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A System of Forced Change

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Has your experience of the content of this MA course led to changes in your attitudes, beliefs, and/or teaching behaviour? If so, what are the changes, and where on the cline of change would you put them? Would you characterize the changes as part of a personal 'paradigm shift', or as aspects of 'continuous change', or 'incremental change'?

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My interpretation of the question is:

"Has your experience of the content of this MA course led to changes in your attitudes, beliefs, and/or teaching behaviour? If so..."

I feel the question has a focus on attitudes and beliefs with only a possibility on teaching behaviour; moreover, the usage of "if" suggests it's possible that changes have not occurred. This also leads me to believe I do not have to focus on teaching behaviour. I would therefore like to state:

This paper has received special permissions from Dr. Walker in regards to example use: The students focus on changes to beliefs and attitude through course content are approved

Doctor Crayton Walker: *"I approve of this interpretation"*.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

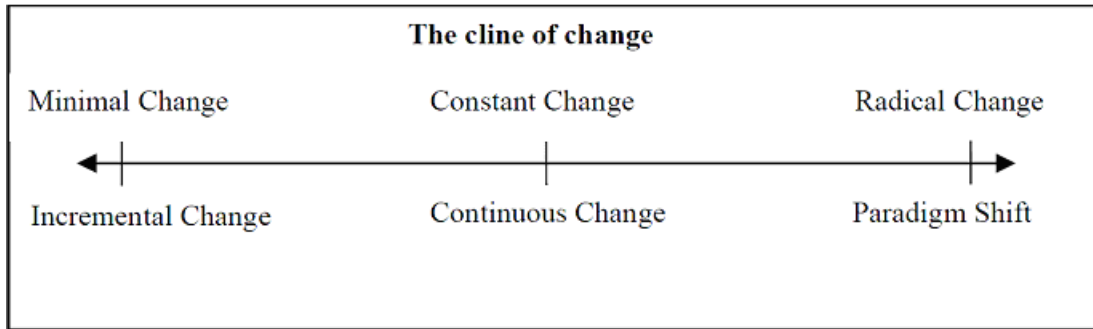
It is not easy to change. In actuality, certain factors or conditions must be involved for change to occur. Moreover, these same conditions decide the degree of change and whether the change occurs in one's beliefs, attitude, or behaviour. I myself have been a person that is very resistant to change; especially in regards to new methods of teaching. Yet, through the "Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics" program at the University of Birmingham, I have changed quite considerably. How this change occurred will be examined.

For the purposes of this study I will define key terminology that is often used in regards to change. I will define three types of change: continuous, incremental, and discontinuous change/paradigm shift. There will also be a presentation of the Master's course content; an evaluation of the changes that did or did not occur in each module. The discussion will then clarify what type of change has occurred, how it occurred, and the end result of personal change through the MA program.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Changes are subtle, slow and sometimes dramatic; therefore, to truly discuss change, one must consider the "cline of change" (see figure 1 from Muller 2004). The cline of change is a scale representation of three different types of change: (1) minimal or incremental change, (2) constant or continuous change which is also referred to as adaptive change, and (3) discontinuous or revolutionary change which may be referred to as a paradigm shift (Kennedy and Edwards: 2011). Classification and movement on the cline of change is often related to change or evolution in one's beliefs attitudes and/or behaviour.

