

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **REFLECTION ON THE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME**

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**CHAPTER 7 REFLECTION ON THE INTERVENTION PROGRAMME****7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is aimed at self-reflection, and is meant to provide an overview of my understanding and experience of action research as a means of implementing the intervention programme in this study. The results of this research are presented and discussed. The literature points to action research as an appropriate means of helping teachers understand and deal with their teaching. It creates the possibility of forming insights into the workings of their own teaching, and as a method of professional development, it provides a means of integrating theory and practice. Thus, the purpose of the chapter is to reflect on the process of gradual development from fact-finding and analysis about the learning environment, to the design and development of appropriate materials, and the implementation of the developed materials. This reflection will lead to the identification of problem areas, but also create knowledge based on concrete experience, thus permitting some generalisations and enabling the reaching of conclusions.

First, I will review my approach to Afrikaans teaching and learning in the study with the purpose of discussing why the intervention programme may be judged as relatively successful, despite the constraints of limited instruction time and a poor learning environment. The broad argument offered here is that successful change entails the acknowledgement of the significance of affective variables in a CLT approach. Successful CLT thus calls for reviewing the methods and techniques employed, the classroom situation, and the materials used during the intervention.

Secondly, the learners' perception of the intervention programme merits some further consideration in order to shed more light on the effectiveness of the instruction. It may explain that the successful outcome of this endeavour was due to the manner in which the intervention instruction was implemented.

## 7.2 EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

We know from the discussions in the previous chapters that there was a distinct difference between my approach to teaching Afrikaans during the intervention and that of the regular Afrikaans teacher at the school in question. The following discussion seeks to identify both the dissimilarities between our teaching styles, and the general factors that might cause teachers to fail to attune their teaching to the needs of their learners.

We first reflect upon the CLT approach during the intervention in contrast to the teacher's generally authoritarian approach.

### 7.2.1 CLT approach versus authoritarian approach

Since the design of the materials was the core of this project, my view or approach to language teaching was of central importance for justifying the choices and decisions made during the intervention. Thus, the starting point in the process was to establish my own beliefs about language learning and teaching within the CLT approach, and then to strive to design language materials in alignment with those beliefs. This notion is in agreement with the view of Weideman (2003: 42-44). In my view, CLT is one of the most effective antidotes to transmission teaching, and in this respect, there is further congruence between my approach and the action research methodology which I had adopted for investigating the implementation of CLT tasks in the classroom (Chapter 6). In the early 1990's, for example, the employment of an action research methodology was the stimulus for teachers on the Teachers' Action Research Project (TARP) to reconsider their authoritarian approach (cf. Davidoff & Van den Berg, 1990).

We have learned from the discussion in Chapter 3 that Communicative Language Teaching can be justified with reference to a theory of language as communication, and that it is best considered an approach, rather than a method (cf. Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 66; Lewis, 1999: 49). In addition, from the literature review in Chapter 3 it has become clear that CLT came into fashion partly in response to traditional language teaching because researchers saw the need to focus on

communicative proficiency (cf. Hymes, 1971; Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 64). The success of language teaching today is measured by the effectiveness of teaching communication, i.e. by the degree to which learners become communicatively competent in the target language (Weideman, 2002a 29). In order to achieve such competence, a communicative approach thus requires teachers to “make considerable adjustments in their attitudes, language teaching philosophy and actual teaching practice” (Van der Walt, 1990: 37). Combrink (1993: 209) indicates that it is vital to revise one’s teaching approaches and teaching strategies constantly in order to keep up with specific educational needs and social context. Thus, the concept of being proficient in a language has expanded significantly, from a restrictive view to a perspective that is open to social context and interaction (see Chapter 1).

At the school in the study, it was evident that during the intervention the Afrikaans teacher’s belief about language teaching was in sharp contrast to mine. As indicated several times in the previous chapters, and as reflected in my diary (Appendix D), she believed in a teacher-centered approach. The learners were accustomed to be passive participants in the learning environment, because the classroom interaction remained merely teacher-to-learner interaction, with excessive teacher talk and limited learner talk. She was a staunch believer in silence and discipline in the classroom, and therefore disliked the communicative approach and pair work. Because of this perception and her resentment of CLT, she believed that strict discipline should prevail at all times, and she felt that it was necessary for a teacher to remain in charge in the classroom at all times. This predisposition is not unusual, since studies done on the African continent (cf. Shaalukeni, 2000: 85; Tesfamariam, 2000: 122; Weideman, 2001: 11; Weideman, 2002b: 3), and the study among English second language teachers in Greece by Karavas-Doukas (1996) underscore the belief of teachers and parents that there should be silence in the classroom and that strict discipline must exist. The joint recent article of Weideman, Tesfamariam and Shaalukeni (2003) makes it clear that this is not only an African phenomenon. So we can’t blame it on Africanness, blackness or any ethnic or racial grounds. The Greek and other examples make this clear as well.

Obviously, within the communicative approach the teacher’s role has undergone a drastic change, and as a result there may be still some confusion regarding the exact

role of a teacher in a second language classroom. Van der Walt (1990: 30) argues that when a teacher keeps up traditional teaching, namely instructing, it does not serve “any purpose at all”. Although a second language teacher’s role is “extremely complex and demanding”, a teacher remains accountable to the learner, the principal, the education department, the parents, and society for teaching effectively (Van der Walt, 1990: 29-30). A number of variables have implications which relate to this accountability. We first examine the factors that are generally associated with learner involvement and participation.

#### 7.2.1.1 Learner-centered approach

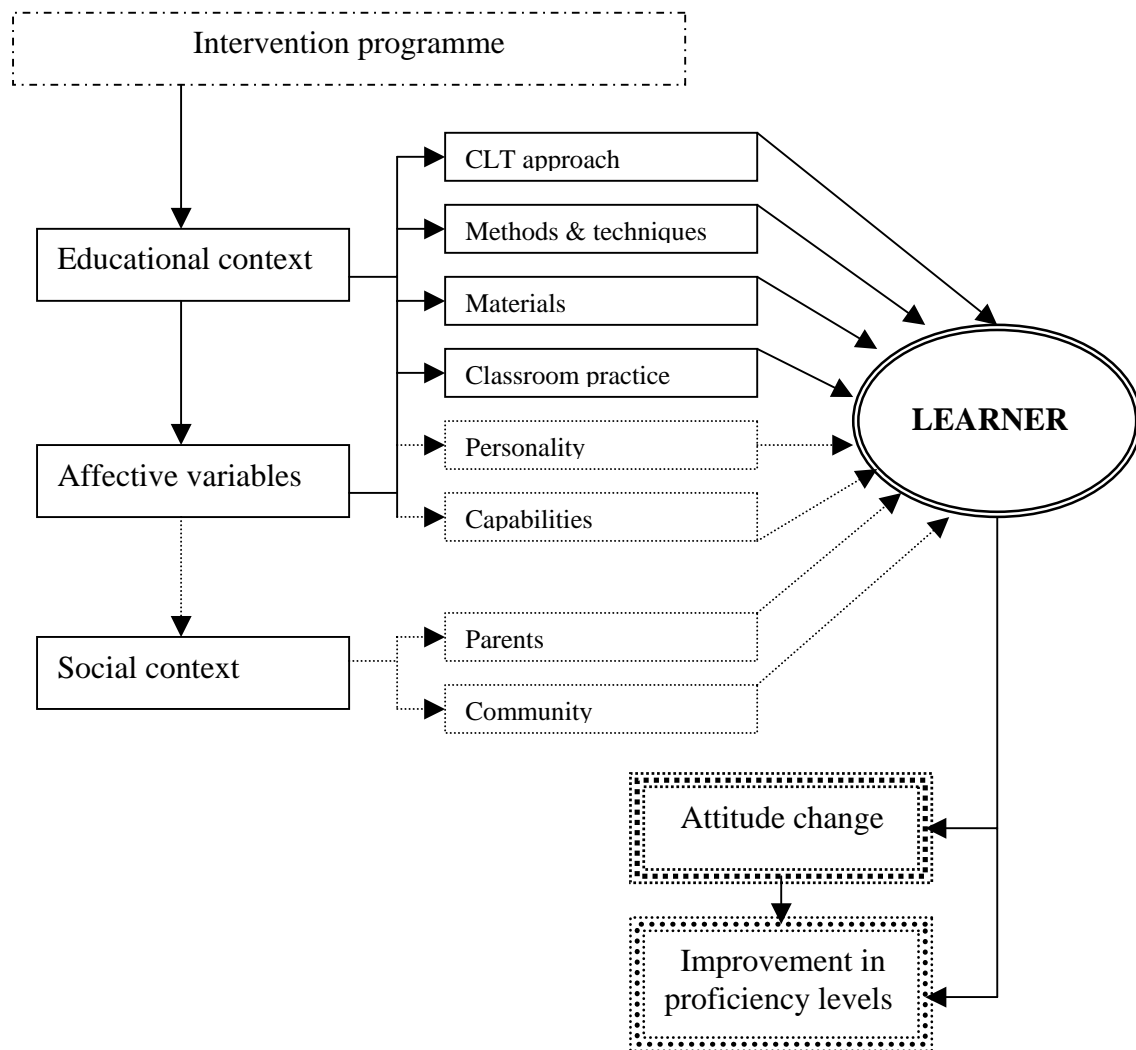
During the instruction that I undertook at the school, the starting point was that the learners are at the center of the learning process and play a more positive role in the learning situation, quite the opposite of what the learners are used to with their regular Afrikaans teacher’s authoritarian teaching approach.

A communicative approach is learner-centered, and therefore requires a paradigm shift not only for teachers, but also for learners, since they must be “engaged-learners” (Thomas, 2003: 28). In line with this, Combrink (1993: 212) claims that in a learner-centered approach a teacher and language materials are secondary to learners’ needs. Although Van der Merwe and Olivier (1997: 33) are in agreement on the significance of a learner-centered approach, they highlight the fact that even though a teacher plays a less dominant role in the classroom, this does not eradicate his/her importance in language teaching. A teacher still has the obligation to provide learners with opportunities for communicative interaction, as well as to supply them with essential materials (Du Plessis & Van Jaarsveld, 1993: 15).

