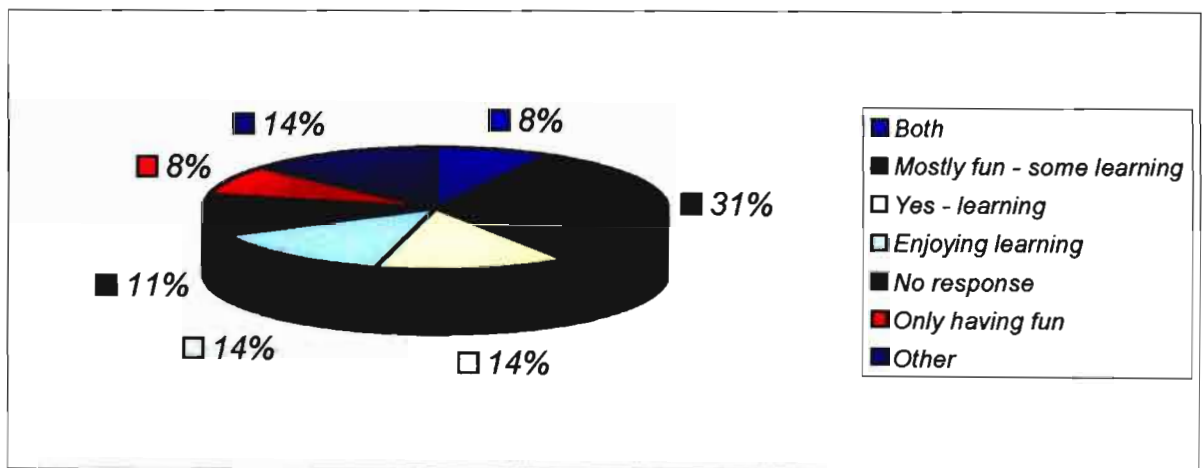
In the next question educators were challenged to find a way to overcome their perceived difficulties. This drew a wide variety of responses. They cannot be strictly quantified because the question was open-ended. The responses were positive in that they suggested that as the process developed, the learners would settle down and there was also a call for more workshops on the subject. A question that needs to be posed here is whether the educators 'like' the workshop events or whether they really find them 'useful'. A further suggestion from the educators was that the rules be explained beforehand and that the learners should be told that the assessment would count towards the final Continuous Assessment (CASS) marks. Other positive responses suggested that the learners should be taught how to take turns, that they needed lots of practice and that the groups should be changed regularly as well as rotating the group leader.

A further body of thought was that close monitoring as well as a great deal of preparation would help them to prepare more interesting material. The need to teach learners to work independently was also stressed. One interesting response was where the educator wanted to have an extra class, i.e. that the classes should be split in order to give the educators more manageable numbers to work with. This is a cry for help which permeates many of the responses, as educators feel overwhelmed by the numbers they have to teach and by the amount of work expected of them.

There were further responses that espoused the belief that the Department of Education should address these problems. Some respondents suggested that the needs of the teachers should be addressed and that the education policy should be revised. There was also a feeling that the parents should be more involved in schools and that fund-raising or the donation of furniture would help to alleviate the shortage of furniture within the schools. In these responses, one detects a level of frustration with the situation at the schools and a feeling that the educators themselves are unable to do anything about their situation without input from the Department. I find these last responses worrying as it seems indicative of a more far-reaching dissatisfaction. It also seems to place the responsibility for growth and development in the hands of the government and not with individuals.



Altogether 81% of the educators questioned had large classes and only 13% did not. On closer investigation, the schools that did not have such large classes were chiefly in the more rural areas, whereas the educators in the urban areas are the ones who have the large numbers. In spite of these large numbers, 82% of the educators questioned have attempted small group teaching. Of those 9% have only taught part of the class or have only attempted to do this on a few occasions. This would hopefully encourage them to attempt the activity again, especially if they feel that it is worthwhile. The next question interrogates whether the educators had a sense that constructive work was taking place during the activity (Fig 12). The question posed was whether the educators believed that the learners were learning, or were only having fun.



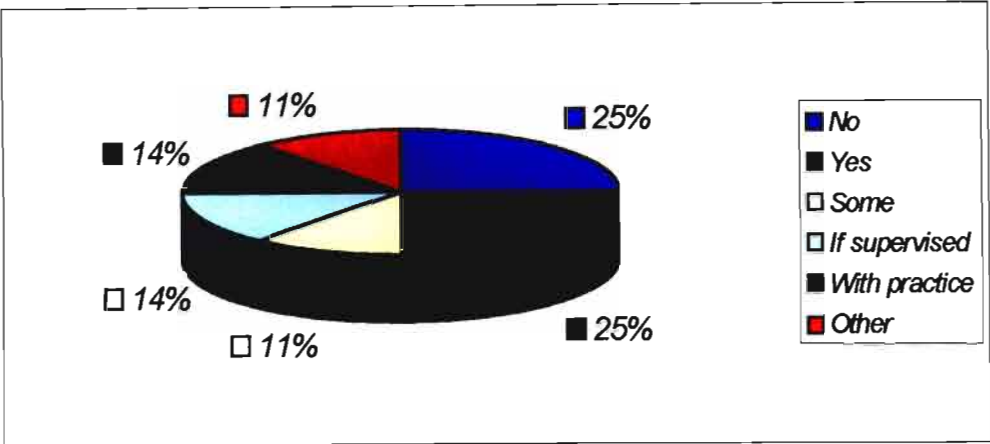
**Figure 12. Educators' perceptions as to whether learners were learning or simply having fun [Question 20]**

Thirty one percent of the responses felt that the learners were mostly having fun, but that there was some learning taking place. The answer to the next question, which challenged them to justify the answer given in question 20, elicited responses like the feedback and written work done subsequently proved that they did learn. Other responses were through observation, by the questions asked and through group, peer and individual assessment. Only 8% of the respondents said that they were only having fun and were not really learning anything. Fifty three percent of the responses were 'a combination of fun and work'. One interesting response was that at first they were having fun, but later on they took it seriously. These are very encouraging responses



because the educators do have a positive foundation to build upon any future LILT interventions.

The next question asked if educators thought that their learners were able to handle the self-discipline required in small groups. Opinions differed widely on this issue and 24% agreed and 25% disagreed (Fig 13). The balance of the responses were positive, because 16% said that only some of their class groups could handle it (here the higher grades) and 16% said that it was a viable option with practice. A further 14% said that



**Figure 13. Educators’ perceptions of whether their learners have the self-discipline required to work in small groups. [Question 22]**

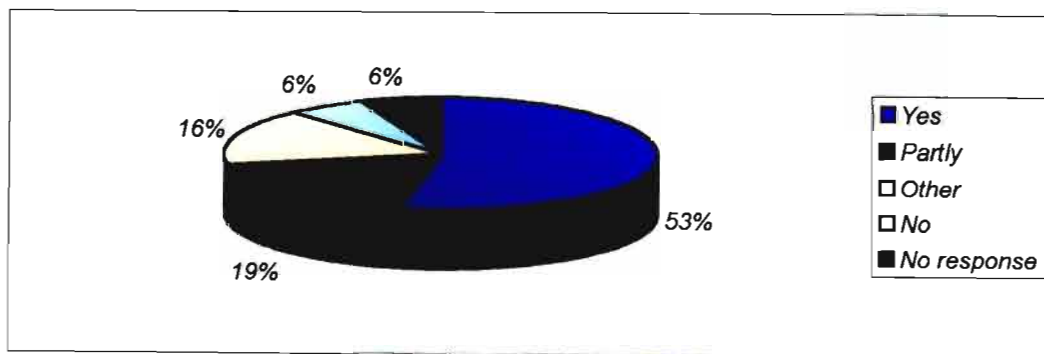
they could introduce group work if the learners were supervised. Of the remaining 5% the responses (classified under ‘other’) varied from the desire for help from their colleagues to a feeling that healthy competition was good for the learners.

The next two questions were also linked and the educators were asked if they had enjoyed the workshop. The overwhelming majority (91%) said that they had enjoyed the workshop. Their reasons were varied. Most of them had found the workshop to be informative and said they had learnt new things. They had also enjoyed the opportunity to share mutual problems and they did not feel completely isolated because they found that many of them shared mutual problems. Bailey (1996) got similar results, finding that collaborative dialogue helps educators to believe in themselves and in their own knowledge. Some were of the opinion that the workshop had been helpful and even

inspiring. They had enjoyed the idea of the ‘noise-maker’ and found it reassuring that the increased noise levels were acceptable.

Most of the educators were satisfied with the booklets, were challenged and enjoyed the fact that they were given specific tasks to do at the workshop. The next two questions were also linked where they were asked whether the workshop had addressed any real problems in their classes and then to justify this answer. The largest number of similar responses were that they were now more confident about coping with large numbers in the classroom. A further response was that relationships had been forged and that they had found group work within the workshop very non-threatening. Many educators also enjoyed the practical nature of this workshop where they felt that many of the other workshops they attend were very theoretical. Some of the negative responses were that no support material had been provided which they could take into their classrooms and that therefore they still had to develop their own material, that there was a lack of resources in their schools and that some felt that their problems had not been fully addressed.

Fifty three percent of the respondents believed that their level of confidence had been improved by the workshop and 19% gave a qualified ‘yes’ (Fig 14) Only 6% did not



**Figure 14. Perceived level of confidence on the part of educators to use this methodology in future. [Question 32]**

feel confident and 6% did not respond. Some of the other replies were that they were encouraged and found that it was easier to work with groups than they had expected and that they had applied what they had learnt. They also enjoyed working with colleagues

at the workshop. This sentiment was reinforced by the following questions which asked whether the workshop had changed educators' attitudes towards small group teaching and whether they would like to attend future workshops on small groups. The response was largely 'yes' with only one failure to respond. A few expressed reservations and felt that there were still problems. These were mainly lack of facilities, large classes and problems within their school environment..

The following question asked them to explain the reason for their response. The positive aspects of the group work methodology which engaged them were:

- ◆ the fact that there was good participation,
- ◆ it improved self-discipline on the part of the learners,
- ◆ it encouraged peer teaching,
- ◆ the confidence levels of learners and educators improved,
- ◆ it was easy to spot weaknesses in learners
- ◆ subject matter is covered in a short time
- ◆ it provided relief from the burden of talking all the time.

Some educators expressed the need to start building up materials for teaching. This is suggested by Bizzell (2000) who recommends that all material be kept for reference at a future date.

The final question (35) in the questionnaire asks the educators to identify any areas that they would like to have addressed at future workshops. Those points not already mentioned above are listed in descending order of frequency:

- ◆ Assessment (53%)
- ◆ Preparation and planning (18%)
- ◆ Discipline (16%)
- ◆ Large numbers (16%)
- ◆ OBE application/ interpretation of specific outcomes (13%)
- ◆ How to acquire support materials/ literature (13%)
- ◆ Peer assessment (9%)
- ◆ Lack of facilities (9%)

- ◆ Learners to attend courses (3%)

(N.B. It must be noted that some responses covered more than one of the above listed points)

In the following chapter, I will make recommendations for future INSET based on the preceding chapters.