Figure 1: The cline of change, from Muller 2004

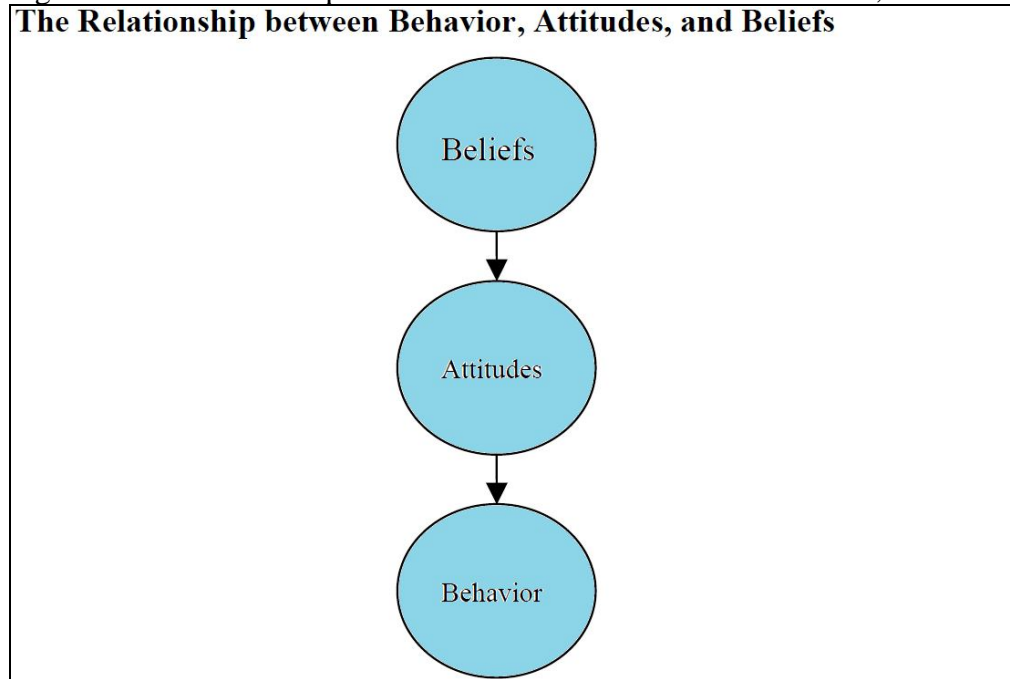


2.1 Key terminology: Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviour

A belief, loosely defined, is information one holds to be true (Harris, Dodds De Wolf, and Gregg 1996:138); in regards to education, this largely influences how professional educators teach (Buchmann 1987 and Beijaard & De Vries, 1997). Therefore, consider how a teacher would teach his/her students how to read: If the teacher has no constraints on time, or external factors that force him/her to teach a certain way, then the effort and how the teacher teaches reading, is directly related to the teacher's personal beliefs on the value of reading. In other words, how an individual teaches reading would be based on their beliefs (Beijaard & De Vries, 1997). Moreover, a teacher's beliefs are what forms attitude towards teaching.

An attitude is the evaluation of one's understanding on any given topic or object (Baumeister & Bushman, 2008: 226). While it may appear that beliefs and attitudes are very similar, they do have significant differences: attitudes are fluid, and may change easily; beliefs are often set, and more difficult to change. Furthermore, beliefs are information that an individual considers true, an attitude often guides how information is presented (Kennedy and Edwards: 2011). However, how an attitude is reflected in one's teaching could also be considered teacher behaviour. Indeed, teacher behaviour is often considered the methods and practices that a teacher uses while teaching. Therefore beliefs shape attitudes, which in turn may be reflected as behaviours (see figure 2).

Figure 2: The relationship between Behaviour Attitudes and Beliefs, from Muller 2004



It should be noted that this relationship is not two-way, and behaviour and attitude may not accurately represent beliefs (Kennedy and Edwards 2011). Consider that a teacher may be required to show a positive attitude towards teaching something that they may or may not agree with; for example, internet usage. While some teachers may disapprove of children under twelve using the internet, due to concerns over children using a potentially addictive form of media, other teachers encourage it. Regardless, there are governmentally required lessons that necessitate teaching internet usage (Becker: 1999); for such lessons, teachers are required to have a “positive attitude” and behaviour regardless of personal beliefs. This is what Kenny and Edwards refer to this as “lip service” (Kennedy and Edwards 2011). Moreover, a change in behaviour may not reflect a true change in attitude; a teacher may change their methods and therefore behaviour in class, but may still retain the attitude that they previously held towards the taught subject. Therefore, teacher change involves ‘modifying individual behaviour and underlying beliefs and attitudes’ and ‘...takes place in an environment that consists of a number of interrelating systems’ (Kennedy and Edwards 2011). This complex relationship of change must be clarified further.

2.2 Key terminology: Minimal Change, Incremental Change and Paradigm Shift

Minimal change is the concept of ‘we continue doing what we did before but we try and do it better’ (Kennedy and Edwards: 2011), to fix any problem that threatens the system or teaching environment. For example: a student, who has new glasses, cannot see the whiteboard and therefore take notes; a solution with minimal change would be moving the student’s chair, or providing the student with a copy of the notes. Therefore, minimal change is the least amount of change that may occur to accommodate the system (Fullan 1991:29). One of the main drawbacks to minimal change is that it often results in **divergent problems**; problems that are created by the solving of problems. To clarify, by moving the student in the previous example, the teacher may upset other students who resent the position of the student, with glasses, at the front of the class. Similarly, students may also complain that one student receives a personal copy of the notes while they have to write notes from the white board. Indeed, minimal change is most effective for problems that can be solved on a “one shot” basis; the possibility of deeper secondary problems often restricts the implementation of minimal change. Moreover, when a secondary or divergent problem has appeared and is significant enough that it cannot be addressed with a minimal change, the entire system is at risk. For such problems that seem to appear with change, it is often beneficial to address them with a focus on continuous change.