Since the intervention was characterised by a learner-centered approach, it involved understanding and being able to analyse and reflect on the learners’ needs, personality factors, the learning setting and the influence of social factors, in order to achieve the goal of bringing about positive change to the learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans. Among those suggesting the importance of a learner-centered methodology in second language teaching aimed at the learners’ needs are Widdowson (1990: 121); Curry

(1996: 29); Ryuko (1998: 395); Nassaji (1999: 386-403); Celce-Murcia & Olshtain (2000: 229) and Weideman (2002a: 26).

A framework of the learner-centered approach in the study, showing the interrelated and interdependent key components, is illustrated in Figure 7.1. It is worthy of note that a multitude of permutations are possible between the respective elements.



**Figure 7.1 Framework of the learner-centered approach**

The framework encapsulates the theoretical views on the overall relationship between the learner and the educational and social context, as well as the affective variables. In terms of this point of view, methodology is not the only important factor in successful additional language teaching. Additional language teaching and learning has to give due regard to the contextual setting, since context influences the learning environment. In fact, various researchers (Widdowson, 1990: 121; Curry, 1996: 29;

Ryuko, 1998: 395; Nassaji, 1999: 386-403; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000: 229; Weideman, 2002a: 26; Weideman, 2002b: 1-11; Bax, 2003: 278-289) not only emphasise the different roles of the learners and teacher in comparison to traditional methods, but also recognise the role of the particular context in which language teaching and learning takes place.

The overall relationship between the learner and the educational and social context, as well as the affective variables present, sets the scene for the action research project being reported on. It not only emphasises the kind of teaching which was necessary to develop the Afrikaans proficiency of the learners, but has also highlighted the more appropriate techniques and methods to accomplish this.

It must be noted that, although social factors (parents and community attitude towards Afrikaans, and opportunities for informal learning) influence additional language learning only indirectly, consideration of these factors during the intervention programme was vital for giving some perspective on the teaching and learning setting. These factors were discussed in detail in Chapter 4, section 4.5. However, the main issue is that because Afrikaans is not spoken on a regular basis in the local community, and the learners therefore have few opportunities to communicate with Afrikaans speaking people, exposure to Afrikaans is limited to the Afrikaans lessons at school. Therefore, the learners had to be provided with as many opportunities as possible during classes to practice communication in Afrikaans.

As the teacher engaging in this research project, I had the advantage that the learners' strengths and weaknesses, as well as the areas for action, became known to me through the diagnostic assessment at the start of the intervention. The fact that the results indicated that the learners' functional Afrikaans literacy was poor, and that their speaking, reading, writing and listening skills averaged at Grade 4 level, enabled me, amongst other things, to compile and implement the developed learning materials in the way I did, as discussed in Chapter 6.

Along with a learner-centered approach comes the call for active participation of the learners, to which we turn now.

### 7.2.1.2 The interactive classroom

In an article on language teaching in the new South Africa, Combrink (1993: 209) suggests that in second language teaching a teacher should rather focus on **how** to teach, than on **what** to teach. Therefore, language teaching should be characterised by tasks that teachers endorse and activities in which learners perform (resulting in their active participation) in order to enhance language learning. Hence, the emphasis is on collaborative learning, which requires teachers to be able to act as “facilitators and guides, not just as language experts” (Thomas, 2003: 28). Various researchers (cf. Davidoff & Van den Berg, 1990: 8-27; Brown, 1994: 161-162; Versfeld, 1995: 24; Cook, 1996: 187; Ryuko, 1998: 396; Nassaji, 1999: 386-403; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000: 231; Weideman, 2002a: 26) hold similar views.

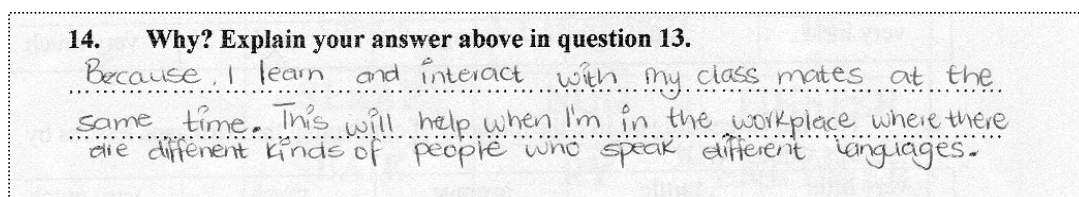
The fact that a teacher needs to play a more passive role in the interactive language teaching class remains problematic for many teachers. They find this role threatening because they feel as if they are not in control, and this may explain their resentment of group work (Van der Walt, 1990: 30-31). Similarly, Du Plessis and Van Jaarsveld (1993: 17) indicate that teachers who dislike communicative activities usually tackle group work with scepticism because they feel it upsets the normal class routine (e.g. when the technique requires moving furniture around). Moreover, these teachers see group work as a threat to class discipline (they may be unsure about how to handle the generation of much more noise than usual). Indeed, the noise level during the lessons was constantly criticised by the regular Afrikaans teacher, as indicated in Chapter 6 and in my diary (Appendix D). In all fairness, though, her aversion of communicative activities might be tied up with the fact that she was concerned that pair and group work would generate so much noise that this would upset the principal, who advocates discipline. Du Plessis and Van Jaarsveld (1993: 17) acknowledge this trepidation, but stress that meaningful communicative tasks are characterised by ‘purposeful noise’ and not disruptive noise, or shouting. Therefore, they argue that a principal should be worried if silence prevails in favour of a ‘healthy hum’ in a language class (cf. also Van der Walt, 1990: 31).

Admittedly, some of the communicative activities during the lessons did generate more noise than a ‘healthy hum’, but discipline was not sacrificed in the process.



Instead, the employment of these communicative tasks enhanced the learners' enthusiasm and contributed to a positive atmosphere in class, which was conducive to learning. The interactive nature of the intervention gave the learners a different perspective on their role in the classroom and forced them to become actively involved and take up responsibility for their own learning.

In the questionnaire at the end of the intervention programme (Appendix F) a few learners stated that the interactive nature of the lessons, in particular, made the lessons more interesting, lively and fun filled. Learners pointed out that through interaction they had learnt "step-by-step", and that they "don't really have to write something immediately" because "we learn most of the things practically". Some learners remarked that the lessons were "very interesting cause everybody takes part in all the activities", and "Because it [sic!] easy to talk and improve your skills". Another learner's positive comments on the benefit of an interactive classroom, are illustrated in the following example:



**Figure 7.2 Learner's comment: Interactive classroom**

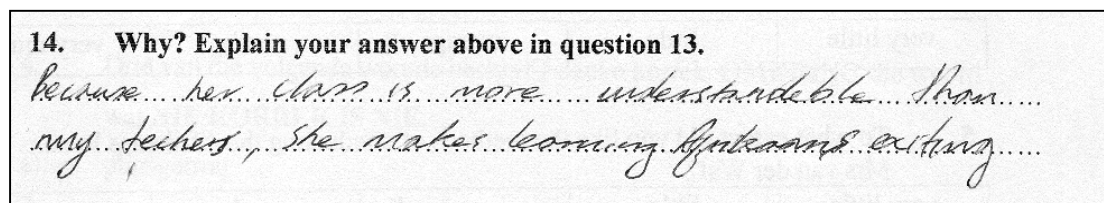
### 7.2.2 Methods and techniques

Since the learners were not familiar with communication and interaction arrangements in the classroom, and must have had the preconception that they need to listen to the teacher, who is expected to do the talking, the methods employed during the lessons I conducted must have caught them by surprise. The introduction of pair and group work during these lessons posed a prominent challenge, since the learners had no experience with these types of activities, and had to be coached into properly employing these techniques for developing their language use. In fact, in hindsight, I should have provided the learners with more opportunities to engage in two-way communication earlier in the programme. It is likely that this would have met their elementary classroom needs sooner (e.g. knowing how to use basic language

functions such as asking, requesting, suggesting, persuading, accepting, refusing, arguing, disapproving). However, despite my failure to engage in two-way communication sooner, the learners responded very positively to the relatively new methods used during the lessons, as will be shown below.

In the questionnaire at the start of the intervention programme (Appendix A) the learners indicated that they found Afrikaans very difficult to learn. As Mongiat (1993: 54-55) rightly points out, learning Afrikaans is quite often an insurmountable problem for black speakers because of the different sounds and syntax compared to their vernacular. This phenomenon becomes even more problematic if the target language is not regularly spoken in the community, as was indeed the case in this study.

How did they feel about the difficulty aspect of learning Afrikaans after the short intervention programme? It is remarkable that most of the learners pointed out that the methods used made the learning of Afrikaans simpler and easier and the language itself more understandable. Evidence of this is the following example:



**Figure 7.3 Learner's comment on methods used**

The focus of second language teaching has shifted considerably during the years, and the different methods or techniques often seem to confuse teachers and hamper successful communicative language teaching. So, for example, the communicative task and its associated information gap technique are viewed as indispensable for successful CLT teaching. Yet, the practice of the information gap technique has not so far taken root in language teaching, because teachers generally misinterpret CLT and they often simply do not understand the information gap concept.