## Chapter 5

### **Recommendations for future research and INSET**

#### **5.1 Conclusion**

In an oral communication with the Materials Developer (2001 See appendix C) she mentioned that workshops on the development of material for specific needs were a part of her future plans for educator INSET. She also informed me that after working intensively with educators at a school for over a year, the educators were beginning to develop their own materials. Based on booklets of this kind and on the evaluation of LILT, I think this is an indication of the level of INSET of this nature that is required throughout the 'previously disadvantaged' schools. Extensive in-service training is required to develop the types of activities that challenge the learners without threatening them. The development of this skill is not included in the scope of the LILT booklet. From this it is obvious that much INSET needs to be done in schools in order to make educators self-reliant and prepared to introduce innovative ideas in their teaching.

##### **5.1.1 Self-reflection**

Ideally learning materials for educators should help to develop the skill of self-reflection in the educator. This requirement is not overtly stated in the LILT booklet. However, what is suggested is that an integrated programme should be designed in conjunction with the other educators on the staff, which looks at the different learning areas and designing Programme Organisers, which would include skills across the areas. I think that self-reflection would flow from this type of integrated planning. Self-reflection could lead to Action Research and these are areas which educators need to address, and they should become part of the work ethic. I have personally experienced lessons where educators have asked me to critically evaluate a lesson. After the lesson I have questioned the educator as to her perception of the quality of the lesson just delivered. Unfortunately, there has often been a great disparity between *her* perception of the lesson and what *I* have observed. Educators' evaluation of their own work (and that of others) has often been over-generous and unrealistic. Educators are, by and large, very

polite, generous and uncritical of their assessment of their own lessons and those of others.

The educator needs to arrange groups and to monitor their effectiveness. The greatest impact of group work is achieved when educators are convinced of the efficacy of and are prepared to try group activities in their classrooms. Once they have experienced its effectiveness they will be more inclined to implement it on a regular basis. This is a problem that Wildsmith-Cromarty (1995) also wrestles with when she questions whether there is “any way in which to hasten the transition towards an alternative pedagogy.” She suggests that these practices should begin to change if the teacher is engaged in self-reflection (p122) (see 4.5.1) “Once other teachers begin to see the fruits of...(this) approach in one classroom, they may be inspired to try it on their own.” (Holderness, cited in Brumfit *et al.* p31). Based on the responses to the questionnaire, the workshops did go a long way towards addressing the fear of an unknown methodology.

### **5.1.2 Parental and community involvement**

I support Holderness’s proposal that the help and support of parents should be enlisted. He suggests that, even if teachers are reluctant to change, they could be encouraged by informed parents to try new methodologies (in this case, group work). The schools that have community support are often more successful because they are able to ‘achieve’ both in and outside the classroom. When parents are aware of what is happening at school they become more involved and support educators to a greater extent.<sup>1</sup>

### **5.1.3 Training of educators to be facilitators**

One of the skills that educators need to learn is how to relinquish some control of their learners so as to allow them to become independent problem-solvers (4.1). Bizzell

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<sup>1</sup> At one of the schools in the Umvoti District, the percentage pass went up from below 20% to above 90% when the parents got involved in school activities. They helped with the supervision of homework and supported the educators. The school has no electricity, but parents brought lamps and helped by taking their children to school and providing assistance to the school.

(2000) stresses that, when the classroom is learner-centred, children are responsible for their own learning. The educator sets activities into motion and then monitors progress. This is directly in line with Principle 2 (see 4.1). Bizzell does, however, state that “a teacher never really surrenders responsibility for what is happening in a classroom. The trick is to see what learners can handle on their own and what requires your intervention” (p27). She also mentions the fact that not all activities have to be group activities, but that there are some activities where the teacher teaches and the learners listen (Prabhu 1990).

#### **5.1.4 Future INSET**

New materials cannot just be handed to educators, they have to be workshopped intensively before they can be given to educators to implement. This notion is supported by the findings of the Palmer Report that “(s)tand-alone booklets delivered to schools are an inappropriate medium for reaching the target audiences”(1999 piv). Much INSET is required to bring educators on board. There is a reluctance amongst educators to try new approaches and they also need further workshops to help them to develop materials for small group activities.

There is a need for learners and educators to break away from cultural impediments where girls, in particular can be assisted to overcome the taboos within their cultural environment so that they become confident to express their opinions in small groups and later perhaps in public and not be intimidated by their male counterparts. It has been my experience with girls in single-sex schools that they are more confident to express their opinions and justify their point of view than those in co-ed schools.

Owing to the curtailment of the workshops studied in the main research project I consider it necessary to run further workshops on some of the techniques involved in small groups. In particular, the Tracking Sheet is a very useful method of assessment and CASS has now become part of our daily classroom activities.

In the future a follow-up will be undertaken to address problems identified by educators in the questionnaire. Further workshops will also be run because “in the majority of contexts, teachers do not have the resources or skill to develop their own materials” (Review Committee on C2005 (2000 – Executive Summary). This work is still ongoing and has been built into the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education and Culture planning for future INSET.



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**How to organise  
and manage small  
groups in your  
classroom**

Developed by  
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The material is available for  
teachers to copy and use in their  
classrooms

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**This booklet is for teachers!**

It is addressed to the many teachers in this country who know they have to change their teaching methods, who want to change their methods but who do not know how to do it in their classrooms.

It is addressed to the many teachers who welcome the new Curriculum 2005, who are interested in OBE but who do not know how to translate the ideas into practice for their learners. It is also addressed to those who are already trying out the new curriculum and OBE methods.

**The aim of this booklet is to provide helpful new ideas and practical suggestions for organising and managing small groups in a classroom. Small groups are essential to modern teaching.**

The new approach to teaching is based on the following principles:

- A shift in from teacher-centred to learner-centred.  
We no longer assume that teachers are the source of all wisdom. Learners bring their own existing knowledge and experience to the classroom on which we base new learning.



- Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning
- They learn to become independent problem solvers
- They learn the skills of team work
- They learn information gathering skills. In a constantly changing world , teaching knowledge alone is insufficient. Pupils need the skills to gather, organise and use information.

## Second Language Learning and Teaching

This booklet is also for the specific needs of South African teachers and learners who are working in a second language and therefore carry a double load of difficulty.

**The methodology of Curriculum 2005 and OBE is ideal to meet the needs of learners working in a language other than mother tongue.**

The examples used are aimed primarily for grades 5,6 and 7. But they can be adapted to other grades - the methods can be used at all levels and with

different learning areas.

These methods can be adapted to different conditions. Obviously it is much more difficult in schools which are underresourced and overcrowded. However, these methods have been shown to make some difference even in the worst conditions which unfortunately still exist.

The point is for you, the teacher to examine these ideas, and try them out in ways which fit your conditions. They work in many schools in many countries; they open the way to change which must come in our schools if we are serious about meeting world standards.

**Change is easier with help.**

Do not try to make these changes by yourself. You will need support and help. It is important to remember that new methods will not necessarily work immediately. They require new attitudes and skills on the part of the teachers and on the part of the learners. They will take time to develop.

Essentially you will be shaping your own methods by trial and error in the classroom. You have to jump in and try the ideas out and then adapt them to what works for you and your learners. This can be quite alarming!

But you are never alone! Make sure that your principal knows what you are trying. Try and work with other teachers in the school. Even if you are not doing the same things, it is important to have someone to talk things over with.



### What is small group learning?

A small group consist of a small number of learners who work independently and co-operatively on tasks which you, the teacher have prepared for them.

Small group learning is essential to modern teaching . It is impossible to achieve the critical outcomes listed on page one unless you use small groups.

**But you cannot use small groups all the time!**

There are times when the teacher has to introduce new ideas and concepts, when you have to stand at the front and talk to the whole class. Then the learners are quiet and they listen to you.

There are other times when it is better for learners to work on their own, giving them a chance to collect their thinking or

to practise a skill.

Let us look at a couple of classrooms. One which does not use small groups and a second which is based on small group learning.

**The Traditional Classroom** is in the middle of a geography lesson.

There are 45 learners seated in desks. The desks are arranged in rows, with neat aisles between them. The teacher is moving round the front of the room teaching the solar system.

She has wonderful drawings and maps of the universe. She is focussing on the fact that the sun is many times larger than the earth. But the children are having difficulty with this . They find it hard to believe that what they see is not true. The sun does not look bigger than the earth which seems so big. So she tells them that as objects move into the distance they appear to get smaller. "For example," she says, "What happens to a car when it moves away from you on a long road?" Some of the learners get what she means , some do not.

Now she is explaining why we have day and night. She gets a child to hold up a soccer ball, ( that's the sun) and another to hold up a tennis ball (that's the earth). They circle each other and provide a



perfectly good demonstration of this complex subject which the class watches and tries to internalise.

Then the children read the textbook, do some exercises and are told to learn pages 20 to 25 for homework.

**A Modern Classroom.** This class is also in the middle of a geography lesson and is the same size.

It is difficult to see the teacher. There seems to be some confusion in the room and the noise is terrible. The desks are pushed round the room so that there are nine clumps of desks. They are a bit squashed so that you cannot see exactly where the teacher's desk is.

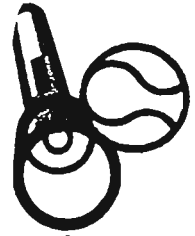
The children are in small groups of about 5 each, all occupied with something round the desks.

In one corner of the room there are rows of boxes containing material, books, paper, file folders and binders. Various learners come to the boxes, consult a chart on the wall, look for the correct box and take out material. They return with the material to their group which starts working.

What are the groups doing?

*The first group* is drawing pictures of two

balls, a football and tennis ball. The tennis ball is on the window sill and the football has been placed way over at the end of the playground. One child is outside moving the football gradually closer. Each time she moves the ball the rest of the group makes a drawing of both balls.



When the football is up next to the tennis ball the children read their instructions which ask them to :

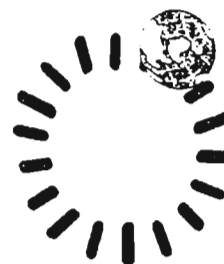
- a) describe their drawings to the whole group
- b) compare their drawings for any differences
- c) analyse why their drawings changed
- d) explain why they drew the football (which is bigger than the tennis ball) as though it was smaller.

Then their instructions ask them to write down this explanation in their individual notebooks.

*The second group* is jointly drawing a large diagram of the solar system, but they have to get it into the correct proportion. This is a difficult task because the sun is so much bigger than the earth.

They have to find the distance between the different bodies from the textbook or from other resources if they are available and figure out how to represent these distances without making the earth only a tiny dot. This involves much discussion about the concepts concerned.

*The third group* is working on building a model which explains day and night. They are using wire sculpture and a battery- charged small motor to get a ball to rotate in front of a torch shining directly on to the ball. They also have to make the ball revolve around the torch ( the sun).



*The fourth group* is jointly writing an explanation of the cause of day and night.

*The fifth group* is making and filling in a chart which shows at what time people in different parts of the world get up in the morning.

### Each group has a task to perform

Some tasks are the same, some are different. Some are writing, some discussing, some doing research, some building models.

But the children are all active, involved, interested and talking to each other.

### What is the teacher doing?

She is moving round the room, sometimes asking questions, sometimes providing help when learners are lost or puzzled. But mostly she is listening and watching.

She is watching the class as a whole to see



if they can handle groups, if they are really working. Or she is doing assessment. *Group work is ideal for continuous assessment.*



### Assessment

At the beginning of the process she has decided what outcomes she will assess. Now she moves from group to group making notes, giving marks, writing comments on how the learners are actually performing. For example, she might decide to assess how well the children grasp the relative sizes of astronomical bodies by observing their demonstrations.