Continuous change adapts to systems that are constantly evolving. To clarify, consider the example of the vision impaired student. In place of moving the student, the teacher moves the entire class or sets up a rotation that allows students to spend equal time in different arrangements within the class. The teacher could also give all the students a photocopy of the notes and ask them to each make a copy in their own words, but allow them to keep both copies. Therefore continuous change must consider forecasting problems with solutions before problems occur. It should be noted that continuous change must still consider the “system in place” and how any changes that are implemented affect the current system as well as possible future states. Moreover, a

system with continuous change is far more likely to survive a forced major change or paradigm shift.

The paradigm shift, also referred to as revolutionary or discontinuous change, is the most extreme of the three forms of change. It is a completely radical and new direction from teaching methods that were used in the “previous system”. It is so radical that it is often only implemented as a “last resort” in order to keep the system functional. In most occurrences revolutionary change does not occur due to hard facts, but rather when a significant change in view, or world view, occurs; for example, after a divorce or family members passing. However, it should be clarified that technology or innovation can also cause a radical shift in teaching methods. Consider the addition of a computer, or even high speed internet, to a teaching/learning environment. To suddenly begin using this kind of technology would undoubtedly be a major change to the system. Indeed, the paradigm shift may very well be the greatest challenge a teacher can face in regards to how they teach; however, the very nature of a system requiring “forced change” mandates that change must occur.

3.0 MA COURSE ANALYSIS: IN REGARDS TO PERSONAL CHANGE

The MA course is comprised of six modules; this writing is for my sixth module. After completing the reading for each module there is a writing requirement; a 4000 word essay that answers a specific question on the content of the module. The learning experience of completing a module does not always equate to a change that could be characterized on the cline of change; however, it is likely that personal attitudes, beliefs and sometimes teaching behaviour will be affected. How each module affected me and an examination of why change did or did not occur will be explored.

3.1 Module 1 Sociolinguistics

For the sociolinguistics module, the essay presented the results of “how English has been used imperialistically”. To support my thesis, I had to go outside of the course readings

and research the colonial practices of England. I also examined the cultural implications of learning a language, and researched the usage of English in Japan.

3.1.1 Module 1 self-analysis of change

The readings and essay did not effect any change in my personal beliefs, on the role of English in imperialism; however change did occur. To clarify, I had already researched the topic during coursework for my undergraduate degree. My previous conclusion was that English, like any other language, could be used imperialistically; this conclusion was not affected by the MA work I had completed. Though the MA readings and subsequent writing did not affect change in any personal beliefs, I was affected by the course content; my attitude had changed. To elaborate, since the completion of the module I have often quoted Ngugi Wa Thiong'o 'the language of my education was no longer the language of my culture' (Ngugi 4:86). I often reflect on the profound sense of loss Ngugi felt as he discussed how his language and culture were taken away from him. I have thus concluded that there needs to be some resistance to teaching so that the teachings are taught and not imposed. That perhaps, students should have more control over their learning; moreover, this could of course be implemented with assignment choice, but the focus should remain on giving the student some choice or control over their learning. Therefore minimal or incremental change did occur; I decided "to continue doing what we did before only better" (Kennedy and Edwards: 1998). The teaching methods I have used since that module have not changed; however, the content did encourage more self-assessment on the frustrations I feel, when my students show resistance to language learning; indeed, personal change did occur.

3.2 Module 2 Written Discourse

In my work with the Written Discourse module, I presented an essay on how a gender bias towards females has existed in institutionalised forms of discourse. The study included an examination of gender in dictionaries, textbooks, and newspapers. There was

also some research on how models of the female gender have been reinforced through great works of literature.