Many studies have been done on group work and the interaction between learners in pairs in classrooms or in simulated classroom contexts, with emphasis on the

information gap technique (cf. Johnson, 1982: 151; Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 22; Prabhu, 1987: 46; Combrink, 1993: 213; McDonough & Shaw, 1993: 164; Mongiat, 1993: 57; Cook, 1996: 187; Van der Merwe & Olivier, 1997: 33; Habte, 2001: 19-20; Liao, 2001: 38-41; Weideman, 2002a: 32; Thomas, 2003: 28). This research has shown that learners benefit more from the opportunity of one-to-one communication where they need to express themselves meaningfully in different situations, than in a teacher-centered whole class environment. Furthermore, a task based on the information gap principle requires learners to listen actively and to react appropriately (Combrink, 1993: 211). Thus, in the process the learner also displays his/her functional proficiency (Greyling, 1989: 40). A further advantage is that a speaker receives immediate feedback from the receiver and can ascertain whether communication was successful (cf. Greyling, 1989: 40; Mongiat, 1993: 55; Combrink, 1993: 211).

There is no doubt that the learners referred to in this study were accustomed to a teacher-centered approach, and were used to repetitive tasks and drilling of grammatical structures. Since these methods provide no opportunity for communication, I realised that in my classes I should create ample opportunities for communication. Furthermore, such communicative tasks should allow the receiver a choice on how to respond or react to the utterances of the sender, as suggested by Combrink (1993: 210). In line with this, Van der Walt (1989: 52) recommends that learners should be provided with an “acquisition-rich environment with (little or) no selection of linguistic content”. However, Weideman (2003: 31) cautions against a rather widespread misconception among teachers that a communicative approach is merely oral work. Likewise, Strydom (1989: 3) correctly warns against the misconception that chatter in class may be viewed as communicative teaching, because effective communicative language teaching tasks require well-informed structuring by a teacher. The argument, then, seems to proceed from the assumption that if a teacher uses interesting and authentic communicative tasks, the learners are provided with an environment conducive for engaging in meaningful conversation (cf. Strydom, 1989: 1-4; Mongiat, 1993: 57). In addition, providing learners with ample opportunities to think and express themselves in the target language not only stimulates their interest, but also influences their attitude towards the language more

positively, resulting in greater enjoyment of their language lessons (cf. Combrink, 1993: 213; Mongiat, 1993: 58).

The information gap technique as a criterion for identifying communicative language teaching came to the fore through a variety of information gap tasks during the intervention programme (as discussed in Chapter 6). The main issue remained the provision of adequate opportunities for communicative interaction in order to reach the objectives of the given tasks.

Several examples in the literature of the practical uses of information gap tasks and communicative activities that rely on them (e.g. word games, board games, charades, role plays, dialogues, reasoning-gap tasks, jigsaw tasks, and so forth) guided the planning of the materials employed in the intervention programme (cf. Van Jaarsveld & Weideman, 1985; Weideman, 1985; Lutrin, 1999; Habte, 2001; Hofmeyr, 2001; Lätti, Gouws, Jooste, Kroes & Van der Merwe, 2001). The diversity of available tasks that utilise the information gap technique enabled me to employ anything from very simple role plays to more advanced dialogues and complex tasks. It is clear from my evaluation of each of the lessons as indicated in the different assessment tables (Chapter 6) that the information gap principle functioned prominently and satisfactorily in the intervention lessons.

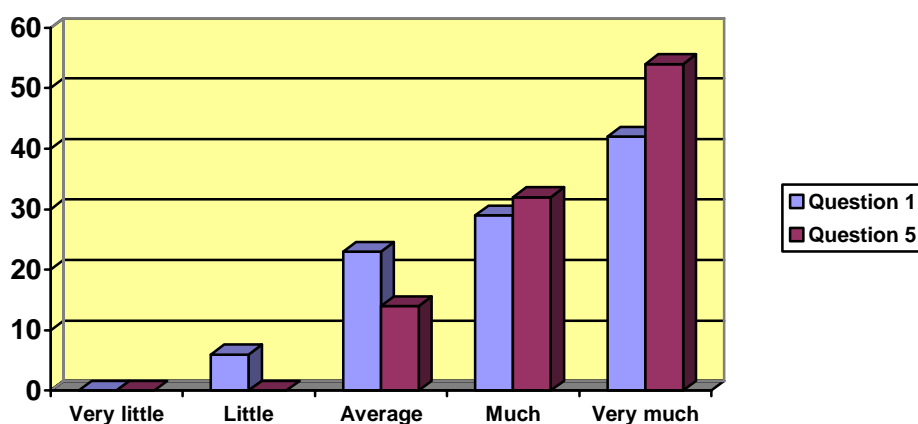
Reflection on my teaching during the intervention highlighted the fact that the unsettled atmosphere and the disorganisation at the school at certain times resulted in my decision to revert to traditional grammar teaching. As Van der Walt (1990: 34) correctly points out, grammar instruction is likely (in an ideal scenario) to result therein that the learners will end up with some knowledge about the language, and that this knowledge may well be seen as contributing to the learners' education. But this will happen only if they learn something from the instruction. On the other hand, as Van der Merwe and Olivier (1997: 40) indicate, grammar teaching means nothing if learners cannot (or will not) apply this knowledge in real communication. It is perhaps salutary to note that the tendency of teachers to revert to a teacher-centered approach is not exceptional, even though the learning materials have been clearly designed for learner-centered, task-based activities. Be that as it may, the crux of the matter is that there are some role plays designed for grammar teaching available, and I

should perhaps have focused more on employing those types of tasks, than getting sidetracked by the problematic teaching environment. But the occurrence of traditional solutions even in the teaching style of a seasoned practitioner supportive of CLT concepts and methodology provides a salutary reminder of the difficulty that teachers have of making innovations in language teaching, such as those embodied in CLT, their own (cf. Weideman, Tesfamariam & Shaalukeni, 2003: 75).

Reflection on classroom activities entails not only an understanding of how learning opportunities are created and implemented, but also how the learners perceive them. In this regard, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 290) points out that “such a multifaceted, stereoscopic view” allows a teacher to “get a full picture of the intended and unintended outcomes of classroom events”.

In the questionnaire at the end of the intervention programme (Appendix F) the learners were asked to what extent they enjoyed the Afrikaans lessons (Question 1), as well as to what extent they liked the methods used during the project (Question 5).

Fifty four percent of the learners indicated that they liked the methods employed *very much*, 32% of the learners mentioned *much*, and 14% of the learners viewed the methods as resulting in *average* enjoyment. It is interesting that none of the learners indicated that they enjoyed the methods used *very little*. The above findings are captured in Figure 7.4.



**Figure 7.4** Learners' perceptions: Enjoyment and methods used

Regarding their enjoyment of the classes, and by implication also the methods and techniques used, as well as my classroom practice, 42% of the learners enjoyed the lessons *very much*, 29% said *much*, 23% of the learners indicated an *average* enjoyment of the lessons, and 6% of the learners said that they enjoyed the lessons only a *little*. Once again, none of the learners mentioned that they enjoyed the lessons *very little*.

Comments of two learners about their enjoyment of the classes serve as examples:

15. Any comments?  
 I enjoys the afrikaans lessons they were very cool and I especially enjoyed the sing and handouts and I learned a lot, think you very much.

**Figure 7.5 Enjoyment of lessons: Example A**

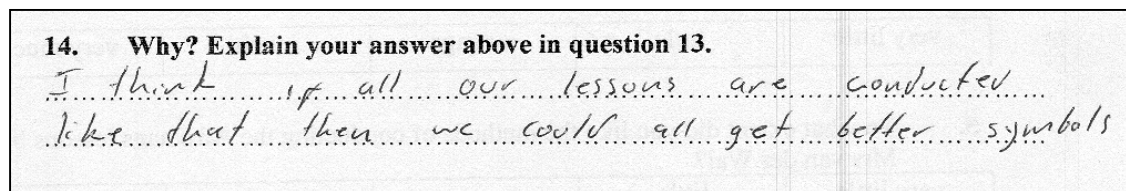
15. Any comments?  
 I enjoyed the afrikaans lessons very much and the teacher Mrs van der Wal was also great, I now like and enjoy afrikaans more than I did before. If I was given another chance again for the lessons with her, I would Thank you very much! definitely go for them!! Thank you, mevrou!...

**Figure 7.6 Enjoyment of lessons: Example B**

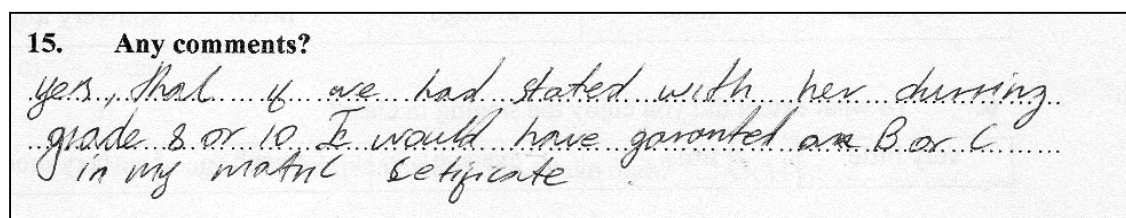
The emphasis on learner perspectives played an important role in the process of evaluating teaching activities during the lessons. The comments of the learners indicate that they viewed the intervention programme as a valuable endeavour, and acknowledged the significance of the methods used. They suggested that their other language teachers should be encouraged to use these methods, and that more learners could benefit from them. Some verbatim comments of learners support these findings: “Because her methods of teaching are easier and you can grasp the information very quick”; “Because it makes for us to understand the unusual words in Afrikaans”; “I’ve enjoyed being with her. I hope she will do the same to others”; “Although I was not co-operative enough, I hope you will help others too”; “I think this method must be introduced during the early stage of learning so that it will help most student to enjoy

Afrikaans”; “The Afrikaans lessons was not as heard [sic!] I thought it was going to be, but it was very good”.