By the end of a week she will have observed everybody in the class on that particular activity and will have a record of each child's performance of that specific outcome. Or she might be watching the performance of a critical outcome like how the learners co-operate when faced with a difficult problem.

### **Small groups give you time for remedial work**

She might also use this time when the class is working independently to provide some remedial help to slow learners. She could make a small group of the children who are having difficulty with the size of heavenly bodies and give them the special attention that is possible with



only five or six children.

When the learners have finished a task to their satisfaction they fill in a tracking sheet (This will be explained later). They place whatever finished product there is, back in the box with all other materials and collect a new task for the next stage.

### The difference between the two classrooms

The most obvious difference is the *physical arrangement of the desks*. In the modern classroom the rows facing the teacher are gone. Instead, learners work in groups of anything from 4 to 15 depending on a number of factors like the nature of the work, size of class and of the room.

**But be careful. Changing your desk arrangement is not enough. There are teachers who move their desks and then proceed to teach in exactly the same way as ever.**

The method used in the traditional classroom is not *wrong*. However, the teacher is relying on her verbal explanation to convey difficult concepts of perspective and relative size. Some

children will grasp her explanation, others will understand when they watch the demonstration. But they will probably have trouble describing the concepts in their own words. Other children will be wondering which ball is which body. It is very unlikely that any of the learners will have any idea of the vastness of the distances.

We all learn in different ways, so teachers have to provide different ways of conveying information to the children. It is important that all the children in the class are *actively* involved in exploring a concept not just one or two providing a demonstration.

**There are many other additional skills, knowledge and attitudes which we must teach today. Traditional teaching methods are no longer adequate.**

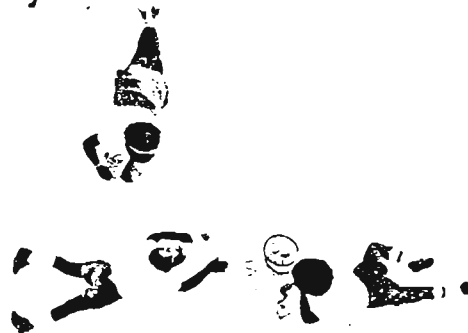
In the modern classroom you have to make sure that dynamic things are happening in the groups. You have to make sure that the *learners are actively looking at and talking and listening to each other*. In the first classroom the children were for the most part passive, listening to the teacher.

**In the second class the teacher and the textbook are no longer the only source of understanding and knowledge; the**

children have to *actively* tackle the work; they cannot be passive. They have to find solutions, answers, ideas, conclusions, rationales. They have to put forward hypotheses and then test them out. For all of these functions they learn to use their own abilities, each others', the resources provided, which may include the teacher as well as the community outside the school.

Another difference is the noise level. The second classroom is a very noisy place. No longer is there one or maybe two people talking but many people are talking at once. In each group at least one person is explaining, questioning, arguing, showing and discussing.

There is also the noise that comes when children move around. They walk around from their desks to the resource, to the teacher, or to another group. The whole group might move across the room to consult a map or a chart. This movement is not decreed and monitored by the teacher - the children make these decisions. They are in charge of their own activity.



## Curriculum 2005 and small group teaching

As the new curriculum emphasises, the demands on education today are that learners are able to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nobody can achieve these outcomes adequately by simply listening, by rote learning or by reciting lists of facts. Teachers have to use small groups to meet the standards of the new curriculum.

In small groups each child is given the opportunity to *practise and work at these skills*. Whether skills are mechanical or more abstract analytical skills they cannot be learned unless they are actually practised.

In small groups the children have to really work with information, to apply factual knowledge to real problems, to practise finding information from their peers, their teachers and sometimes their community. The children learn to discover knowledge from multiple sources. They learn to manipulate information, to perform functions and operations, not just collect and memorise facts.

Every small group is made up of a number of individuals. The children are

forced to deal with people who have different opinions and experiences. *They learn social skills and attitudes.* They learn to work co-operatively.

There are times when you have to introduce your class to social attitudes which are in the new curriculum such as respect, consideration or fairness. You have to start by talking, perhaps allowing some discussion or role playing. But in a small group the process of learning can be deepened. The children have to deal with each other's different attitudes and ideas in a very real way. They have to deal with each others' real behaviour not abstract rules.

Group work encourages children *to think and work independently.* It helps them to apply knowledge to problems in innovative ways. It forces them to face *problem solving* and allows them the satisfaction of actually solving problems for themselves.

Small groups help learners *to manage their own time.* This means that they have to take responsibility for their own work and not be dependent on the adult for constant direction about when and where to work .

Not only do learners have a chance to practise skills in small groups it provides them with *a much less threatening*

*environment* than in the whole class. Children often take criticism or correction from their peers more easily. They are often more comfortable about raising problems and question with their peers than with a teacher.

Small groups allow learners to work at a *pace decided by the group*. Teachers can use small groups to sensitise children to the different needs of the members of a group.

Lastly small groups are vital for the special needs of *second language learners*. They help to build confidence in the use of language because the children have the opportunity to practise it in a more comfortable environment.



## How to start small groups in your classroom

**You have to *teach* a class how to work in groups**

If a class is used to more traditional work, working in groups is not easy for the children or for you. Do not expect it to succeed immediately. It does not come naturally, you have to start carefully and prepare the way.

Do not worry that you are wasting time on this. You are actually working on the Critical Outcomes of Curriculum 2005.

1. **Explain! Explain! Explain!** that the class is going to work in a different way. Explain what small groups are and why you are going to use them. You want them to be interested in the process and to feel part of an interesting new experiment. Appeal to their understanding of co-operation, team work as well as independence and responsibility.

2. Start gradually, especially if you have a large class in overcrowded conditions. Start with pairs. Later change the pairs. Then put two pairs together. If the desks won't move, have one pair turn around and work with the pair behind them.

Do not be afraid of having children sitting on top of their desks, on the floor, in the corridor or even outside. Obviously, you would send only the most reliable learners out of your sight. If they are interested they will work.

Or you can start with only one small group. Put together your best behaved, most reliable kids and let them work independently but in full view of the rest of the class. The rest of the class continues working in the traditional way but make sure that they are aware of what is happening. Discuss the work of the group so all can hear taking care not to embarrass anybody. At the end of a unit of work discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this way of working first with the group and then with the whole class. Then get volunteers for a second group to start. You would use only short units of work to do this so that within a reasonable length of time most of the class has had one experience of working in a group.

**3. Formulate and teach the ground rules.** Do not attempt to take short cuts on the rules. It takes time for learners to appreciate what in fact, is a major change in behaviour.

Have a discussion about what makes a group work, about the rights and responsibilities of individuals to themselves and to the success of the



group. Refer to their own experience of *team work*, for example in sports and families, working a farm or running a school.

It is useful to talk about personality differences and strategies we use to work together. Children need to practise *listening* to each other and constantly to be reminded of how *to communicate politely*.

We have to teach them about *turn taking*. Games are useful ways of practising turn taking. At the same time it is wise to note that in normal talk between people we do interrupt each other- we do not always wait for our turn. So you also have to teach the children *how to interrupt politely*.

It is vital that the class understands what to do if they cannot follow instructions. If you want them to work independently they will have to have strategies to deal with not knowing what to do next. You can be sure that such difficulties will arise so make sure that there is a procedure to follow. Look at the set of rules on page ..... for one idea of how to handle confusion over instructions.

You will need to develop a set of rules. Ideally the children should participate in making the rules. This makes the rules "theirs" rather than imposed by a higher authority.

Make a big, very visible chart of the rules. Refer to them constantly so that they become part of the culture of the classroom . You will know they are successful when the children start quoting the rules to each other. Your aim is to have the children use them as guidelines for their own behaviour. Discipline should not rely only on the authority of the teacher if we want to help the learners take responsibility for their own learning.

The set of rules on the next page was developed in a grade five classroom and is intended as an example only. You and your class make up your own set together.



## How to make a group work well

It takes hard work to make a group work well

Take turns

Listen to each other

Help each other

Make sure nobody is left out

Share out the work

Read the instructions carefully

If you cannot understand the instructions:

1. Discuss them in your group

If you still cannot understand them

2. Discuss them with another group

If you still don't know what to do

3. Put up your hand and ask for help from the teacher

Be aware of how much noise you are making

Use your mother tongue to help each other

4. It won't be easy! Even after all your careful preparation do not expect the groups to work smoothly - they probably will not! But do not give up!

After you have the groups set up and the routine more or less under way spend as much time as possible discussing and analysing how well groups are working or not working. Talk about what is preventing work, let the children suggest possible solutions to problems.

So you must systematically draw the attention of the class to how groups function. Whenever you can get the class to discuss the relationship of individual and collective needs. Make aspects of group work part of your assessment. You can give marks for participation in the group as much as you can for correctly solving maths problems.

Teaching how to work in small groups is not a waste of time. You are providing an ongoing lesson in many of the Critical Outcomes which are part of Curriculum 2005. In addition you will have an easier classroom and the children will be learning invaluable lessons to serve them in their life and work conditions of the future.

5. How big is a small group. Again this depends on your class and in particular

on the size of the room and the kind of desks you have .

Keep in mind the purpose of a small group which is to allow the learners to learn by interacting with each other.

*Pairs* are useful and should be used frequently but they are not a group. But the interaction is not the same as in a group. There are fewer communication difficulties to negotiate and fewer ideas to consider.

*Three learners* in a group has to be watched. There is always the tendency for two to gang up on one!

*Four and up* is when communication and interaction become serious factors.

*More than 10* gets difficult, and more than 15 is very difficult if not impossible. The larger the group

But in some conditions the groups have to be very large which means that only a few members actually participate. When you have classes of 60, 70 and up a group of 20 at least allows a few kids to talk. It is better than spending the whole school year listening, only speaking when the teacher gets to you!

6. How to choose the members of a small group. There are no rules on organising small groups. Essentially, you make the decisions which suit your kids, your subject and your classroom. But the composition of groups can be tricky.

The options are :

- You can decide who works in each group
- You can let the learners decide who they want to work with
- You can draw names out of a hat

At the beginning when the class is learning how to work in groups it is probably wiser for the teacher to make the decisions. The children need to experience the process for a while first.

So at the beginning ignore the wails and insist on your decisions about who works in which group.

Drawing names from a hat or any other random selection can be dangerous because you could end up with disastrous combinations of all the class rascals in one group!

However, children get very intense about who they work with so you need to be sensitive to personal relations in the class as a whole. You have to weigh up

several problems to which there are no easy solutions - you have to make judgements based on your knowledge of the children.

You have to weigh up the merits of *allowing friends to work together*. Some experts advise against putting friends together. There is also the opinion that *mixing the sexes in one group* is not advisable because it encourages bad behaviour. Or, that boys tend to dominate and girls to take the subservient roles.



You also have to decide on *whether to mix different ability levels*. Sometimes you will find it best to group them according to their abilities. For example if you want to do some catch-up remedial work with the slower learners put the faster kids on supplementary work while you take the slower kids through difficult areas more slowly. *Slow learners are more comfortable* talking about their problems in front of a small group of their peers.