3.2.1 Module 2 self-analysis of change

The course did have a significant impact on my beliefs and attitude but did not result in any change to my teaching methods as defined by Kennedy and Edwards (1998). To elaborate, the text books I researched for the study did not show any significant bias. However, the dictionary definitions, that were researched, showed considerably more bias against the female gender. My research showed that the Canadian Oxford dictionary defined “**man**” with fourteen definitions (Barber 2004: 937) while the word “**woman**” had only eight (2004: 1790); if the difference is biological, then why would man be defined to a greater extent. This led to an understanding of what exactly is taught and reproduced through institutionalised forms of discourse; that to a certain extent, ‘women have little choice in the formation of their sexual identity’ (Butler 1990: 2-3). This resulted in a significant change in my own attitude towards feminism, and my perceptions on the construction of the female gender. I now had more understanding on why female students were sometimes reluctant to speak or act outside of defined gender roles, but I did not, and still do not, know how to correct this problem. Therefore, it should be noted that though my attitude had changed towards my female students my teaching behaviour did not. I did not make any allowance for female students to remain silent in class; nor did I correct the problem. Indeed my behaviour can be summed up by Fullan, ‘minimal change is sufficient in maintaining the system’ so further change was not required or implemented (Fullan 1991:29).

3.3 Module 3 Functional Grammar

The third essay I wrote was an evaluation on different writing styles. For the study, there were two texts that discuss the effects of alcohol consumption: one text was written for an academic journal; the other had a more cautionary or emotional tone that strongly discouraged the consumption of alcohol.

3.3.1 Module 3 self-analysis of change

The content of the module enhanced an awareness and interest in the true meaning of discourse that began in the previous module; I again experienced minimal change. To clarify, my understanding of how “gender bias may be taught or reinforced through discourse” (Wodak 97:10) was expanded by examining other possible meanings and beliefs that are not always apparent when first reading, or assessing, discourse. While most of the differences between the two texts were quite clear in regards to intent, I was quite intrigued by the usage of pronouns like “**your**” to enhance reader interest; for example: “**your** car” or “**your** body”. Moreover, the difference in using an article like “**the**” as an enhancement in a sentence like “**the** car” as opposed to “**a** car” was something that I had previously never considered. Indeed, after the module I began to notice the different peculiarities that appeared in written discourse; I found myself wondering why SOME words were capitalised and others were not. Therefore, as with the previous module, I had been deeply affected by the content of the course; however, like the previous module, there was no change to my teaching behaviour as defined by Kennedy and Edwards (1998). The content of the course had significantly improved my understanding on the subtle meanings that may or may not occur in written discourse; but again, I did not see any “teaching behaviour” changes I could apply to my teaching. Nevertheless, it is now apparent that there seemed to be a noticeable change or adaptation taking place. My personal beliefs regarding the construction of the female gender, and my understanding towards the subtle meanings within text had changed; moreover, my attitude towards resistance to teaching also changed. Therefore, the content of the MA program significantly reduced my own personal resistance to change; this change occurred, after each module was completed.

3.4 Module 4 Corpus Linguistics

In regards to the Corpus Linguistics module, I wrote an essay on two words that English language learners have traditionally confused: **near** and **around**. The module itself is

based on understanding English through usage; therefore, the various usages of the words under study were examined within the BOE (Bank of English).

3.4.1 Module 4 self-analysis of change

This module was a complete departure from the previous modules in that it necessitated the use of a corpus and corpus software. To be truthful, I did not know what a corpus was until I started this module; however, I quickly learned that it was extremely beneficial in discerning the differences in word usages. In this case, I learned that **near** was used more often with specific number or precise details; for example: “**near** the station”. While **around** is often used more with unspecific or more general details; for example: “**around** school”. While the usage of the software was at first quite complex, I was very determined to use the software towards assignment completion. Despite frustrations, I never considered not learning how to use the software, or any “shortcuts”; I considered it necessary. This attitude towards change is not something I have traditionally had. I would characterize my attitude towards new technology to have been more open at this time but not before the MA program; at some point, the MA program instilled a more change-friendly attitude. Indeed, the introduction of new technology may have resulted in a “personal paradigm shift” (Kennedy and Edwards 2011); however, the content of the program thus far had caused an effect of more continuous change. As a result, the 4th module did not cause any revolutionary change in attitude or world view.

However, I was unable to find any usage for corpus linguistics outside of language research. Though corpus study was an excellent way to discern word usages, I could not find any practical application for the classroom environment. I had completely accepted the usage of a previously unknown form of language research, and software, but I did not see any application for the teaching environment.

3.5 Module 5 Language Teaching

For the Language Teaching module, my essay discussed the benefits of teaching writing with the “**process approach**”. I collected six writing samples from current and previous

students. I compared the writing difficulties of students who had been taught with more traditional approaches to those that had learned with a process approach.