Moreover, some learners categorically stated that the implementation of these methods was to their advantage, as the following two examples illustrate:



**Figure 7.7 Learner’s comment: Significance of methods. Example A**



**Figure 7.8 Learner’s comment: Significance of methods. Example B**

### 7.2.3 Materials

In order to enhance the Grade 12 learners’ proficiency in Afrikaans during the short intervention process, I had to consider the employment of appropriate and relevant learning material that was in line with a CLT approach. The process of materials selection, collection, reproduction, adaptation, and development can easily become a daunting task, especially for inexperienced teachers. Therefore, a materials writer (teacher) should be conscious of a number of design considerations. These design criteria or statements that describe in ideal terms the basic conditions for developing appropriate and relevant materials were discussed in detail in Chapter 5, section 5.5.1. However, a brief overview of these criteria is necessary here, in order to distinguish between the materials employed during the intervention and those the learners were accustomed to.

Apart from the use of information gap techniques, such as pair and group work, careful consideration had to be given constantly to authenticity in the task-based exercises employed. In communicative language teaching realism plays a significant role, and this explains the emphasis on authentic texts as an important feature of the communicative approach (cf. Johnson, 1982: 19-22; Nunan, 1991a: 279; Van Lier, 1996: 13-14; Tomlinson, 1998b: 13; Habte, 2001: 15-16; Han, 2001: 13; Parry, 2002: 96; Weideman, 2002a: 29-32).

More evidence of the significant role of authentic texts comes from Roets-Hentschel (1989: 25), who claims that if provision is made in second language teaching for realism between teaching and the real world outside the classroom, a teacher moves closer to the ultimate: *non scholae, sed vitae discimus* – not for the school, but for life we learn. In other words, when classroom activities include more realistic situations, these tasks enhance the authenticity of the learning process, learners become more motivated and goal-orientated, and the learning programme is stimulating to learners and teachers alike (cf. Melvin & Stout, 1987: 55; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000: 196).

Reflection on the implementation of the developed materials during the lessons (Chapter 6) has illuminated the authenticity dilemma in this study. I found that the unique circumstances in which the teaching took place where Afrikaans is seldom spoken outside the classroom, and there are no Afrikaans-speaking friends, made it very difficult and extremely challenging to base content on the ‘real’ world. Therefore, the interpretation of authenticity during the intervention should best be viewed as the interaction between the learners, the material and the context, as well as my use of Afrikaans in the classroom. Researchers who view authenticity similarly are Bachman (1990: 9-10, 316), Widdowson (1990: 44-45), Van Lier (1996: 128), and Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000: 195).

In the design of materials for the lessons, consideration was also given to topics that were thought to suit and engage the experience and the interest of the learners. In line with this, Van der Walt (1989: 54) stresses the importance of choosing interesting activities, because “language, thought and concepts develop together”, and therefore learners cannot do things with language that is “outside their conceptual grasp”. Thus,



texts should be selected with a view to their “audience appeal” (Van der Merwe, 1989: 44). Among those who advocate similar views are Strydom (1989: 4); Nunan (1991a: 279); Mongiat (1993: 57); Wlodkowski (1993, 158); Van der Merwe & Olivier (1997: 34) and Kumaravadivelu (2003: 230).

A considerable amount of research has focussed on integrating all four language skills as a prerequisite for a CLT approach (cf. Genovese, 1990: 6; Combrink, 1993: 212; McDonough & Shaw, 1993: 202; Weideman, 2002a: 96; Weideman, 2003: 31; Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 225-231). Despite the emphasis on the integration of the four language skills in CLT, Jacobs (1991: 4) found in his research that teachers still view listening skills as less important than writing, reading and speaking skills. Van der Merwe (1989: 43), furthermore, reports that reading is neglected in additional language teaching, and argues that reading develops linguistic knowledge, provides extensive exposure to language usage, and that if reading is made enjoyable, it will enhance learners’ motivation to interact with the text, which ultimately will improve their reading ability.

A good deal of attention was paid to integrate the four language skills in the materials for the intervention. Since language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening) are rarely used in isolation in daily life, it is vital to integrate them in language materials. And as Kumaravadivelu (2003: 228) points out, language skills are “essentially interrelated and mutually reinforcing”. In fact, the separation of skills is a “remnant of a bygone era and has very little empirical or experiential justification” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 226).

Proponents of communicative teaching also advocate the various uses or functions of language that relate to the real language (‘L’) needs (Roberts, 1982), of learners (cf. also Genovese, 1990: 5; Van der Walt, 1990: 29; McDonough, 2001: 293; Weideman, 2002a: 45; Weideman, 2003: 32). According to Kumaravadivelu (2003: 26-27), the assumption is that learner-centered methods are those that are “principally concerned with language use and learner needs”, and therefore language is best learned when the learners’ focus is on “understanding, saying and doing something with language”, than on linguistic features. Therefore, learner-centered methods seek to provide opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful activities both inside and outside of

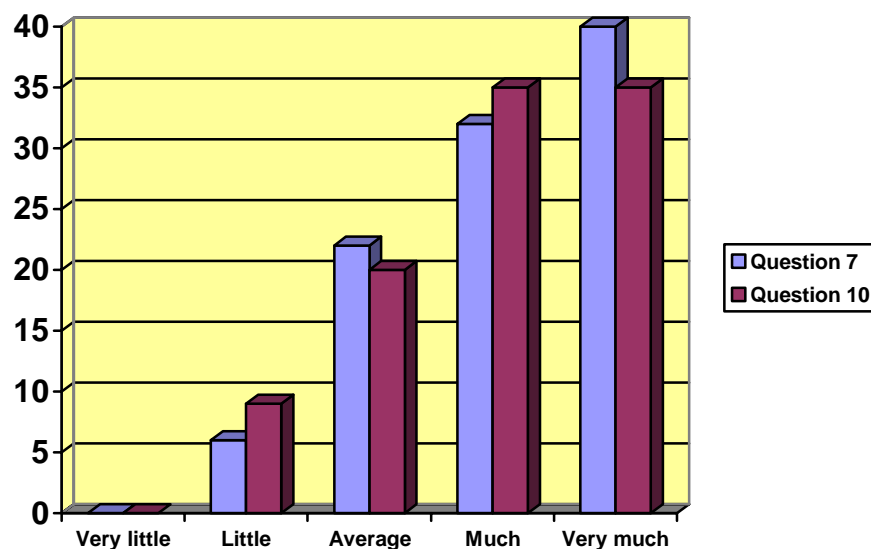
class. During the lessons I planned it was thus vital that learners understand how to use basic language functions, such as interpretation, expression and negotiation, in order to engage effectively in role plays and dialogues which require these functions. Since language is highly complex and dynamic, the significance of this criterion for materials development is to be found in the fact that acquiring competence in a target language involves not only the ability to understand and produce correct sentences, but also the ability to use the target language in different situations and with various participants (cf. Weideman, 1988: 93; Genovese, 1990: 5; Van der Walt, 1990: 29; McDonough, 2001: 293; Weideman, 2002a: 35; Kumaravidelu, 2003: 26).

A dimension in materials design to ponder in addition to those identified and discussed in Chapter 5 is that of physical format. Since learners were unaccustomed to receiving learning materials developed by their own teacher, I made a special effort to develop and design materials (in the form of handouts) that would elicit the learners' curiosity and could contribute to an environment conducive to language learning. Many researchers have expressed the opinion that the physical appearance of materials is vital to achieve impact, to enhance learners' interest, and to enhance motivation (cf. Nunan, 1991b: 210; Combrink, 1993: 213; Rowntree, 1994: 129; Tomlinson, 1998b: 7-8). Some of the design features researchers view as valuable for language teaching materials are that materials should be interesting, user-friendly, unusual, novel, innovative, creative, and eye-catching. Furthermore, a teacher should attempt to provide learners with a wealth of stimulation from rich and varied materials such as games, charades, stories, songs, rhymes, role plays, dialogues, simulations, discussions, jigsaw tasks, and reasoning gap tasks to avoid over-familiarity and demotivation (cf. Van der Walt, 1989: 55; Genovese, 1990: 3; Combrink, 1993, 213; Mongiat, 1993: 55-56; Van der Merwe & Olivier, 1997: 34; for other examples and reviews of numerous information gap tasks, cf. Van Jaarsveld & Weideman, 1985; Weideman, 1985; Habte, 2001). In addition, I found the use of pictures to clarify unfamiliar concepts valuable. Furthermore, Mongiat (1993: 57) suggests that pictures as supplementary aids in the classroom assist in creating everyday situations in the classroom.

Evaluation of the materials was essential to make pertinent judgements on their appropriateness, and since the learners were the users of the materials, their opinions

and feedback were analysed to bring their perspective on the materials used during the lessons into such an evaluation. Kumaravadivelu (2003: 291) emphasises the importance of learners' perspectives on teaching events, since as "stake-holders of the classroom enterprise, they can bring a unique interpretation of the usefulness of teaching".

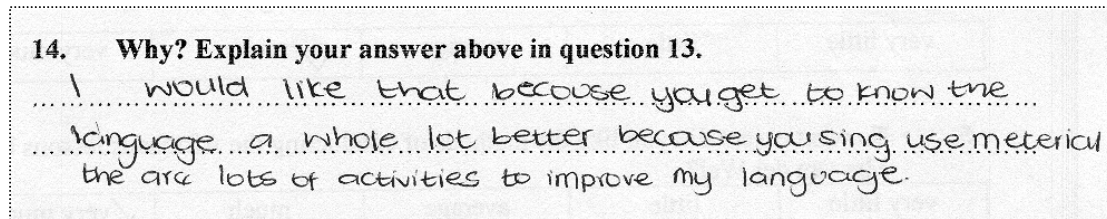
In the questionnaire (Appendix F) the learners were asked to what extent they enjoyed the activities on the handouts (Question 7), as well as liked the materials used (Question 10). The learners' answers are given in Figure 7.9.