But there are also reasons to have *mixed ability groups*. You will probably use mixed groups more often simply because they work so well. They seem to benefit both the slower and faster learners equally well. They also avoid stigmatising the different levels. Kids are quick to

categorise groups as the "Dumb" ones and the "Brainy nerds"

There is some opinion that small groups penalise the brighter, faster learners .

But if the learners are encouraged to set their own pace the faster ones are not necessarily held back. In fact, the faster learners gain from having to explain concepts or demonstrate skills, a process which deepens their understanding. Furthermore, as the new curriculum emphasises, learners are not only acquiring knowledge they are also learning attitudes and social skills. Teamwork is often difficult for very bright children so the peer pressure of a small group is of value to them.

But again, there are no hard and fast rules about how you organise your groups. You are the best person to make such decisions because you know your class.

Eventually the learners themselves develop the maturity to make their own groups, but that takes time.

7. How long should the groups last You are able to move them around as you need. If the point of group work is to make learners feel comfortable it can only help to work with friends. If a group of friends becomes a centre of giggles and gossip - then you split them up.



It should also be pointed out that it is unlikely that you would keep the same groups throughout the year. A group should continue long enough to settle down; for the group members to get to know each other. But on the other hand, learners get bored if they are together too long. A change every now and again helps to bring a little extra bit of interest and motivation.

*Make sure that you do keep changing the groups.* Once the routine is under way it is important to keep changing the groups. You want the learners to gain the maximum benefit from interacting with all members of the class. This includes working with people whom they thoroughly dislike! We all have to work with people we don't like and the children have to develop those social skills.

**This does not come easily for children so you must watch carefully. Even as adults some of us never learn how to work with people we dislike, so we cannot expect too much from adolescents.**

8. What grades can work in small groups? Groups can be used from the earliest years to the end of school. As the attention span increases the more effective groups become. Young children will work as happily in groups as they

play in groups. At the intermediate level, groups are very productive as long as the tasks are sufficiently well thought out to keep the learners motivated and occupied. By high school learners have to be given the responsibility to organise and pace their own work.

9. Coping with discipline Initially it is difficult to use the small group approach because it feels as though you are giving up control. In a sense, that is exactly what you are doing - transferring responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learners themselves. Accepting and responding to that responsibility is a hard but crucial lesson if we want creative, motivated self- starters.

**But a teacher never really surrenders responsibility for what is happening in a classroom. The trick is to see what the learners can handle on their own and what requires your intervention.**

You have to watch for behaviour which is beyond the ability of the group to control. There are children who will not work themselves and who take pleasure in preventing others from working. You will find learners who, for various reasons , take pleasure in destroying the effectiveness of the group. The teacher cannot allow this to happen .

*How do you intervene?* First, see if the group can find its own solutions with your help. If this is not possible then withdraw the culprits. Most children hate being left out. In a classroom buzzing with activity they feel deprived at being isolated and end up promising the moon in order to get back into the group.

In addition if you include in your assessment performance in the group you can use marks to control bad behaviour.

But there are always the tough ones who remain genuinely unaffected by anything. Isolate them, let them work on their own but watch for any opening to start talking.

10. You must expect noise and mess! If you want a class of 25, 35, 47 children to explore and exchange ideas, they must talk. They will laugh. They will use loud voices to emphasise or argue. If they are to organise their own work they will walk around the classroom which means they will bump into desks, walls, chairs and you.

If you want them to learn by doing then you must expect that there will be mess—paper, glue, sand, cardboard and mud on the floor.

These are the consequences of a room full of busy active children so you must plan for this. Before you start small group work

make sure that there are places for all items, and that all the children know about those places.

Make sure that time is allowed for clean up and insist that this is carried out. You will have to impose some fairly strong penalties to help the learners to develop these work habits.



## 11. Getting the groups to work independently

You have chosen the groups and discussed co-operative work, you have prepared packets of tasks but there is still a large problem to solve - how to help the groups work independently.

At all levels learners are used to being told what to do, when to start and when to finish; books and stationery are handed out by the teacher. *The learners do not make their own decisions about their learning.*

With this background we cannot expect them to make a sudden change from those habits and to understand how to work co-operatively and independently without considerable help. They have to be *taught* how to work independently.

Do not hesitate to spend time on exactly how work will proceed. The learners will not grasp it fully unless you also demonstrate and show them exactly what will happen. They will probably still not grasp it.

You must have *practise runs*, where all the groups do several small tasks collectively and independently. Then you can start the real work with a small but real set of activities on the theme you have chosen.

You can be quite sure that five minutes into the lesson you will have half the class tugging at your sleeve, madly waving their hands, calling out in great distress " We don't know what to do!" They will spend the initial time constantly seeking reassurance that their decisions are correct.

*Do not give up!* Initially it is frightening for learners to make their own decisions. So at first be as kind as the size of your class permits. The panic won't last! Do not hesitate to interrupt their work on the units in order to reinforce the rules and principles of co-operation. Explain again what co-operative work is, and if necessary introduce new rules.

You must get them to the stage of not depending on you for all decisions. Help them take pride in their own independent functioning.

## 12. Organising independent work.

Some suggestions that work:



*1. Tracking sheets.* These are sheets that allow the learners and the groups to plan their work, to decide on their own pace of work and to know exactly what remains to be done. They also allow you to record assessment.

Each tracking sheet contains several

columns. The first column lists the activities which you have prepared, their names and numbers them very carefully. The second column is for the learners to record the date when they start and finish. A third column indicates whether an activity is compulsory or optional. A fourth column is for assessment, marks or comments. You can include a column for self or peer assessment. You can also include a column for things like "Ability to work co-operatively: or "Helpfulness"

You design the tracking sheets according to whatever activities you have made and what you want to assess.

Each learner receives one of these sheets. Or, you can give a tracking sheet to each group. If you have no copying facilities, train your learners to make their own sheets by copying the example you have put on the board.

*2. It is also wise to have a large chart of the tracking sheet on the wall, where the whole class can see it easily. This lists all the activities , indicates which ones are compulsory to be assessed.*

The tracking sheets and the charts mean that you do not have to make copies of activities for each group in the class. Make one set of each activity and it then circulates round the groups. Thus if there are six groups in the class you make six different activities and one or two extra for

the faster groups.

The chart is necessary to coordinate and smooth the process. The wall chart assigns an activity to a different group every day and helps to avoid argument and confusion.

**A sample tracking sheet:**

Activity Number	Activity Name	Date started - Completed	Compulsory	Assessment
1	New Vocabulary			
2	Newspaper article			
3	Fill in the gaps			
4	Make a graph			
5	Story			
6	Draw a picture			
7	Model			

**Example of a wall chart :**

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Frid.
Group A	Activity 1	Activity 2	3	4	5
B	5	1	2	3	4
C	4	5	1	2	3
D	3	4	5	1	2
E	2	3	4	5	1



*3. Storing activities* Make sure that the activities are stored in a way that the groups can find them easily and put them away easily. Have boxes, large Corn Flake ones do well, clearly marked with exactly the same names and numbers as are on the tracking sheets.

You must insist on all material being put away carefully. With a whole class working on the material, you expect a fair amount of wear and tear. But if well organised and if the class is trained, you should not have to spend time re-making activity sheets.

*4. Be sure to keep every single activity,* with all the instructions, worksheets, pictures, samples of tracking sheets. If you are wise you will keep a list of all the activities and their outcomes, box and label them all well. Over the years you build up an extremely valuable set of resources which gradually decreases the preparation work you have to do.

*5. Make sure that the necessary stationery* is easily available. You do not want learners sitting doing nothing for a whole period because they do not have pencils - which some children will happily do! You do not want to answer a hundred requests for rulers or erasers.

*6. Group leadership* A vital aspect of teaching groups to work independently is to ensure that children can carry out the

different roles required for a small group to function. So you have to assign the different responsibilities and you have to teach the functions of those responsibilities. This way you are not leaving the essential tasks to chance or to the more conscientious children. You are also teaching them real life skills of operating in small groups.

For example you need a person who will collect the material at the beginning of a class and return everything to the correct place. It is sometimes necessary to have a leader who is in charge , who is responsible to see that the group works well and follows all the ground rules. A time keeper is a useful person to have or the groups end up rushing to put things away at the end and you start to lose material.

As you go along you will discover what roles are necessary. You are probably better to assign the roles at the beginning but eventually the groups should be mature enough to elect their own positions. You must encourage rotation of the different roles.

**Preparing activities for small groups.**  
The success or failure of small group work depends on the activities you design and make.

These activities have to be designed, prepared and organised by the teacher for each unit of work. It is possible to find commercially made activities but even if one could afford them, they never fit the particular needs of a classroom.

Like the activities in this booklet, they are useful for ideas on how to make your own. Modern teaching requires teachers to make and prepare activities which meet the particular needs of a particular class and of a particular set of individual children. The textbook (if you have one) is no longer the basis for teaching. It is a resource, particularly for the teacher, but you have to convert the content of the syllabus and the textbook into meaningful, active work for your particular classroom.

This is very hard work for teachers. But once a set of activities is prepared for say one or two weeks, you can relax, there is no more preparation for that week. You can observe your learners working. This does not mean that you are not working! You can concentrate on assessment, you will be acting to facilitate the work of the groups or you can work with individual

learners.

It is very sensible for teachers to cooperate on making activities. Collective thinking will produce much more imaginative activities, helps to lessen the burden on individual teachers and is the most productive way of evaluating how well a set of activities worked.

**Activities** Small groups must have something to do. One of the common problems with small groups teaching is that teachers put their learners into small groups and then continue to teach them as they always have. *All they have done is change the seating arrangement.*

Small group learning requires specially designed activities. Performing these activities in small group conditions is the way the learners will achieve the outcomes you want. This is how learners become active, how they learn to problem solve, how they learn to work in a team. All of these new outcomes we are now aiming at are achieved because the children are given the opportunity to actually practise and experience these skills, and attitudes. The activities you design must let the learners experience processes or thought patterns from which they can construct new knowledge.

Another common mistake is to limit activities to discussion only. You cannot expect primary level children to be able to *discuss ideas*. Generally this is beyond the capabilities of learners up to the early high school years. It is also asking too much of second language learners. You must be sure that your learners have the skills to engage in discussion and that they have enough background knowledge on which to base discussion. .

You must design activities that involve the learners in active use of many skills.

### Ten essential features of activities

1. In order to make small groups work, the learners must find the activities *interesting*. They must be what the children consider fun so that they are motivated to continue working. They are working on their own so that motivation is crucially important.

2. Make sure that you challenge the learners with *problem solving activities*. The activities should not be too easy, nor should they be too difficult. This is a hard balance to find but teachers only find this balance by trial and error. Always have more activities or exercises than you think you will need and include a variety of levels of skill. This allows the pupils a choice, so that those who need a

challenge can work on the more difficult items, and the slower children also find their own pace.

3. Make sure that you include in the unit of activities *a balanced selection of the skills, knowledge and attitudes* emphasised by Curriculum 2005. You are not just focussing on knowledge!

4. It is important that the activities involve work in *all of the four learning skills* - reading, writing, listening and speaking. Each activity can involve one or more of the skills. The compulsory activities can be focussed on essential elements of the content you are teaching and on ensuring that all four learning skills are covered.

5. If you are introducing new ideas *relate them to something which the learners already know*. Learning is achieved by adding on to the knowledge we already possess. Activities should relate as closely as possible to things and concepts which are real in the actual lives of your pupils. Wherever possible bring real things and real people into the classroom. What is relevant to a child in Johannesburg is not at all real to a child in a small KZN rural village. What is real in a textbook produced in London or New York is not going to relate to a child anywhere in

South Africa. You have to translate the ideas into the reality of your classroom and the learners' lives.