3.5.1 Module 5 analysis of change

The fifth module completely changed how I teach writing in English. By examining the students who had been taught primarily with the reproduction of modules, I discovered that they “had significant difficulties writing original composition” (Buckley 1998: 32). This problem seemed amplified because I could relate it to how I had been taught, and my own writing difficulties. My understanding of the process approach changed my opinion of multiple drafts and the note taking process; therefore, my own ability to write significantly improved. As soon as I began to understand the process approach and the impact it had on student writings, I immediately looked for ways to change and improve my teaching practices. I had completely accepted the process approach to writing and was very eager to replace my own methods of teaching writing.

3.5.2 Module 5 analysis: changes in teaching behaviour

I introduced several activities that completely changed my teaching approach. Previously I had handed out a writing topic and had students write their essays based on a model. Of course this rather unimaginative approach had significant problems; fortunately, I could address them with changes applied through a process approach to writing. I first addressed the problem of:

‘The writer must often make inferences on the relevant knowledge of the readers and therefore decide what information should be included and what information should be omitted’ (Nunan 1991:86).

I encouraged students to consider this during the prewriting stage by creating notes (see appendix 1). Similarly I created a **second activity** to target the problem of lack of interest I had learned that ‘brainstorming is effective in igniting student motivations and teacher

participation in the writing process' (Brown 2001:349) (see appendix 2 for full data). Moreover, the brainstorming or "free writing" activity allowed students to freely write content as it came to them without feeling any pressure on the quality of composition. A **third activity** I introduced was to address problems students encountered during the writing process (see appendix 3 for full data). I had learned that: 'writers rarely know at the outset exactly what it is they are going to write about because many ideas are only revealed during the act of writing itself' (White and Arndt 1991:3). In this regard, I encouraged students to write a first draft. By making one or more drafts, students corrected writing difficulties slowly but without the stress of immediately submitting their work. Moreover, students could now 'read over and review, to get an idea of how text is developing, to revise and bring in new ideas or rearrange those already expressed' (Hedge 2005:53).

These changes at first seemed quite radical to me and my students; however, I cannot classify them as any type of paradigm shift. The changes were the result of a significant change in my beliefs on how to teach writing, but they were not a "last resort" or needed to 'keep the system functional' as suggested by Kennedy and Edwards (2011). Moreover, they were not difficult to implement and not the result of a significant change in the teaching/learning environment. The changes to how I teach writing seemed to be a further stage, in a long process of change, which had begun with the first module.

4.0 SUMMARY

The content of the MA course is structured in a manner that promotes continuous change. The first module involved the learning and exploration of the English language in imperialism. While the subject is widely known and taught in many institutions, I believe there is a significant probability in increasing the MA student's understanding and addressing views that have been overlooked at the secondary, and even post secondary level. The MA program starts by approaching the MA student on a familiar topic but significantly adds to their understanding of it; therefore, the first module builds trust.

Similarly, the second module adds to that experience. The second module takes a deeper look at discourse and relates it directly to established social structures. For my own understanding, this put the experience of the MA program at a very personal level. The module presented an understanding of discourse that I could directly relate to my own personality, and considerations on why I am the person I am; therefore, the second module creates significant personal interest.

The third module used a topic that I, like perhaps many, have considered dry or unimaginative. Indeed, the very notion of studying functional grammar is something I would have considered as interesting as a counting stones in a drive way. However, because my experiences in the course thus far had built a strong interest in the meanings of discourse, I found the module to be quite interesting. The module gave me a deeper understanding of the sometimes hidden meanings within discourse; therefore, the third module builds more interest and challenges previous interpretations, or viewpoints, that are not necessarily accurate.

The fourth module, corpus linguistics, is a complete departure from the flow of the program; I believe it can only be approached after an MA student has gone through the experiences of the first three modules. To clarify, the module significantly challenges the MA student with new technology; however, this is easily overcome with a positive attitude towards learning and personal change. The significant benefits of corpus linguistics become apparent with little consideration for the difficulties of new software. Because corpus studies deals with defining with new or often confused vocabulary, it presents a solution to very common problems in language teaching; therefore, the fourth module teases the MA student with solutions to problems he/she addresses in language teaching. Moreover, the fourth module gives the MA student a very open attitude towards change and innovation; the MA student becomes eager to enhance their teaching ability but the eagerness of implementing new practices may not be addressed until the next module.

The fifth module, language teaching, satisfies the desire for changes in teaching behaviour. Indeed the first four modules have led the MA student to a position where they want to change, they want to improve, and they want to evolve. The fifth module arrives to a very receptive environment and what appears to be the most significant change is in actuality the next step in a continuous process. Therefore, while the fifth module may result in the most change to teacher behaviour; it is not truly a personal paradigm shift. The fifth module is in fact part of the process of change that starts with the first module.