**Figure 7.9** Learners' perceptions: Materials used

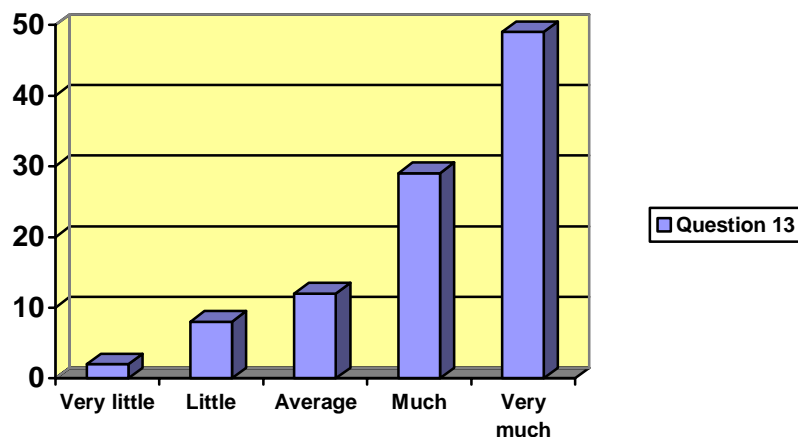
There is a close correlation between the learners' answers in the two questions, and it appears that the learners liked and enjoyed the tasks and liked the materials. Forty percent of the learners indicated that they enjoyed the activities *very much*, 32% of the learners mentioned *much*, 22% of the learners viewed the activities as *average*, and only 6% of the learners indicated *little*. Regarding Question 10, 35,5% of the learners liked the materials *very much*, 35,5% said *much*, 20% of the learners indicated *average*, and 9% of the learners liked the materials used only *little*.

In the following example relating to Questions 13 and 14 in the questionnaire, a learner especially comments on the benefits of the activities of the materials used in the programme:



**Figure 7.10 Learner's comment: Benefit of materials used**

In the questionnaire (Appendix F, Question 13) the learners were also probed about whether they would prefer their regular Afrikaans and English classes to be conducted in a similar manner as the lessons. Figure 7.11 illustrates their answers, and we see that nearly half of the learners (49%) indicated that they would like this *very much*, 29% of the learners indicated *much*, 12% of the learners said *average*, only 8% of the learners mentioned *little*, and 2% of the learners responded by ticking *very little*.



**Figure 7.11 Learners' perceptions: Preference for similar language classes**

#### 7.2.4 Classroom practice

Since the classroom is the place where major elements of learning and teaching, such as “ideas and ideologies, policies and plans, methods and materials, learners and teachers“ are combined, it is also the place where the “effectiveness of innovative thoughts on teaching is tried and tested” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 287). Therefore, the action research undertaken in this study allows me to reflect on classroom input, interaction, and the managerial aspects of classroom activities, as well as the self-analysis and self-evaluation of my teaching.

The shift in our understanding of language teaching has a significant effect on the role of the teacher and his or her classroom practice. The role of the teacher has been a constant topic of discussion in language teaching, since, in classrooms, teachers are the “players who have a direct bearing on shaping and reshaping the desired learning outcome” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 6).

Researchers have been trying to pin down the role and function of a teacher through a multitude of metaphors. Some of the various teachers’ roles referred to in the literature are those of artist, attendant, manager, mentor, facilitator, instructor, director, informant, guide, coordinator, planner, developer, controller, psychologist, councillor, advisor, consultant, drama coach, comedian, skills builder, overseer, resource, technician, practitioner, and an authority on mime techniques (cf. Genovese, 1990: 3; Lombard, 1990: 22-23; Van der Walt, 1990: 29-30; Mongiat, 1993: 56; Combrink, 1993: 214; Brown, 1994: 160-161; Kumaravadivelu, 2003: 7). Viewing this extensive list of metaphors, or roles, one can easily see that there may very well be confusion regarding the extremely complex and demanding role of the teacher in the second language classroom.

There is no doubt that a teacher needs to recognise the significance of the teacher’s various roles in CLT. There is merit in each of the different roles because they complement each other, as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.7.2. The emphasis on communicative activities and tasks calls for a teacher to follow a well-worked out plan which directs and organises his/her teaching in line with a facilitating role (cf. Genovese, 1990: 3; Van der Walt, 1990; Du Plessis & Van Jaarsveld, 1993: 15; Combrink, 1993: 214-215; Mongiat, 1993: 55-57). In this planning a teacher needs to interpret the syllabus which will be influenced by his/her view of language and language learning.

During the short intervention programme under discussion, careful and practical planning was imperative not only for effective classroom practice, but also for the process of designing appropriate materials, guided by a set of key principles. I have made specific and deliberate choices and decisions regarding my role as the teacher, the materials, and the employment of certain tasks and techniques which were in congruence with my beliefs about language learning, framed as these were by the

CLT approach. The discussion in Chapter 6 has made it clear that the intervention programme undoubtedly took place in an extremely complex teaching and learning environment. It provided a salutary reminder that the teaching style of a teacher, even a seasoned practitioner, can be severely influenced by contextual factors. In my particular case, the measure of authority and power I had to change the context also mattered. The difficult instructional context allows such political questions to emerge quite sharply when one reflects on one's own practice. In this case, I had to steer a course between what was practically possible within an authoritarian context, and the demands made upon me for acting in accordance with my own beliefs. I had more power, in other words, to change my own classroom practice than the entire school, and this perhaps highlights one particularly beneficial aspect of doing action research in my own work: it allowed me to see ever more clearly where my powers lay, as an individual professional, to change language teaching, and what their limitations were.

As mentioned above, various researchers have carried out studies on the role and functions of a teacher in the classroom. The kinds of question that have been asked are: What is the profile of a good language teacher? What are the implications of the teacher variables in communicative teaching? How did my teaching during the lessons measure up?

The following part of this section seeks to investigate the characteristics of an interactive language teacher, as well as the features of an interactive classroom, as suggested by various researchers (cf. Strydom, 1989: 2; Roets-Hentschel, 1989: 27-29; Askes, 1990: 6; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991: 179; Nunan, 1991b: 190-191; Combrink, 1993: 215; Mongiat, 1993: 56-58; Brown, 1994: 105; Cook, 1996: 129 & 187; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2000: 231; Bourke, 2001: 72; Dernoshek, 2001: 71; Turnbull, 2001: 534; Conteh-Morgan, 2002: 193-194; Weideman, 2002a: 26; 97-103). The compilation of the different traits in Table 7.1 will serve as a guideline to examine my role as teacher and my classroom practice during the intervention. It must be noted that since a number of these teacher variables have already been addressed in more detail in previous chapters (Chapters 3, 4 and 6), the discussion that follows will take the form of a summary.

**Table 7.1 Profile of a good language teacher**

	<b>FEATURES</b>
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proficient in target language</li> <li>• Speech modification</li> <li>• Uses primarily target language</li> <li>• Encourages participation and interaction</li> <li>• Encourages spontaneous expression</li> <li>• Encourages self-activity</li> <li>• Learners ask questions in target language</li> <li>• Up to date with teaching methods and materials</li> </ul>
Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive attitude</li> <li>• Motivated</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Enthusiastic</li> <li>• Interested in subject</li> <li>• Competent and enlightened</li> <li>• Organised</li> <li>• Creative</li> <li>• Punctual</li> <li>• Friendly</li> <li>• Applies humour</li> <li>• Patient</li> <li>• Makes jokes</li> <li>• Shows interest in learner as individual</li> <li>• Awareness of cultural diversity</li> </ul>
Body language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses ample body language</li> <li>• Moves around in class</li> <li>• Smiles a lot</li> <li>• Maintains eye contact with learners</li> <li>• Voice modulation</li> </ul>
Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner-centered</li> <li>• Relaxed atmosphere</li> <li>• Reduces anxiety</li> <li>• Warm and friendly</li> <li>• Uses variety of activities and visual aids</li> <li>• Gives positive feedback</li> <li>• Excellent class control</li> <li>• Provides atmosphere of acceptance</li> <li>• Provides affluent stimulation</li> <li>• Enhances creativity</li> <li>• Consistent pace of teaching</li> </ul>

An important variable in a teaching-learning situation, the teacher is responsible for classroom activities (cf. Roets-Hentschel, 1989:27; Combrink, 1993: 214), and therefore, he/she is the “ultimate determiner of the communicativeness” of a lesson, and whether language learning takes place (Van der Walt, 1990: 37).

According to Van der Walt (1990: 31) the variable which may have the greatest influence on the teaching-learning situation is the teacher’s teaching style. It goes

without saying that every teacher has a certain range of individual variables which are demonstrated in a consistent pattern of behaviour, and reflected in his/her own teaching style. The influence of traits such as a sense of humour, positive outlook, motivation, and creativity on the teaching and learning environment immediately comes to the fore. Indeed, a communicative approach should not be “interpreted rigidly, but should make allowances for individual differences among teachers” (Van der Walt, 1990: 36).

The significance of a sense of humour in the classroom cannot be ignored (cf. Roets-Hentschel, 1989: 29; Mongiat, 1990: 57). In the quest to provide learners with positive experiences, in order to bring about a change in their perceptions of the target language, the play element and humour play an important role (Roets-Hentschel, 1989: 29). However, it is very important that learners should not be allowed to laugh at their classmates, or make fun of their efforts during communicative activities (Mongiat, 1993: 57).

My sense of humour and positive outlook indeed carried me through some trying moments during the classes. It was also noticeable that the learners enjoyed the light-hearted atmosphere, the joking and laughter, as well as the cheerful remarks I made. Some of the verbatim comments of the learners at the end of the intervention programme serve as confirmation of this: “It was lively and full of fun”; “Very interesting and understandable. I’ve enjoyed being with her”; “I really had a good time”; “The class were [sic!] great. I can say if we could have such classes again it will be fun”. On a slightly different note, a learner remarked that their regular teacher “should try to make her presence felt like making jokes and make people to be interested in the lesson”. During the lessons I undertook their own teacher’s body language was portraying her dismay and resentment of the ‘noise’ the communicative tasks generated, she constantly frowned, hardly ever smiled, and regularly reprimanded the learners. At times she was absent or apathetic. Even the evaluator conducting the post-test remarked that the teacher’s apathetic attitude was obvious (Appendix D) and showed in her body language. In fact, the influence of a teacher’s body language on successful teaching is another dimension of classroom practice listed in Table 7.1. Combrink (1993: 214) stresses the importance of a teacher’s body



language and comments that voice modulation should always be in harmony with the verbal message contained in the teacher's utterance.