6. Design *active*. They must involve the learners in doing something whether it is writing, drawing, arguing, researching and so on. Ideally pupils must feel that they are producing something valuable. We are trying to get away from passive work which would be copying from a textbook, or reading from a textbook with no specific purpose.

7. Always include as much *collaborative work* as possible. Children do not always learn everything from teachers or other adults. Design tasks which cannot be completed by an individual but which require participation by other members of the group. Working together provides the stimulus to question and discuss more freely. They are naturally apt to be more interested in each other's opinions and are more likely to understand each other's difficulties with concepts.

8. Make sure that you provide topics which will *encourage talk*. When we have to put concepts into our own words, we discover what we do not understand, and we consolidate new ideas which we have learned

9 It is also important to provide activities which *involve writing*. The act of writing down an idea or a succession of ideas forces one to be clear about what we actually do understand. Writing down concepts is a way of learning them. Because writing is so much slower than talking learners are forced to look more carefully into ideas.

10. If you are working in the sciences make sure the activities are designed to reinforce *science skills*. Include activities such as categorising, classifying, generalising , hypothesising .

Children do not automatically know how to work independently. They are used to being told exactly what to do and when.

**You have to provide activities which will keep them interested and make them want to go on. So you must provide a variety of activities.**

They all have different tastes and they will not maintain interest if they have to work on the same thing for too long.

Some activities might appear to have little educational value but if they keep the learners involved and interested they have a definite impact on the attitude of



the learners. So build in some fun!

Sometimes it is far more difficult for the pupils to know how to proceed than mastering the actual content of each exercise.

**Keep in mind when you are making activities - your instructions must be absolutely clear - without any ambivalence. This is almost impossible to get right at the beginning - takes some practice!**

And as the children get used to this method they develop a sense of what you want them to do.

How does one start making activities  
You have decided what part of the *syllabus* you are going to work on , and how long you will spend on it . If you do not have a syllabus, decide on a section of a textbook or on something which you know has to be covered during the year.

Next you decide on a *theme or a programme organiser*. See the section on theme teaching for suggestions on how to use themes.

Then decide on *the outcomes* you want.  
In other words at the end of these

exercises what skills, attitudes and knowledge will the children have acquired? Be very specific - you want to be able to measure these outcomes, although this is not always possible. If you cannot measure in terms of marks you must be able to report on some change in behaviour or attitude.

Next decide on the *learning areas* you want to include.

Then you choose *what the groups will do* to achieve the outcomes you chose.

There are numerous activities to choose from. Once you start this kind of work you will spend much of your life hunting for useful, interesting activities. They vary of course, from subject to subject.

**A short list of some of the kinds of activities:**

1. You can start with the *ordinary exercises* that you have always given your learners. Only now the difference would be that you let the pupils discuss problems, and you let them work at their own pace, and you let them find information for themselves. You will see some different processes at work when a small group of children is working on a problem and when a whole class in separate desks works on the same

problem.

2. *Making charts* or drawings to illustrate an abstract idea.. To understand historical dates - make a timeline of their own lives and then of their grandparents' lives. You are getting them to depict time graphically. Time is an abstract concept fundamental to studying history which you must make sure the learners grasp.

3. *Friezes*. A set of drawings illustrating a historical event, a cycle in nature, crops of a country which is then pinned up around the top of the walls for a limited time only.

4. *Surveys*. In these activities the children must convert facts into questions, a process which looks more deeply into the information, and then they must listen and analyse the responses of others to those questions. The learners might not find any new information but they would be manipulating facts and deepening their knowledge. If you were teaching nutrition they could survey their classmates on eating habits. If you were doing averages in arithmetic, they could survey their neighbours to find the average number of children in a family, or the average age of the mothers.

5. *Making models*. These are excellent to

help build understanding of a difficult concept. The learners have to in a sense duplicate what they are attempting to understand. Instead of explaining mapping contours verbally only - give a group some small pieces of glass. Have them place them under each other starting with the smallest and working up to the largest. As they place the pieces down, they draw around them and at the end remove the glass and they will have a perfect set of contours. This will back up your verbal explanation beautifully. Or they could build a clay mountain in stages and copy the outline of each stage, cut them out and glue them on to one sheet.

6. *Drawing.* Most children enjoy drawing and it is a good way of reinforcing detail. A drawing of a scene at the guillotine during the French Revolution or of a battle in the Anglo-Boer War will probably be done with appropriate gore and much enjoyed. Take it as far as you can- ask them to draw in all the main characters, such as the politicians of the time. They will have to do a bit of research on who they are, and come up with imaginative ways of including them in the picture.

7. We always used *diagrams* in the science. Try and use real objects, get the children to go and find examples of the

different leaf types to draw. Use these drawings in as many ways as you can think of to help build vocabulary. Provide the labels and have the learners attach them to the drawing, do it vice versa. Give them a diagram with the labels wrongly attached, which they have to correct.

If you are teaching points of the compass in geography give them a written description of a village and have them actually draw it. Have them draw a village showing where it would be good to open a new business.

8.. *Games.* Start looking at all the games we have played since childhood and think about turning them into learning activities.

*Cards.* If there are words or facts or figures which have to be memorized put them, on small cardboard cards and have the learners play games like Memory, Fish, Old Maid. The Bakers Family.

*Boardgames.* Make a snakes and ladders game but use historical events, Make a version of Monopoly using historical events.

*Dominoes.* Make a set of dominoes with names of countries and their capitals instead of dots. On one dominoe you would write *England: Ottawa*; on the next one *Canada : Canberra* and the next one

*Australia: Copenhagen.* The player who has *Canada* puts it down next to *Ottawa*. Then it is the turn of one who has *Australia*.

Hangman. Using only vocabulary from the current lesson.

9. *Puzzles.* Jumble up the letters in the names of famous characters. Jumble up a sentence from a lesson in geography, history or biology. A very effective device is to write out a sentence which contains crucial information on cardboard, then cut it up into separate words and have the learners put it together again. They really have to think about meaning, and use the vocabulary in way which shows they have understood it.

10. *Lists.* Making lists is a good way of reinforcing vocabulary and focussing on key concepts. For example you can have the learners make lists of the characteristics of something in zoology, botany or geography. They can make comparative lists or alphabetical lists. Each time they are thinking about the concepts and reinforcing vocabulary .

11. *Charts.* Give them blank charts with columns for inserting information. Such as advantages and disadvantages of train travel, causes of malnutrition,

consequences of the Industrial Revolution. They have to sift through information to find the essential.

12. *Food.* Any activity which involves food is guaranteed success. Be on the constant look out for food items which are cheap if not free. If you can find such things use them to practise fractions in arithmetic, to introduce profit making in business economics by setting up a "shop" ; to practise vocabulary in a language class.

13. *Written exercises.* Cloze. Write out passages or sentences on the topic you are teaching but leave out crucial words. The have to fill in the essential information.

Stories. Work out situations which fit the concepts you are teaching and ask the learners to write short stories. You are teaching volcanoes- have them write an adventure story about being caught in a volcanic eruption.

Preparing the activities.

This is the time consuming work! Once you have made all the above decisions you must get the material ready to hand over to the groups. They have to *look attractive*, the instructions have to be *easy to follow*, they have to be *labelled and numbered* and they have to be *organised* so parts do not get lost.

There are many ways of organising your activities. This is one example.

- Prepare a set of big manilla envelopes. Used ones are fine. You will need one for each activity.
- On the outside write the name and number of the activity. This is exactly the same as the names and numbers on the tracking sheet and on the wall chart.
- If you can draw a picture or paste a picture of something relating to the theme - makes it more interesting for the kids and helps to identify the theme.
- You can write the instructions on the outside of the envelope or on a separate piece of paper or card to go inside.
- Inside you place all the necessary parts of the activity. If it is a game, the cards, or board go inside. If it is filling in spaces the exercise is



envelope. If they are to do a survey, the questions, and the bar chart, the graph or the set of columns is included. This envelope must contain everything the group members will need to complete the activity.

Each separate piece of paper or card should have the name and number of the activity on it.



Theme teaching is ideal for small groups



What is theme teaching?

How do we use programme organisers?

The new curriculum emphasises the need *to teach in a way that relates to the real world which learners experience*. In the real world knowledge does not come in neat, separate packages. From their natural interest in the environment around them children gain many different skills, attitudes and bits of knowledge.

That is why the new curriculum stresses *the necessity of integrating areas of learning*. Instead of working in totally separate subjects as we used to, we are now trying to find the ways in which the concepts and skills are related from subject to subject. We are trying to find ways of learning which are closer to reality.

It has become obvious that education needs to work in this direction because it is becoming more and more evident that the modern day work force must become more flexible, more able to apply different skills and knowledge to problems.

**Theme teaching is an invaluable aid to promote integration of knowledge.**

Instead of working in the old water tight

compartments of history, geography, math, and art, we now choose a subject or a concept which will interest the learners and look at it from the point of view of history, geography, math and art.

We now know that *learning is a process in which new knowledge is added to old knowledge*. The existence of the old knowledge helps us to grasp and remember new knowledge. When we hear about something new our first instinct is to compare it to something similar in our past experience. "Ah!" we say to ourselves, "I wonder if it is like the one I learned about a year ago? Is it similar to what I already know? If it is different, how is it different?"

That is why theme teaching helps learners with new knowledge. You choose a theme about which the children are already knowledgeable, something with which they are familiar. By activating that previous knowledge you have started the process of grasping new knowledge.

**We are starting with a subject area which comes from the real world and interest of the learners, which helps with motivation.**

In fact, there are times when the learners can choose their own themes. The subject of the theme is merely a vehicle which the teacher uses to teach skills and knowledge called for in the curriculum. But if well

chosen the themes or organisers help to keep the learners involved.

Nobody uses themes all the time. It is necessary to vary your approach. There are times when a mathematical or historical concept has to be introduced and taught as new skills or knowledge.

**How does one pick a theme?**

Seeing that the purpose is to use something directly from the experience and interests of your pupils, look at their lives and choose a subject which can be studied from the viewpoint of the new curriculum.

Let's say you chose *Taxis* as an ever present factor in the life of most of your learners. Now look at what you are required to teach from the curriculum and see if you can devise activities, projects, exercises on the subject of *Taxis* but working towards the outcomes for Language, Technology, Mathematics, Natural Science, Life Sciences, Economic Management.

There should be room to create problem solving exercises. You want work which will challenge the learners. Because the subject comes from real life you can make the problems ones which the learners will know as real and therefore be more likely to apply themselves.

Be careful about picking themes which are

too wide in their scope. For example *The Environment* would be a difficult programme organiser simply because it covers so much. You could have activities on *Water, Air Pollution, Alien vegetation Ecosystems, Permaculture, Soil Conservation* and many more. There has to be more of a focus so that the learners are not working with too many concepts at once.

Because the problems come from the real environment around the learners there is more chance of making use of resources actually in the community.

This relationship with the community is another emphasis of the new curriculum and one which is of great potential particularly for schools with poor resources.

### How do we plan theme teaching?

Planning becomes much more interesting when you use theme teaching. Instead of battling to understand over complicated textbooks and battling to find ways of making them relevant and interesting to the learners, you apply the curriculum outcomes to your theme subject and work out different activities.