5.0 CONCLUSION

On the cline of change I would characterize my change as continuous; most significantly my attitude and beliefs are now more open to change. The change that has occurred is a direct result of my experiences in the MA program at the University of Birmingham. The program is structured in a way that even those that are resilient to change are deeply affected by the content and will likely experience some change. In regards to my beliefs I have a significantly greater understanding of the English language and the meaning of discourse. The course has instilled a change in my teaching behaviour and how I will structure my classes. The course has also significantly changed my perception on how discourse shapes social structure, and has changed my attitude to one of responsibility in how I teach. Perhaps the greatest change in my teaching has been the lessening of my resistance to change. The MA program has taught me: that to be a good teacher, one must always be willing to learn.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Making Notes

After students have chosen a topic it is beneficial to start writing notes; this is for creating supportive material. This supportive material may be: notes for specific essay topics, or background information for short stories, or even points they wish to include in support of an email topic; however, notes are beneficial for the problem of providing enough information. Making notes also corrects certain problems students have with providing relevant information to their topic; indeed, many writers have the problem of over emphasis or insufficient support of their thoughts and ideas. From Nunan's, *a language teaching methodology*, 'the writer must often make inferences on the relevant knowledge of the readers and therefore decide what information should be included and what information should be omitted' (Nunan 1991:86). In other words, writers cannot always know what information needs to be included or omitted because they must often guess on how much information the audience has their topic (ibid). This problem may be corrected during a note taking activity by consulting the teacher or even other students for more viewpoints on what information needs to be presented. Students can therefore expand on the points that were made while brainstorming. Typically, the role of the teacher during this activity is to: (1) remind the students on what information is required, (2) ask the students if the written ideas are clear or require further clarity and (3) to consider how the written ideas relate to the topic that the student is presenting. This allows the teacher to help the students build a focused composition that is adequately supported and does not have irrelevant information. Since the writing process is often not linear but recursive (Raimes, 1985:229), students often need to refer to their notes to make sure their writing retains a sharp focus and does not confuse the audience

Appendix 2: Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a pre-writing activity that often helps students overcome writing difficulties in regards to content and participation. Common brainstorming activities include working in a group, or alone, and quickly jotting down ideas on a topic without worrying about how to use or present the information. It is important to note that allowing the student to choose a topic is an effective way of engaging student interest (Bridgeman, Morgan and Wang 1996).

Brainstorming is particularly effective with students that have difficulties with content. When a writer "draws a blank" and has nothing to write about a simple brainstorming activity can relax writing frustrations and reignite the production of thoughts and ideas; 'brainstorming is effective in igniting student motivations and teacher participation in the writing process' (Brown 2001:349). The teacher can encourage students to write down possible topics and ideas without offering judgement or critical analysis; this in turn relaxes students but offers some direction. As a result, students have the freedom to base the writing on topics and concepts that motivate them but also possess an awareness of the writing task requirements (Brown 2001:349). Therefore, brainstorming is very effective in changing the perception of writing as a chore to one of expression.

Appendix 3: Writing a first or multiple drafts

Many students feel the first draft should be the final draft; however, by making one or more drafts students can correct writing difficulties without the stress of immediately submitting their work. Though an outline may have corrected some problems with the composition, a first draft allows the writer to

‘Read over and review, to get an idea of how text is developing, to revise and bring in new ideas or rearrange those already expressed’ (Hedge 2005:53).

While writing a first draft, it is not uncommon to go back and forth through notes and reshape the outline that had been previously prepared; sometimes writers will have to brainstorm more content or topics to fulfill the requirements of the composition. This is not unusual because the content may not be as sufficient as the writer had thought during the pre-writing stage. Consider these statements from *Process Writing* by White and Arndt ‘writers rarely know at the outset exactly what it is they are going to write about because many ideas are only revealed during the act of writing itself’ (White and Arndt 1991:3. therefore until the content is actually written down the writer cannot assume that more supportive material is not needed or that current material has enough clarity. Again this is another opportunity to consult others on their opinions of the draft. This is very important because many writers have a “blind eye” to their own work. To clarify, the writer makes certain assumptions when they write on the understanding of their content; it is possible that these assumptions are incorrect and the writing may make suggestions or inferences that the writer does not see. Furthermore, it is also possible for the writer to unknowingly miss or ignore some requirements of the assignment; these omissions are often easy to see for teachers and sometimes fellow students.