During my conversations with the regular Afrikaans teacher, she admitted that she was struggling with feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and a loss of motivation. She furthermore criticised the learners and the learning situation (Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.2). All of these factors may be viewed as symptoms of a poor proficiency level. It is worthwhile to remember that a de-motivated, negative teacher influences the learning environment negatively, and all of these negative influences probably must have rubbed off on the learners, and contributed to their negative attitude towards Afrikaans (Chapter 4, section 4.6.1 and Figure 4.2). Askes (1990: 6) has found that de-motivating factors include (any or all of) the following: if a teacher appears to have knowledge but not an understanding of the subject, is not up to date with the latest materials, does not make use of visual aids, progresses at an inconsistent pace, and criticises the subject or even the learners. Conversely, a motivated teacher who is helpful and approachable, patient, has an interest in the subject as well as the learners, broadens learners' interest in the subject, and uses a variety of visual aids, not only inspires learners but also creates a set-up that is conducive for learning (Askes, 1990: 6). Again, a few verbatim comments of the learners capture the essence of their evaluation of my teaching style. It must be noted that the learners' remarks in this Chapter are given exactly as they have written them, including the spelling and grammar mistakes: "I think she is a perfect teacher for language because she is patient with us"; "She is very good. She knows how to communicate with people he is the loudy person". From the remarks of some of the learners they now appear to be more motivated to learn Afrikaans: "Being with you has brought to be the interest to doing Afrikaans. I now enjoying every Afrikaans lesson and I'm willing to work hard to gain Afrikaans knowledge"; "If we can be given the Afrikaans books to read a lot of Afrikaans at class we can understand something"; "I wish she would have started the year with us, we would have been having more understanding of Afrikaans".

As far as creativity is concerned, Genovese (1990: 1) advises that it should be seen as a developmental process, because there is a need to "cultivate and encourage creativity, since this talent has been traditionally ignored in education in general". To stimulate creative behaviour, a teacher should provide opportunities where learners

can explore and experience a variety of tasks and activities, but with the assurance that their attempts will be appreciated (Genovese, 1990: 2). Regarding a teacher's creativity, Genovese (1990: 2) points out that teachers should be aware of their own creative thinking abilities, should constantly produce innovative ideas, and should exploit materials effectively and in novel ways. A language teacher should encourage "original thinking, openness, emotional awareness, self-expression, self-confidence, self-initiative in students and create an atmosphere of mutual respect and mutual freedom of expression" (Genovese, 1990: 2). Since I value originality and creativity, I consistently endeavoured to tap into the learners' creativity in my planning and designing of appropriate, novel and innovative materials.

We now turn to the language a teacher uses in the classroom, since through the use of language a teacher can either succeed or fail to implement his/her plans. It is obvious that I had the distinct advantage of being proficient in Afrikaans in comparison to the regular Afrikaans teacher's proficiency level. Van der Walt (1990: 31) stresses that communicative language teaching demands a high level of proficiency of a teacher because of the unpredictability of the language generated by the use of communicative techniques. Hence, because non-native teachers are afraid to use the target language freely, they rather stick to textbooks than implement meaningful communication in the classroom (Van der Walt, 1990: 31). However, according to Van der Walt (1990: 35), the major problem is a teacher's perception of his/her own proficiency, which can result in a lack of self-confidence in his/her own abilities, and may inhibit performance. Combrink (1993: 215) is in agreement that a teacher preferably should be proficient in the target language, but argues that a dynamic, innovative teacher could overcome the problem by employing teaching methods and techniques which are in line with the learners' needs. The implication of proficiency as a variable is that a teacher should be sufficiently proficient so as to be able to "handle the lessons competently" (Van der Walt, 1990: 35).

Ideally, a teacher's classroom practice should aim at providing in the learners' language needs. Learners should learn how to use the language, and not only learn about language usage (Combrink, 1993: 213). This also implies that learners should be encouraged to use the target language for asking questions to increase their opportunities of using it (cf. Roets-Hentschel, 1989: 28; Combrink, 1993: 215). CLT

proceeds from the assumption that more rather than less language must be produced. The rationale is that the more language the learner produces, the greater the chances are that the language will develop, i.e. be learned. Mongiat (1993: 56) claims that if teacher talk is adjusted to suit the learners' proficiency level, it increases the learners' concentration, thereby enhancing acquisition. Since issues such as code switching, error correction, constructive feedback, and praise were dealt with in previous chapters (Chapter 4, section 4.7.2 and Chapter 6), it is sufficient to say here that the significance of these aspects was duly considered during the lessons surveyed.

Being a native speaker of Afrikaans, the language I used in the classroom no doubt offered the learners authentic language input. Moreover, I was constantly aware of the importance of teacher talk in line with recommendations of various researchers on speech modification, simplification of language, and manageable, comprehensible input, as discussed in section 4.4.1.2 (cf. Ellis, 1985: 304; Spolsky, 1989: 178; Nunan, 1991b, 190-191; Brown, 1994: 105; Cook, 1996: 129; Dernoshek, 2001: 71; Conteh-Morgan, 2002: 194). During the lessons, bearing in mind the limited time available, the central focus was to provide the learners with as many opportunities as possible to engage in communicative tasks in an anxiety free class setting in order to develop their proficiency in Afrikaans. In this regard, as Bourke (2001: 72) rightly points out, to implement a task-based methodology and employ materials which provide genuine interaction to allow learners to grow in language while providing a stress-free environment, require commitment from teachers.

### **7.3 AFFECTIVE VARIABLES**

The quest in a learner-centered approach to obtain a thorough understanding of the learners' needs resulted in building a profile of the learners (Figure 5.8). This profile contained demographic, cognitive, affective, and learning information that I found useful for the design and development of materials, as well as for employing appropriate methods and techniques that would take into account the diversity among the learners. Since the focus in Chapter 4 was on the influence of affective variables, where a more detailed picture was sketched of the learners' attitudes and motivation, the discussion below naturally leads more to reflection, self-analysis and self-

evaluating, in an effort to help establish the effectiveness of the intervention programme in this regard.

Roets-Hentschel (1989: 27) suggests that interactive second language teaching starts with the teacher and his interactive behaviour, which in turn rests heavily on the affective aspect of empathy. This means that a teacher should make an effort to have compassion with the learners' environment, since this not only reduces emotional barriers like anxiety and uncertainties, but also enhances feelings that they (the learners) are understood (Roets-Hentschel, 1989: 27). Moreover, Roets-Hentschel (1989: 26) argues that it is possible for a teacher to establish rapport with the learners, and to enhance learners' self-confidence if her or his conduct lessens the learners' concerns, uncertainties, and anxiety in the language classroom. Evidently, these are factors that influence language learning indirectly (cf. Spolsky, 1989: 14; Van Lier, 1996: 35-36).

A teacher's teaching style also affects the atmosphere of the classroom, which we now briefly turn to. In light of the learners' poor functional Afrikaans literacy, and because the teaching and learning situation in the classroom was less than favourable, my role as teacher required not only that I establish an interactive classroom through the use of relevant materials, but that I had to strive to create a classroom atmosphere that was conducive to learning.

One cannot discuss classroom atmosphere without reference to the influential work of Krashen on the Affective Filter hypothesis in second language learning (cf. Krashen, 1987: 30-32; Krashen & Terrell, 1995: 37-39). Recognition of the Affective Filter hypothesis entails that a teacher should not only supply comprehensible input, but also encourage a low anxiety situation in the classroom (Krashen, 1988: 38). I present below a few researchers' suggestions to help a teacher to accomplish this.

Combrink (1993: 215) suggests that an ideal classroom should be characterised by a warm and friendly ambience, lots of laughter and a feeling of acceptance. Similarly, Genovese (1990: 3) agrees that a teacher should provide an atmosphere of acceptance, and suggests that an emotionally supportive climate encourages learners to explore, to express, to experiment, and to take risks. What this entails is that a teacher not only

should adhere to a positive teaching approach, but should also strive to establish an enjoyable atmosphere in class, which would serve to reduce learners' anxiety, as well as enhance acquisition (cf. Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 134; Krashen, 1988: 23; Lombard, 1990: 23; Combrink, 1993: 212; Mongiat, 1993: 56; Lessing & De Witt, 1999: 53; Van der Merwe & Olivier, 1997: 40; Conteh-Morgan, 2002: 173; Weideman, 2002a: 61).

The preceding analysis has made it clear just how important affective variables are in the classroom. Throughout the lessons I paid special attention to affective factors, in order to create favourable conditions in the classroom to reduce anxiety and stress. The use of the slogan *Goed, beter, beste* to compliment learners on their achievements, for example, paid off, since it established an enjoyable and relaxed atmosphere, encouraged participation, affirmed their abilities, and raised their self-confidence. A few verbatim remarks of learners highlight their perceptions of the classroom atmosphere: "Mrs van der Wal make you to not feel weak in your Afrikaans"; "We can all understand and to be with a friendly teacher"; "She give you a chance to understand"; "She's a very understanding person especially when it comes to the children who doesn't understand Afrikaans"; "Because she explain to us and we try to co operate with her".