Following the direction of the new



curriculum you know that you must have reading, writing, listening and speaking activities. You also want to include fun activities.



These will probably include activities in subject or learning areas which are not your own. Approach the teachers who are in these fields and see if you can work out something together. They can either help you plan something you teach, or better still, they can plan and teach a section of the work on the theme. This could be done by the teacher on staff who normally takes your class for this subject or you could approach another teacher and offer a time swap .

How does theme teaching help second language learners?

If you choose themes which arise from the experience and the world of your pupils you are *giving the second language learners an immediate boost*. They will be dealing with things which they know something about, not operating in a completely new and mystifying context. This helps to give them increased confidence which is a very necessary ingredient for speaking a new language.

However, it is essential that when planning theme work for a multicultural class or for a class of second language learners , that their special needs be taken into account. *You must teach vocabulary*. Do not ever assume that vocabulary is understood or

that it can be used with ease. Design exercises, puzzles, games that will get the children working with new vocabulary. Have the key words prominently displayed for as long as a theme is being worked on. Make sure that terminology is understood and used no matter what the activity. All subject areas including or maybe especially the sciences and mathematics, have special terminology which teachers tend to neglect.

Use the list below to make sure you design activities which will be **ACTIVE** and which will enable the learners to demonstrate a wide variety of skills, attitude and knowledge:

measure	share	cut
ask	plan	complete
solve	name	help
list	watch	hold
respect	write	discover
communicate	combine	debate
build	guess	investigate
decide	arrange	identify
draw	mix	choose
lead	listen	design
answer	attempt	look at
find	assist	select
read	explain	notice
hop	sew	challenge
order	co-operate	show
skip	suggest	prepare
find out	volunteer	compare
sort	record	balance
consider	defend	create
add	predict	tell

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## Appendix B

### Field notes on first workshop - 18 August SACOL

The workshop took place with activities in the following order:  
Number of participants = 16

#### **1. Introduction – ice breaker**

The LILT tutor introduced the educators to a number of possible icebreakers but used the one entitled: *What were you doing yesterday?* Here members were given cards on which activities were depicted. They had to find another participant who had been involved in the same activity. Language interaction took place, as they had to ask the question – ‘What did you do yesterday?’ The person who was questioned had to reply. ‘I ....’

#### **2. Rationale, background and explanation**

The LILT tutor accessed their prior knowledge by questioning the groups on their own classroom use of small groups. *How many use small groups?* Answers – too many children in the classroom; too little space in the classroom; noisy classrooms; questions about discipline; kids did not readily take to group work; some have tried, but have given up because it did not seem to work

Alternatives –The LILT tutor suggested that they work in pairs where there is limited space but pointed out that this was not really ideal. Larger groups are better.

#### **3. Background – drawing on own experience**

The LILT tutor explained that in Canada, (where she taught for many years) depending on the specific need of the school, they worked on a split-level classroom system. Here different grades are put together e.g. Grades 1 & 2, or 2 & 3 – sometimes the top grade 2 learners would be put with the slower grade 3 kids. She stressed that in this type of set-up, Small groups work is essential.

#### ***WHY use small groups?***

- Learners are doing the tasks themselves
- It gives them the confidence to speak. They are surrounded by a smaller group and do not have to perform in front of the entire class.
- They learn the language by USING it.
- In large classes, learners listen to the teacher, but do not actually use the language, so it is essential to work at getting them to use the language.
- They work at their own pace.
- Children are often scared to ask in front of the whole class if they are not sure.
- Discussion takes place in small groups.
- Eliminates chanting and rote learning.
- Small groups are a precursor to OBE where small activities allow the learner to work without being time bound.



- If you work in small groups, you grapple with things yourself. This is crucial for second language learners.
- In small groups there is more talk by individuals whereas when the teacher speaks, there is very little talk by learners – the only way to learn a language is by using it.
- Don't use small groups all the time

#### 4. Activity

Educators were given a selection of seven activities. These were laid out on a table and they had to choose the activities from the table and return them once they had been completed.

- A timekeeper was appointed, as there were 7 activities – Activity no 7 was obligatory. The timekeeper had to ensure that they limited the time spent on each activity and did not get over-involved in too few activities and consequently did not complete them all. They were given approximately 45 minutes to complete these activities.
- Tracking sheets were handed out. All completed activities were to be recorded on these upon completion. The advantages of these tracking sheets are as follows:
  - Good record keeping is ensured.
  - Ongoing assessment takes place.
  - The teacher can monitor progress and they act as an excellent record of work done.
  - If parents ask about their children's development, tracking sheets are a good record of growth and improvement.

All the activities related to the reasons why group work is beneficial. They were in the form of cards which asked the following questions:

1. What are the benefits of using small groups in a classroom?
2. How would you introduce small groups to your class?
3. How big should a group be?
4. Who chooses the groups?
5. What rules are made for group work?
6. Do you mix ability levels?
7. What happens to discipline in a small group classroom?

The LILT tutor (here the facilitator) moved amongst the groups assessing, evaluating and addressing problems. I also sat with each group in turn to observe how they were managing the activities.

Most interactions were in isiZulu unless one joined them.

The LILT tutor introduced a 'Noise Maker' to interrupt groups. This could take the form of a rattle, or even two pieces of metal banged together. This might not work immediately, but learners get used to it and learn to respond to it. (The LILT tutor uses a piece of wire bent into a circle. Bottle tops have been strung through the wire,

and when shaken, it makes an effective rattle, which makes enough noise to attract the attention of even the noisiest group!)

Report-back – not too much as this was the same stuff over and over again.

Started with one group – input from other groups.

## **5. Interactive feedback and reflection**

### **What was different in this activity when one compares it to a ‘chalk and talk’ lesson?**

There was much discussion, and participants reflected on different ideas. Active thinking about issues related to the promotion of learning. Learning was experiential.

The LILT tutor pointed out that when remedial work is required that a particular group, which is weaker, could be singled out and an activity could be designed especially for them.

The principle of Ubuntu applied here as the participants could help each other (Co-operative learning). The LILT tutor suggested that they always start with a fun activity.

The LILT tutor went on to underline the fact that it takes time and it does not happen instantly but that educators need to keep trying because when group work is successful, it can be enormously effective.

### **How big should a group be?**

- The LILT tutor suggested that anything from 5 to 10. There are no rules.
- In a class of 70, educators should try groups of 10 (at least this is better than no groups) but if they are able to make the groups smaller, all the better. A group of least below 15 is reasonable; below 10 is ideal.
- She suggested that educators avoid groups of 3 as this often leads to a two against one situation.

### **Who chooses the group?**

- Small groups of friends are comfortable and this might be a way to start.
- If, however, chaos results, then separate them.
- Random groups do not always work – but can be tried when the children are more *au fait* with the dynamics of a small group.
  - A good starting point could be according to birthdays.
  - Initially, the educator should choose the groups; later they could choose their own groups.
  - If this does not work, try some other way of composing the groups

### **What rules need to be made for group work?**

- Learners should be taught turn taking. An example of this might be that they hold an object, and only the one who is holding the object may speak. When someone wants to say something, they have to be holding said object in order to speak.
- This also leads to effective listening, with their eyes, body and ears.
- Instructions need to be very clear before the activity commences.

### **Do you mix levels?**

- Groups need to be changed regularly (every two weeks).
- First put one group together. Later two groups together i.e. groups can be combined.
- Group constitution must be flexible.

### **Does discipline suffer?**

- Discipline is only as good as the activity. In other words, if the activity is meaningful, children are absorbed in what they are doing and are therefore have a sense of accomplishment.

### ***Observations***

The educators were obviously enjoying themselves and there was much discussion and interaction amongst the teachers. This interaction was mainly the sharing of ideas, relating personal experiences and talk about their own situation.

These activities were geared for educators i.e. to show them how to apply the principles of group work. How will they react when they have to apply these in the classroom?

During the activity, each participant was given a copy of the booklet on how to manage small groups and on the question cards there were clear page references to where the topic in question was explained. As soon as some of the participants realised this, they simply referred to the manual without actually grappling with the question. Was this perhaps because they wanted to give the *right* answer?

## **Appendix B**

### **Field notes made at Bulwer workshop - 1 September 2000**

Number of participants = 4

As there were only four educators present the LILT tutor had to change the format of her presentation. She sat with them around a table and spoke to them informally as part of the group. She managed to get the educators enthused in spite of the fact that many of them had travelled long distances to get to the workshop and were obviously tired. Our hostess at the school provided everyone with a cup of tea and this, together with the LILT tutor's presentation seemed to do wonders to perk them up.

#### **1. Ice breaker**

She introduced them to a few icebreakers, but simply at a theoretical level and showed them a few examples.

#### **2. Rationale, background explanation**

She discussed the main motivation as to why group work was essential for the teaching of English L2. She pointed out that small groups were an important link with OBE and Curriculum 2005 because:

- It encourages team work
  - It helps with problem solving
  - It encourages time management
  - It develops independent workers
- 
- The theory of small groups is backed up by extensive research and is an important means to teaching ESL. She made the point that group work was not just a rearrangement of desks, but that learners should have easy access to each other in order to communicate effectively. There are different kinds of group work e.g.
    - Pairs
    - Buzz groups
    - Jigsaw groups

She also introduced them to tracking sheets, the concept of the timekeeper and the 'noise maker'.

#### **3 Background – drawing on own experience**

The LILT tutor questioned them on their own experiences in the use of small groups. Again the question of noise levels, discipline and the queries from by the principal as to whether they are having problems controlling their class discipline was brought up. The LILT tutor pointed out that there is an increased noise level during the group activities, but that it is a controlled level of noise and that there is a vast difference between the 'busy' noise and the kind of noise that emanates from an unattended class. The LILT tutor told them about her background in the field of group work and her Canadian experience. The educators asked questions about the logistics of the implementation of group work. The LILT tutor pointed out that group work does not happen automatically, but that it takes time to teach the learners to work in groups.

The LILT tutor then made the following points regarding small group work:

- Small groups allow learners to use the language rather than just listening to how a language is used – i.e. active use of the language rather than passive listening.
- In small groups the language is used meaningfully and the structures of the language are applied rather than simply being listened to.
- Confidence is increased because the atmosphere is relaxed and not as threatening as when a child is expected to speak in front of the whole class.
- Speaking to one's peers increases communication.
- If the activities are fun and interesting, motivation is improved.
- Focus is on communication (meaning) and not on form
- Different communication skills are used, i.e. persuasion, suggestion, questioning, arguing a point and hypothesising.
- Learners can proceed at their own pace.
- Questioning takes place in a non-threatening atmosphere.
- Rote learning, chanting and drills are precluded.

#### **4 Activity and interactive feedback**

The LILT tutor then introduced the group to an exercise on topic analysis.

She supplied them with *function words* (instructions) from recent Matric papers and possible definitions. They had to match the words with their respective definitions. The object of this exercise is to help learners to identify and respond appropriately to these function words to keep them 'on topic'. There was much discussion on the topic of answering questions and the problem of learners misunderstanding questions in tests and papers.

Because the group was so small, the LILT tutor sat with them and they briefly discussed the seven principles governing the use of small groups. Many of the problems that were raised were similar to those mentioned in the first workshop. These were discussed at length.

#### **Observation**

One of the teachers said that she had really enjoyed the time with the LILT tutor and that she had already tried group work before but had given it up as it did not seem to work. She was however determined to renew her efforts and try again.

## Appendix B

### Field notes made at the Workshop at SACOL - 8 September 2000

Number of participants = 13

On this occasion I joined one of the groups after the icebreaker as a participant-observer. The reason for this was because some of the educators were late in arriving and I directed them to the venue.

The LILT tutor had just had them in their respective groups when I joined them. The number of educators was more satisfactory and there were four groups of about five each. The LILT tutor gave the same introductory talk on the use and benefit of using group work in L2 classes and she assigned seven activities to the participants. Activity no 7 was obligatory. Each participant was given a Tracking sheet and we were told what to do. A timekeeper was appointed to our group and we selected our first activity.

#### **Our first activity was:**

- **How big should a group be?**

The LILT tutor had already handed out the handbook, so some members of the group worked out that the passage references referred to the manual. Consequently, many of them looked up the answer and did not really think about the question on the card.

Other questions we looked at were:

- **What rules are made for a group?**
- **What happens to discipline in a small group classroom? (Obligatory question).**
- **Who chooses the group?**

#### **Observations**

The time management in the group was not always too disciplined as many of the educators seemed to enjoy airing *their own* particular problems for discussion. The timekeeper tried valiantly to keep participants to time, but she eventually gave up. At one stage The LILT tutor arrived at our table and joined the discussion. She clearly came to check how we were progressing and the discussion moved to her questions. What she required us to do, was to take a step back and watch the *dynamic* that was taking place, rather than *what was being said*.

Does a form of time discipline eventually develop when a group is more accustomed to the small group classroom, or should one be so flexible so as to allow the structure to fall off the table occasionally? If so, to what extent?

Teachers were sorry when the workshop was over in spite of the fact that it was a Friday afternoon. They obviously enjoyed the time spent in the workshop. I should definitely follow up on his initial 'pilot project' next year and use the services of the LILT tutor more regularly. Her presentations are interesting, full of humour and enjoyable for the participants.

'I really want to try using small groups again in my classes. I gave up too soon. But will you please help me to develop activities?' Comment from one participant – *must follow up*.

Perhaps the LILT tutor and I should run a follow-up to help the teachers to develop their own materials. Perhaps we should look at the whole problem of creative writing with the portfolio assessment system starting in 2001!

## **Appendix B**

### **Field notes taken at the Greytown workshop 15 September 2000**

Number of participants = 9

#### **1. Ice breaker**

Participants were divided into their groups by counting them (one, two, one, two) in order to divide them into two groups. She gave an example of how one would divide up a group if the number were larger by numbering them one, two, three, four etc.) When she then told them to get into their two groups, there was some confusion, as one of the educators had not clearly understood in which group he was supposed to be. The LILT tutor used this as an example of how the system breaks down when a child does not remember his number or when instructions are not absolutely clear. She emphasised that learners need to be trained to listen in the use of group work.

#### **2. Rationale, background and explanation**

The LILT tutor explained to the participants that they were going to work in their allotted small groups and that the activity that they were going to participate in was to help learners with their creative writing. She explained that she would be treating them as though they were her class and that they would do an activity first and then they would spend some time reflecting on how the activities had worked after the activity had been completed. She also explained her Canadian experience to them and how the different grades were put together and that they had to use group work to address the Canadian situation.

#### **3. Activity**

She appointed a timekeeper and explained the function of the timekeeper. When the groups were more organised, a note taker, a leader, a reporter etc. could also be appointed. But for this particular activity only a timekeeper would be appointed.

The proposed activities were laid out on a central table and participants were instructed on how to utilise these activities. Only one set of activities was to be used by each group and they were to return the activity to the table after use. Tracking sheets were handed out and she explained how these work. She explained that there were twelve activities, of which they should do six. She pointed out that there were some crucially important activities. Numbers 3, 9 and 12 were compulsory and that extra marks would be awarded if they did more. Learners need to be told that they would get extra marks if they did the compulsory activities. She also highlighted the fact that there were some groups who did not do the activities in the specified time. Some children completely forget which are compulsory, but when marks are allocated at the end of the activity, they realise that the compulsory activities carry more marks than the others. They quickly realise that in order to obtain better marks, they need to listen carefully and they should not forget them again. Furthermore, if proper time is



kept they do more activities, which also mean higher marks. This teaches them to discipline their time allocation.

At this point they were given about 45 minutes to complete the activities and timekeepers were reminded to keep a careful watch on their use of time. The other members of the group would blame the timekeepers if they did not finish.

At this juncture, The LILT tutor went through the activities on the table. She stressed the importance of clear instructions before the activity commences.

- **Activity 1 Making good paragraphs**

This consists of an extract from a History text book. Participants have to find the sentence which does not belong.

- **Activity 2 Brainstorming.**

Participants take the set of instructions. In addition they have to take one page in the form of a mind map or graphic organiser on which they have to brainstorm ideas for an essay on “Sports in South Africa”. One person has to record the ideas in one of the graphic organisers (mind maps).

- **Activity 3 Connecting words**

Here the entire package has to be taken. Participants have to match sentences A and B to make full sentences. An example of this is:

A While the government is having many problems.

B Things are improving.

- **Activity 4 Essay structure**

This is a set of sentences relating to the kangaroo rat. The participants are required to put the sentences together to make up an essay. They are reminded on the instruction card that they must remember to stick to one idea per paragraph.

They could then check it against the original. This was removed from the package and would be returned when the activity had been completed.

- **Activity 5 Essay structure**

This is a similar exercise to activity 4 – here on the Chimpanzee. Scrambled sentences have to be put back together to make a coherent whole.

- **Activity 6 Essay structure**

Again a similar exercise to activities 4 and 5 – on Jesse Owens.

- **Activity 7 Essay structure**

Another similar exercise to activities 4,5 and 6 – here on hurricanes

- **Activity 8 Direct and indirect speech**

The rules for changing from Direct to Indirect Speech are outlined. This is followed by two sentences, which have to be changed either from direct to indirect speech or *vice versa*.

- **Activity 9 Topic analysis**

The object of this exercise is to teach learners how to answer the essay question, otherwise they write essays off topic. They need to identify the *function word*. The pack consists of function words and the participants have to match the function words with their definitions.

- **Activity 10 Paragraphs**

In this activity, the participants have to take one long paragraph (a passage on climate, taken from a Geography textbook) and divide it up into different paragraphs.

- **Activity 11 Categorising ideas**

Different objects and ideas are written on separate cards and the participants have to divide them into four different categories.

- **Activity 12 Connecting words**

In this activity, the participants have to identify the differences between a group of sentences. What happens here is that they are discussing the function of logical connecting words.

The groups were instructed which package they would do and to be conscious all the time of what is happening in the group so they could reflect on the activity.

At this point the LILT booklet on essay writing was handed out.

The LILT tutor moved around between the tables to check on progress.

After the activity, the LILT tutor introduced them to the ‘noise maker’. Children need to be trained to listen to the ‘noise maker’. She told them that there are many activities in the booklet for them to refer to.

Looked at – how do you choose small groups. Asked if any of them used a small group. She asked the educators how they chose their small groups. She introduced them to an activity, which consists of a picture of a goat in front of a house, behind a house or next to a house. They then have to go around the group and find a matching picture. They use language (here prepositions) in order to find a matching picture. Question: ‘Where is the goat in your picture in relation with your house?’ and by

finding the goat in the same position, a match is made and groups are formed. They also learn prepositions and use language.

Also 'What were you doing yesterday?' 'I was walking' etc. In the beginning it is a good idea to choose the children yourself so you can avoid troublemakers – discipline. 'Should you put friends together?' Everybody said 'No'.

Why do we use small groups?

Answers

- Everyone will talk
- They teach each other
- Help the shy children – please don't ask me –
- More comfortable
- Can ask questions
- Most important – the use the language – arithmetic – 50 kids teacher does all the talking – how many times a year does the child get a turn to talk?

Questions      Group 1: What size should a small group be?

Group 2: What rules should be made for group work?

### **Report back: Question on size of a group**

There are no rules. Group size depends on the size of the classroom, facilities. It differs from situation to situation. Pair work has a different dynamic. It is not difficult to talk to one person at a time – it happens all the time. As soon as there are more than two, the dynamic becomes more difficult. In a group of three, there is the danger of two ganging up against the third. More than ten is also very difficult but if you have 70 in your class, you might end up with a group as large as 20. This is not ideal, but in this way at least some children end up speaking more often than in a class of 70. Look at your options based on your numbers, furniture, room size etc. If the desks are long they are awkward to put together. A suggestion is that the kids first work in pairs and then turn around and work with the group behind. This is not easy because of the awkward desk sizes. In the case of a very large class, divide the class into two let one half of the class work in groups and the other half do a different exercise. Alternately one group can work in a group and the rest of the class observe and comment (fish bowl).

The LILT tutor then asked the question as to whether one should mix abilities. Some of the answers were:

- It can frustrate the fast learners and cause jealousy.
- Brightest ones do all the work – others are simply passengers.

The LILT tutor suggested that groups need to be changed around. You are not stuck with a group. If you have a child who is completely passive, remove it from the group and give it individual work. However you can't solve all the problems. Teach and then apply what you have just taught them. Sometimes a bright child may be held back a bit, but it is also learning other skills like listening and other social skills.

She referred them to page 20 of the booklet on group work.

Rules should be positive i.e. **not** *you must not* but *this is how you do it*.

If your instructions are not clear, chaos results – give them a strategy to deal with problems. If you get stuck let them use MT. Teaching across the curriculum and you can use the MT to explain a concept quickly – if you do not speak isiZulu, get the other kids to explain. If you are teaching English then you might come across a word which is crucial to the understanding of say, a poem, then use MT. Otherwise use English. The testing is in English. We must use English, but if they are stuck, let them use MT.

### **Assessment**

Tracking sheet. Sheet for every child. Assessment column. They must fill in a comment themselves. They must assess themselves. You then make further comments.

### **Report back : How do you introduce your children to working in small groups?**

It will not work, to suddenly put the children into small groups and to tell them that they will now be working in small groups. The children should be told well in advance that the organisation of the classroom is going to change. The learners are going to have to take more responsibility for their classroom activities.

The learners need to be told about all the things that are going to happen i.e.

- the desks are going to change,
- they are going to decide about who is to fetch the activities,
- they will decide who is going to do the timekeeping etc.

Discuss the ground rules with them – let them determine these in a discussion. They know what kind of rules they need and if they devise these themselves, they are far more likely to ‘own’ them. They are changing from a teacher-centred to a learner-centred class. It is not easy and needs to be taken slowly.

Discuss it at length and then do a practice run. Give them an easy activity. When it is over, discuss what happened within the group. Was it fun? Did it work? Was it easy to work within a group? Gradually work up to the whole class working in groups – if you can. If you can’t, let half the class work in groups. Be prepared – it probably won’t work. Don’t give up - try again. Review with the class what happened. Now, try it again.

You need to spend time developing small group activities like the ones you worked with today. They take time, but once you have them and you look after them, you can use them over and over again, year after year. Make one set of activities and all the groups use them. But one has to take time preparing them. You can probably work ahead for about two weeks. This will then keep the groups occupied for two weeks, and then you need to start preparing activities again.