In a second language class learners often struggle with face-to-face communication and may experience feelings of helplessness, foolishness and even humiliation, all of which may lead to anxiety and stress. One accepts that certain activities are more stressful than others. Consequently, teachers are challenged to create a favourable environment in line with the learners' needs by employing methods and techniques such as ice-breakers, stories, songs, rhymes, warm-up exercises, and games to reduce anxiety and stress (cf. Roberts, 1982: 186; Krashen, 1987: 32; Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 134; Krashen & Terrell, 1995: 76-78; Conteh-Morgan, 2002: 173; Weideman, 2002a: 46-51, 58-60; Weideman, 2003: 32-37). In this regard, the stress-index for language methods proposed by Weideman (2002a: 102-103, and discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.3.1.3) proves to be valuable to a teacher for making pertinent decisions on the appropriateness of materials.

We saw in the previous chapter that I successfully utilised a number of methods and techniques (ice-breakers, stories, songs and games) during the implementation of the developed materials (Chapter 6), in order to reduce the learners' anxiety and stress, to increase risk-taking, to improve self-confidence, to capture attention and to enhance motivation. Consequently, by taking the learners' emotional needs into consideration, and by employing such methods and techniques, I was able to create an encouraging learning environment in the classroom, as reflected by the many comments of the learners given in this chapter. Moreover, the successful outcome of the intervention programme (Figures 5.4 and 5.5) may be attributed to the appropriateness of the manner in which the classes were implemented.

### **7.3.1 Personality**

I shall briefly focus on personality since there appears to be a consistent relationship between personality, anxiety, the learning situation, and language proficiency (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.1 for a more comprehensive discussion). It is common knowledge that people vary widely in their personality, and personality variables are interrelated with attitudinal and motivational factors. Traits such as self-confidence, self-esteem, self-efficacy, risk taking, and lack of anxiety encourage a learner's intake, and will result in having a low Affective filter (cf. Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982: 75; Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 133; Krashen, 1988: 23-24; Skehan, 1989: 106; Lightbown & Spada, 1993: 28; Brown, 1994: 23; Ehrman, 1996: 144-145 & 150; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991: 188; Weideman, 2002a: 56).

At the start of the intervention programme it was obvious that the learners struggled with self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem, and were reluctant to speak Afrikaans. Yet, during the lessons, as the learners' began to view the communicative tasks as interesting, meaningful and reflecting the real world outside the classroom, their willingness to take risks increased and more of them deliberately attempted to use Afrikaans (as indicated in Chapter 6). Van der Walt (1990: 35) rightly points out that second language teaching should "contribute to the development of the learner as a person". In this the selection of relevant materials is vital, and topics should contribute to the positive development of the personality traits mentioned above.

### 7.3.2 Capabilities

Capabilities involve learners' capabilities in language learning, such as aptitude, learning strategies and learning styles, as well as previous knowledge and experience of the target language. The combination of these factors and their interaction with attitude and motivation may explain the use a learner makes deliberately or automatically of the learning situation, and this in turn may influence a learner's performance in a second language (cf. Spolsky, 1989: 27; McLaughlin, 1990: 172). Without entering into a lengthy discussion of this affective variable, it must be pointed out that the tendency towards learner-centered methodologies in CLT has "strengthened interest in learner individuality", and that "sensitivity to individual learning strategies is now much more fashionable than before" (Lepota & Weideman, 2002: 217). The crux of the matter is that the emphasis on a learner-centered approach requires learners to become active participants in the learning process. They should become increasingly aware of the strategies and tactics they use or may use to improve their learning of the target language. Evidence of this came to light with the comments of two learners at the end of the intervention programme: "I think I must read more Afrikaans books"; "We must practise Afrikaans by talking".

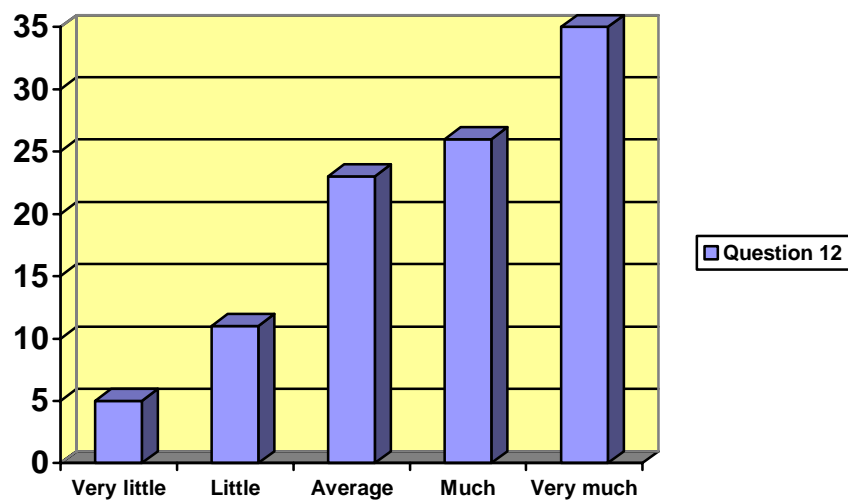
### 7.3.3 Class and classroom size

Before we turn to the influence of social context, it is vital to examine first some of the constraints of this study. One of the main limitations in this project was that of addressing the problem of a large class in a relatively small classroom. Somehow, a way had to be found to reorganise the configuration of the classroom so that the learners would be able to practise language skills, as well as allow me to pay attention to them individually. Concerning the problem of the large class, the question arose: what are the opinions of language teachers regarding this issue? Moreover, how well can language acquisition take place in a large class?

Researchers have found that teachers do in fact find large classes problematic and for several reasons (cf. Mongiat, 1993: 55; Meyer, 1996: 132-133; Tesfamariam, 2000: 100,113). It is often said that problems raised by large classes involve affective factors such as the difficulty to establish rapport with individual learners, inability to

make eye contact, and becoming acquainted with learners individually (Meyer, 1996: 133). Regarding the influence on effective teaching, teachers complain about having to speak with a louder voice, difficulties with discipline, additional mental and physical effort, movement restriction, distractions, and the tendency to avoid certain complicated but potentially stimulating tasks which may influence the teaching and learning negatively (cf. Mongiat, 1993: 55; Meyer, 1996: 133). However, if a teacher considers a communicative approach for language teaching where the learners are given the opportunity to practise the target language in pair and group work, the above constraints and difficulties can be seen in a new light. Tesfamariam (2000: 100) correctly points out, for example, that the “communicative approach is, in fact, one of the few methodologies or approaches that make sense to use in large classes”.

But perhaps the last word on large classes should be that of the learners since they are better placed than anybody to provide perspective on this matter. What did the learners think of the class size during the lessons? Their views are captured in Figure 7.12.



**Figure 7.12 Learners' perceptions: Preference for a smaller class**

From the learners' responses in the questionnaire at the end of the intervention programme (Appendix F) we learn that 61% of the learners would have preferred the lessons to be conducted in smaller groups (*very much* and *much*), and 23 % of the learners indicated *average*, while only 16% of the learners said that it mattered *little* or *very little* to them. In the light of these findings one may assume that although the



large class was broken up into smaller groups and in pairs with the CLT approach, the learners' dissatisfaction with the class size probably can be attributed to the inconvenience of seating arrangements, distractions, and movement restrictions.

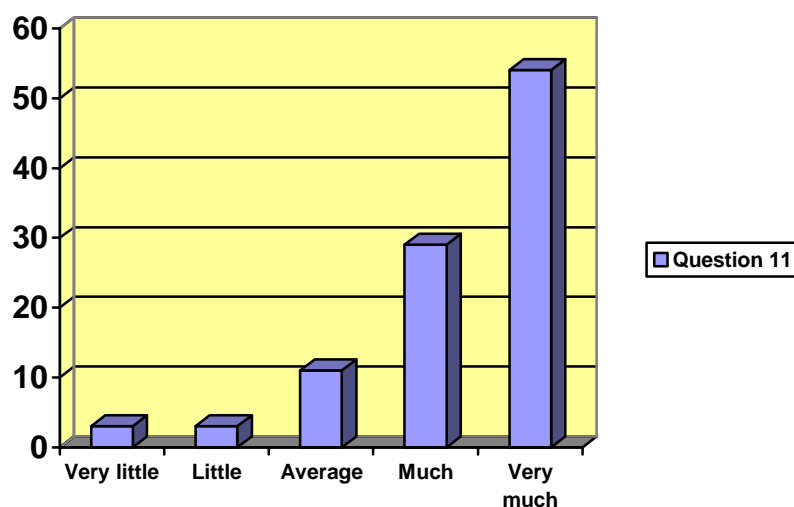
#### 7.3.4 Time constraints

Finally, we briefly turn to the time constraint in the study, since valuable teaching time was lost due to unforeseen circumstances and the disorganised school set-up. The fact that the intervention was limited to only ten lessons, and that the allocated hour for each lesson seldom materialised, obviously influenced the level of attainment. Related factors contributing to my dissatisfaction with the teaching and learning environment were the learners' tendency of arriving late for class, poor class attendance, disorganisation at school, and the physical arrangements in the classroom (Chapter 4, section 4.4.1.1 and Chapter 6). At the end of the intervention programme I was left with the unfortunate feeling that I was not able to accomplish what I had set out to do, mainly due to the limited time available.

But once again, how did the learners feel about the limited time spent on the Afrikaans lessons? It was quite remarkable that many learners indicated in the questionnaire (Appendix F) that they would have preferred to have had more Afrikaans lessons. A few of their verbatim comments (again without corrections to their spelling and grammar) serve as examples: "We sould get more time for Afrikaans lessons"; "Their should be more of these classes to help us improve our Afrikaans"; "We would like to have more Afrikaans lessons with Mrs van der Wal because that was one great teacher"; "I wish you can continue doing what you are doing because it's a good thing"; "The Afrikaans classes were fine and I would have like to have some lessons but it is my last year at this school"; "Yes my comment is that we wish to have some more Afrikaans lesson so that we can improve our Afrikaans".