Assessment is done on a continuous basis in the classroom while they are working. If you do not have copying facilities, the children can make their own tracking sheets. It can be written on the board and the learners can copy them from the board.

Small group work is an essential ingredient of OBE.

## Appendix C

### Notes taken during a conversation with the Materials Developer.

*Q: What was your objective in designing the materials?*

The materials were meant as one part of a three-pronged approach.

- One is working with the teachers in the classroom,
- The second is having workshops for them
- Thirdly, the written material is backup for that. Something they can apply or refer to later.

The ultimate objective is for them to get to a point where they design their own material.

#### **Comment**

*The workshop and material are therefore to address a need expressed by the teachers and to assist them in the implementation of group work, in order to fulfil the requirements of OBE. Hopefully they will implement this methodology in their classrooms and cascade it down to the learners. In my research I will follow up on the teachers who have been trained in order to establish the extent to which they have been able to put into practice what they have learned. In the follow up I will also assist them in their use of the materials which have been handed out to them.*

The booklet on how to manage small groups is slightly different because it is not materials they will be reproducing for their learners, but it is a manual on to manage small group work in their classrooms. The booklet on writing, they will hopefully be able to use as a model for creating activities for brainstorming etc. It is impossible to cover everything in a workshop but the books fulfil a valuable support function. Furthermore, they can be used to address whatever gaps there are when educators are in the classroom. One of the questions in the questionnaire about whether the material was appropriate to the classroom situation is impossible to verify unless you are in the classroom. Any reply to this question would be subjective. If one wishes to really test this question, one would have to get into the classroom. If this is part of a series of workshops, say on teaching essay writing. The teachers participate in the activities as if they are learners in a classroom. At the next workshop they will be required to make and plan their own activities. Only when they do that, is one able to find out if they have captured the essence of group work, because if they haven't captured the essence of the activity, it will show immediately. They are just unable to sit down and make an activity. I could go to the Greytown teachers (who did the booklet on creative writing) ask them to bring some materials with them to the next workshop so we can discuss the materials that they have developed. What will probably come out of this will be that some teachers will have no idea how to develop materials. They seemed have grasped what to do at the workshop, but when they have to get out there on their own and develop materials; they may not know how to do it.

#### **Comment**

*Is there carry-over from the workshop? Is there transfer of training into the classroom? Do the materials stem from what has happened in the workshops? Are the materials ever revised in the light of what happens in the workshops?*

**Q: *What outcome did you wish to achieve?***

**Small groups**

The first indication of change would be a visible change in the classroom. Do they actually change their desks? Is the teacher still in front? Is there still chanting etc.? Are they actually using small groups or are they simply changing the seating plan? Are the learners becoming active? Is there communication going on between the learners? Has the teacher provided them with activities so that they can become active? In essence you are looking at a classroom which has changed from being teacher-centred to one that is learner-centred; from passive to active.

**Comment**

*How does one gauge the level of communication within the classroom? Could one design a simple teacher's tool kit or checklist in order to assist the educator to gauge the level of communication?*

**Essay writing**

The prime issue is that an essay is not written in one draft. Furthermore it is not essential to write the whole essay. Perhaps one could just write introductory paragraphs. I would love them to just write introductory paragraphs.

**Comment**

*This is, of course, where the introduction of the portfolio by the Education Department will represent a giant leap forward. In essence it will mean that they have to come to grips with the idea of editing and revising. One of the things we are encouraging the teachers to do is, if the child has done two or three drafts of a piece of writing for the portfolio, that we keep the three versions in the portfolio and simply indicate which is the final draft. In this way both the teacher and the learner can see the progression and development of their writing. This would be a fundamental change in thinking when they get away from the idea that one starts at the beginning and does not stop writing until one has reached the conclusion. The requirements for the portfolio will be two long pieces and two short pieces.*

I feel that the LILT booklet on essay writing is too long – there are 66 activities. The book can be used from Gr. 8 through to Gr.12. Possibly one could demarcate what should be done according to each grade. We could then give this to the teachers. The genre section is very short and very underdeveloped. We could include a fax, a postcard etc.

**Comment**

*We could work on this together. It could act as a type of syllabus for educators to use as a support course to work through. The new requirements for National Examination for the writing paper from the year 2002 will be that of a portfolio of writing consisting of three sections*

- *The first section is the traditional long essay,*
- *The second section includes the formal and informal letter and*
- *The third section which will consist of items like a fax cover, a C V, a telegram, an obituary and an invitation etc.*

I have developed a theme on the Kruger National Park, which contained many different writing skills like a fax etc. The idea was abandoned because the subject matter is not suitable for the rural KwaZulu-Natal learner. I am looking for something more suitable. I could perhaps develop something similar to this, using all the genres on a topic like cellphones.

***What, in our opinion were the most important problems that needed to be addressed in the materials design?***

Materials need to be perceived as being useful. An educator should feel, "I can use that in my classroom". Language must be appropriate, The context and the content must be very relevant. The only way one can do this is by constantly working with the teachers. The real problem with these particular teachers is that they have problems understanding and using English, but at the same time the language must not be at too low a level otherwise one is perceived to be patronising. The graphics done by Kathy Arbuckle strike a very good medium. They are not simply decorations but contribute to the material and they are not patronising. She has reached a beautiful balance. Sometimes a point is made which is easier to see in graphics than in written form. That is what we need to aim for is to communicate at the right level. Also if a booklet is too long, the educators may be daunted by the quantity. The LILT booklet on writing is a good example of where the amount of material might be a bit intimidating. So one needs to be careful that the booklet is not too long – otherwise you put educators off.

***Do you feel that the material was adequately workshopped so that the educators will be able to teach with them?***

One workshop is never enough. We need to extend this into the New Year into a more longitudinal study. It is very hard in the initial workshops to avoid the lecture-type of situation and try to get them into small groups in order to experience the situation. But then you have got have them do something else, you need to get educators to prepare a model themselves in order for them to get into the questions that need to be worked on. In my opinion, educators are not equipped yet to develop materials after only one workshop.

***How can you maintain the quality of the materials when they reach the learners?***

You can't. We're not there we cannot take over the teaching. We just have to trust that they will take it further.

***What would you like to know from the educators, i.e. their perceptions of their adequacy?***

Can they use them? Are they using them? Are they accessible? It would be interesting to get response from them about layout; the language is the vocabulary at the right pitch? Is it easy to find their way around the booklet? Clarity of language?

**Comment**

*If they are not accessible – why not? Is it the materials? Is it the effort? Is it the teacher herself – due to lack of understanding?*

**Patterns**

*Exposure – Input to teachers*

*Interrogation – Intake (What they remember of the workshop*

*Application – Uptake (What they actually use from both the workshop and the materials in the classroom) Allwright (1991)*



## Appendix D – Questionnaire

1. How did you feel about teaching in small groups before the LILT workshop?  
.....  
.....  
.....
2. Was the material introduced to you effectively that you felt confident to use it afterwards?  
.....
3. Have you taught small groups since the workshop?  
.....
4. If your answer to question 3 was yes, How often?  
.....
5. Have you read through the booklets since the workshop? .....
6. Did you find the booklets easy to read?.....
7. Are the booklets appropriate to your conditions? .....
8. Would you recommend it to any of your colleagues? .....
9. Would you feel confident to teach small groups without a workshop? .....
10. Why?.....  
.....  
Did you understand the use and role of the Tracking sheet?.....  
.....
11. Have you used a Tracking sheet in your classroom?.....
12. Would you like more information about the practical use of the Tracking sheet?.....
13. Have you made any support materials to use in your classroom with your learners?  
.....
14. Have you discussed the use of the materials with colleagues from other schools who had also attended the LILT workshops? In other words, have you discussed the work with them? .....
15. Are there any factors which make it impossible for you to use small groups?  
.....  
.....
16. If you have used small groups, what problems have you experienced teaching small groups?  
.....  
.....  
.....

.....  
.....  
.....  
17. What do you think you can do about these (problems)?

.....  
.....  
.....  
18. Do you have any large classes? .....

19. Have you been able to use any small group teaching in this large class? .....

20. Do you think the learners were learning or were they just having fun?

.....  
.....  
.....  
21. How do you know this? .....

.....  
.....  
22. Do you think your learners can handle the self-discipline required in small groups?

.....  
.....  
**Questions on the workshop**

23. Did you enjoy the workshop? .....

24. Why? .....

.....  
.....  
25. Did you enjoy the interaction with your colleagues? .....

26. Did the workshop contribute to your learning?.....

27. How?.....

.....

.....

28. Did the workshop address the real problems in your class? .....

29. Did the workshop build your confidence?.....

.....

30. Has this workshop changed your attitude towards small group teaching .....

31. Do you think you could now use small group teaching to a greater extent in your classroom from now on?

.....

32. Why? .....

.....

.....

33. If any future workshops on small groups are held, would you like to attend them?

.....

34. If you answered yes in question 33, what would you like to have addressed at any future workshop/s?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

## **Appendix E – Pre survey letter**

KZNDEC  
Private Bag 9101  
PIETERMARITZBURG  
3201  
30 April 2001

Dear Colleague

### **Research for a Post Graduate Degree**

I am in the final stages of completing a Masters Degree on language acquisition amongst second language learners. Part of this degree is research on the booklets that were handed out to you at the OBE course. In order to really gauge the success of the small group model, it is important that some follow-up research is done in order to determine the efficacy of the materials as well as their implementation.

It is to this end that I would like to appeal to you to try and put into practice the principle of small group teaching in your classroom. I would to appeal to you to teach at least FIVE lessons in small group format between now and the middle of May. At the end of this period, I shall be sending you a questionnaire on your experiences in the classroom and on the implementation of the small group as an integral part of the teaching methodology for second language acquisition. My Masters' research will end once the questionnaire has been completed, but I will be using the information gleaned from the questionnaire as a means to improving educators' input and consequently the results of your school. Maggie and I will attempt to address any problems, which turn up in the responses to the questionnaire. While an integral part of the research, the questionnaire is aimed at looking at how to make the teaching and learning experiences more worthwhile, enjoyable and fruitful.

Sincerely

---

Liz du Preez  
Subject Adviser, English Second Language – Pietermaritzburg Region

**Appendix F – Covering letter with questionnaire**

KZNDEC  
Private Bag 9101  
PIETERMARITZBURG  
3200  
14 May 2001

Dear Colleague

If you recall, I sent you a request to teach five lessons, using small groups, in the first weeks of May. This questionnaire is now a follow-up to that request.

Included in this envelope are:

- A questionnaire asking you about your experiences
- A reply-paid, self-addressed envelope.

Please take fifteen minutes to fill in the questionnaire. I promise it will not take longer than fifteen minutes. Please do it now and place it in the reply-paid envelope, pop it in the post to get to me by the end of May.

Please be as honest as possible when you answer the questionnaire. Don't write what you think I would like to hear. Write exactly how you feel about this exercise. When one does research, it is important to have accurate results and not what the ideal would be. Please do this - your input is valuable.

As an added incentive, I have managed to get a box of really excellent books from one of the publishers. These are storybooks for your learners, as well as some books for your own use. I have also included some books from my bookshelf in my office. If you place your name at the bottom of the questionnaire, I will put your name in a lucky draw and the winner will receive this collection of books for use in the classroom and for your own development. If you win the lucky draw, I will personally bring the books to you at your school so you can use them in your classroom.

Thank you for your help and cooperation

English Subject Adviser - Pietermaritzburg