Analysis of Question 11 of the questionnaire (Appendix F) serves as confirmation of the learners' comments above. An interesting picture unfolds, since 54% of them would have preferred to have more Afrikaans lessons *very much*, 29% said *much*, while 11% of the learners indicated *average*. In sharp contrast, only a small minority

of the learners would have preferred not to have more Afrikaans lessons (*little*: 3% and *very little*: 3%). These results are reflected in Figure 7.13.



**Figure 7.13 Learners' perception: Preference for more Afrikaans lessons**

We now turn to the influence of social context.

#### 7.4 SOCIAL CONTEXT

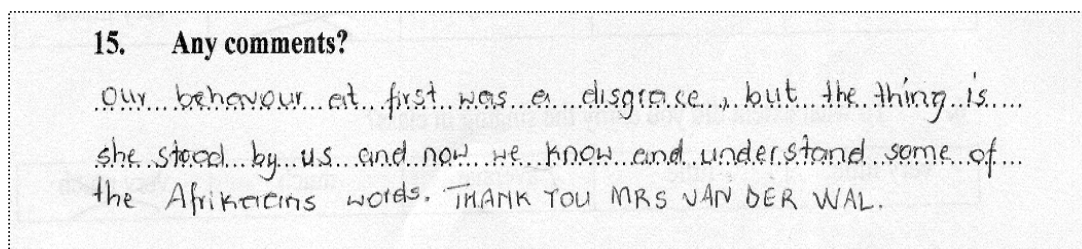
Researchers are in agreement that language learning, especially second language learning and the activities undertaken in the classroom, should be understood in context (cf. Spolsky, 1989: 131; Van Lier, 1996: 35-36; Bax, 2003: 278-289). Likewise, Kumaravadivelu (2003: 238) indicates that “no classroom is an island unto itself” because every classroom is “influenced by and is a reflection of the larger society of which it is a part”. The need to pay attention to the social factors (parents and community attitude towards Afrikaans) during the intervention programme was already discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.5, as well as in the discussion of Figure 7.1 in the beginning of this chapter.

However, a point that needs to be stressed here is that since Afrikaans is seldom spoken in the community (as discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.5.2) the classroom needs to be viewed as a practice area where the learners are provided with ample opportunities to engage in communicative activities. Ideally therefore, the teacher deliberately needs to consider and employ authentic communicative activities. But,

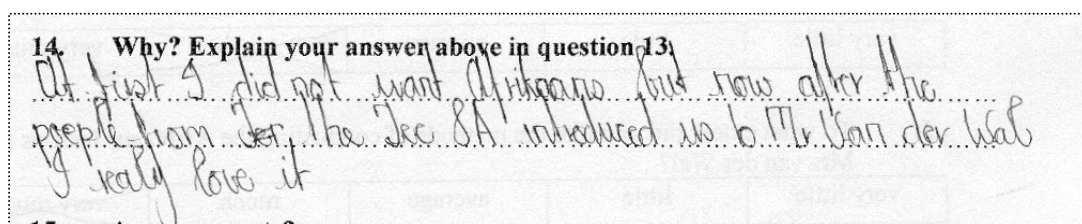
according to Strydom (1989: 2), additional language teaching becomes even more challenging if the teacher responsible for Afrikaans teaching lacks awareness and understanding of cross-cultural differences, as well as proficiency in the target language, as was indeed the case with the regular Afrikaans teacher in this study.

## 7.5 ATTITUDE CHANGE

Observation during the lessons, as well as the learners' comments at the end (Questionnaire, Appendix F), suggest that the endeavour to pay attention to affective factors during the intervention programme was probably helpful, since it was evident that the learners' attitude towards Afrikaans changed positively (Chapter 4, Figure 4.2). A majority of the learners made remarks reflecting their positive attitude and have thanked me for the classes. The following two learners' comments serve as examples of their attitude change:



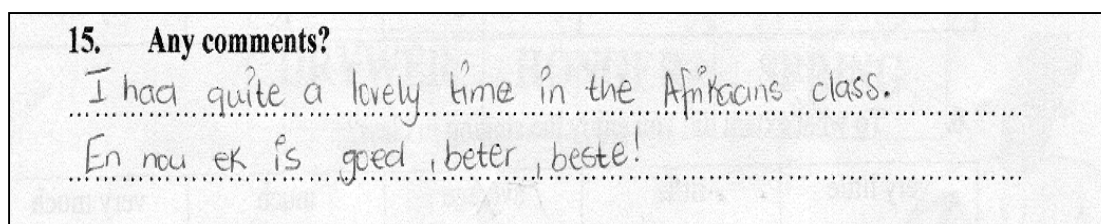
**Figure 7.14 Learner's comment: Reflecting attitude change. Example A**



**Figure 7.15 Learner's comment: Reflecting attitude change. Example B**

Some of the learners' appreciation is reflected in the following verbatim remarks (with spelling and grammar mistakes): "Lessons like these ones must be given to the other leners as well"; "I will like to thank you Mrs van der Wal for Afrikaans lesson"; "Thanks for the lessons, I hope I will pass my Afrikaans exam"; "I think you have been of a help a lot. I think if you can do that for the up coming Grade 12's"; "I would

like to thank her for the lessons she gave to us. I especially really appreciate that very much”; “Keep the good work up Mrs van der Wal”; “I will like to thank you for the great job you have done. Never mind others who took the lessons for granted, but keep it up. I’ll miss you”. The learners’ gratitude made me feel privileged that I could have made some contribution to their learning experience of Afrikaans as an additional language. The following remark by one learner summarises a good number of learners’ comments on the intervention programme.

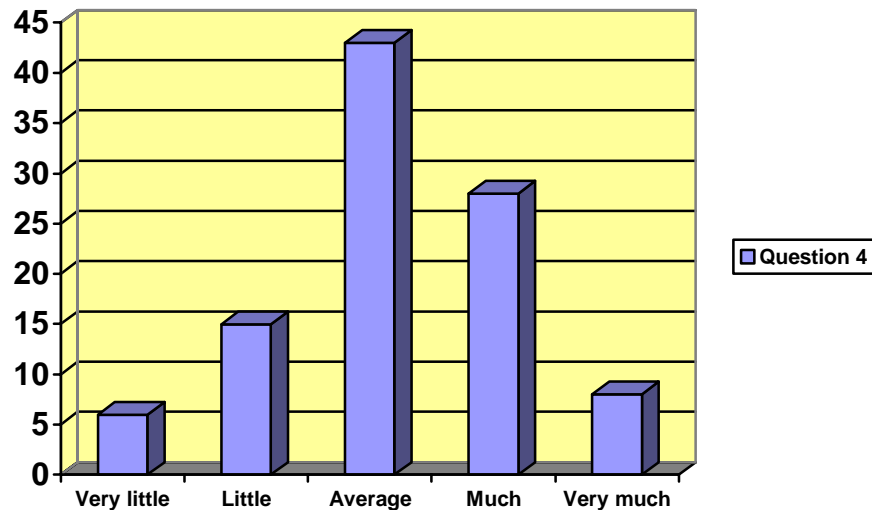


**Figure 7.16 Learner’s comment: Reflecting positive attitude change. Example C**

## 7.6 IMPROVEMENT OF PROFICIENCY LEVELS

The results of the post-test diagnostic report presented in Chapter 5 showed that there was indeed a slight improvement in the learners’ proficiency levels. Even the evaluator who conducted the *EVAT* post-test and who was responsible for the analysis and interpretation was astonished with the results in view of the limited time spent on the lessons, as well as the unfavourable teaching and learning set-up at the school (Appendix D). His amazement is captured in his comment: “*Dit is ’n wonderwerk! Ek weet nie hoe jy dit gedoen het nie, maar dit het gewerk*”. He considered my communicative approach and the materials used as the main contributing factors to the relatively successful intervention.

The question arises: Did the learners themselves feel there was an improvement in their proficiency in Afrikaans? In constructing the second questionnaire (Appendix F), I assumed that the learners were not familiar with the concept ‘proficiency’, and therefore used the term ‘understanding’ instead. The learners’ perceptions on the improvement of their understanding of Afrikaans revealed that they were actually realistic about their proficiency, as illustrated in Figure 7.17.



**Figure 7.17 Improvement of understanding Afrikaans: learners' perceptions**

Only 8% of the learners indicated that their understanding improved *very much*, 28% of the learners said that there was *much* improvement, while 43% of the learners perceived the improvement was only *average*. On the other hand 15% of the learners viewed their improvement as *little*, and 6% of the learners felt that there was *very little* improvement.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of my understanding and experience of the action research undertaken in this study. The self-reflection done here was a means of helping me form insights into my teaching, and, as a method of professional development, it has provided a means of integrating theory and practice.

The purpose of the reflection on the intervention programme was to discuss the reasons why the lessons may be judged as relatively successful, despite the constraints of limited instruction time, limited space in class and the generally unfavourable conditions. The differences between the regular Afrikaans teacher and myself in our approaches to teaching, the methods and techniques used, and materials employed, were considered and contrasted. It was proposed that a vital factor in the CLT approach during the intervention programme was the recognition of affective variables. It was further suggested that an authoritarian teaching approach would have

been inappropriate and that context plays a significant role in additional language learning. Very pertinent is teachers' resistance to change, and the accompanying unwillingness to change their context. We should perhaps take note that action research is not about making compromises, toeing the line, or accommodating the situation. The adoption of an action research methodology in this study indicates that I have been able to use an instrument that has allowed me to challenge the context or those factors that inhibit change, in order to achieve some transformation.

Finally, the learners' perception of the effectiveness of the methods and techniques, the developed materials, as well as my classroom practice, are indicators of the relative success of the intervention programme.

The very nature of action research requires that one should always refine and amend one's activities in the classroom. Reflection on the action research undertaken in this study has revealed that there is scope for improvement of the designed and developed materials employed during the intervention. Consequently, in the following chapter, Chapter 8, the focus will be on a redesigned set of materials for intensive use over a short period of teaching in a scarce resource and disciplined-challenged teaching and learning environment.