

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL ONLINE MENTORING

by

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Summary

This study examines the conditions for successful online mentoring in order to develop writing skills in English in a workplace setting.

Chapter 1 gives the background and context of the study. Problems to be addressed in the study and the aims, objectives, hypotheses and their rationale are presented. This is followed by testing procedures, research design, sources of data and research procedures.

In Chapter 2, the literature review supports the hypotheses on the need for collaboration in materials development and delivery, mentoring relationships, motivation and computer and Internet efficacy.

Chapter 3 presents the findings from the case study bringing into focus problems that would jeopardise a mentoring programme if training providers do not pay attention to the hypotheses. The findings are collated and the hypotheses are confirmed.

Conditions for successful online mentoring are spelt out in Chapter 4. The study concludes that online mentoring works once the conditions are properly followed.

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Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

The point of this research is to provide guidelines for successful online mentoring. Hutto *et al* (1991: 84) defined a mentor as “an experienced, successful and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship”. The term “online” refers to e-mail communication, Internet platforms and chat-rooms. In this research, the term “online mentoring” refers to a developmental relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person using Internet communication.

Workplace mentoring has been suggested as an appropriate tool for work skills development and many people have tried to highlight the importance of developing the skills particularly in the South African context. This study examines the conditions for the success of online mentoring in order to develop writing skills in English in the workplace using process writing. Process writing can be defined as an approach in which learners engage in writing multiple drafts with their mentors before submitting a final written piece of work. The study is based on the experience I had in mentoring employees of the South African Department of Labour (DoL).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 The BCP/ DoL /EU contract

In 2002, the Department of Labour published a tender ref: *Services/ta/cst/p1/wp3* for Communications Skills Training for staff of DoL. The project was known as the Business Communication Programme (BCP) and the European Union Commission for South Africa funded it. The crucial objective of the BCP was to develop work-based communication skills. The Employment and Skills Development Services (ESDS) realised that there was a lack of good communication skills in the Department of Labour in computer-assisted communication and communication through the written and spoken word. The BCP was therefore intended to overcome these shortcomings in communication. This programme was designed to drive a redress and equity process of empowering second language learners and in particular black women and people with disabilities to advance in the system and to encourage learners to be more effective in the workplace.

Due to the importance of the programme, its delivery required the services of a training provider of notable capacity. After bidding, the

programme was awarded through a tender process to an institute called South African Committee for Higher Education (SACHED) Trust in consortium with Wits University and the University of South Africa (UNISA)'s John Povey Centre, which is based in the English Department of UNISA. The tender won, stakeholders felt the need to deliver this type of training in a unique way, a most interactive and effective way over a period of one year from January 2003.

The tender was won on the understanding that six key experts would be available for the duration of the project. One key expert came from SACHED, three of them were from UNISA and the other two were from the Wits University Writing Centre. The SACHED expert was responsible for managing the materials development process that grew out of a joint SACHED-UNISA programme called *Leadership Unlimited*. The SACHED expert also worked as an online mentor and assessor of the portfolios of evidence. One UNISA expert was in charge of the tutors and mentors from UNISA in addition to his duties as an online mentor, assessor and a moderator while the other experts from UNISA and the University of Wits Writing Centre contributed to materials development and mentoring. This was thus an impressive team with diverse experience in materials development and training.

The tutors for each phase were going to mentor the learners during the weeks of the programme. Mentoring would be face-to-face, by e-mail and/or telephonic. As such, there was an overlap in tasks among programme experts, tutors and mentors.

In terms of the overall responsibilities, the SACHED Trust would be responsible for the management of the programme and the financial aspects while UNISA and Wits would provide key experts, contribute to the development of learning materials, undertake assessment, mentoring and quality assurance and meet the logistical needs of the programme.

1.1.2 Subjects

Forty-nine learners and 14 mentors were observed in the Business Communication Programme (BCP) for two years from 2003 to 2005. The learners all came from the South African Department of Labour in Pretoria and the mentors came from SACHED, Wits University and the University of South Africa. Wits University mentors withdrew from the programme in the early stages due to differences in opinion about the approach of this training in that SACHED and UNISA found the mentoring provided by the Wits University unsatisfactory. Other potential mentors from the University of South Africa who had initially indicated a desire to take part in this mentoring programme later decided not to get

involved. The learners' group comprised black and white adult females and black males. They were all South African speakers of English as a second language. The mentoring group consisted of two Indians who withdrew in the early stages of the programme, two black Africans and 10 whites. I was one of the two black mentors and my research supervisor was one of the white mentor experts from the University of South Africa.

1.1.3 The Curriculum

The Roadmap for the Business Communication Programme stated that the training was to be conducted in three phases, namely: Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced. The complete list of items on the course is attached in Appendix I, but below is a summary of the main aspects of the programme.

The Introductory course required learners to:

- take notes
- write a memo or submission
- write a letter of confirmation
- edit one's own and others' work
- develop a workshop programme
- communicate information by e-mail
- write their CV
- write a letter of application

The Intermediate course required learners to:

- plan a project
- conduct a survey
- produce a proposal
- conduct meetings (notices, chairing, minutes)
- Summarise
- produce an action plan
- write a final report
- write an information pamphlet

In the Advanced course learners had to:

- summarise
- write a speech on behalf of a senior official
- write replies to Parliamentary Questions
- write about a workplace task

The general assumption was that learners would start from Elementary

tasks and proceed to the Intermediate and Advanced levels having acquired the lower level skills.

To achieve the required skills, learners were expected to work with a tutor who would have face-to-face contact with the learners in a classroom/workshop learning situation to help learners pinpoint their particular difficulties in writing and to find solutions which would help them. Learners would further have the opportunity to use the tutor as an online colleague and editor during the programme (*Business Communication Programme 2003:3*).

The learners were also expected to submit a portfolio of work for each phase of the programme. The submission of the portfolio file was mandatory as an important part of the assessment that would lead to formal accreditation. At the time, the Business Communication Programme was going to be registered as a short programme (skills programme) with the *South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)*, and the University of South Africa would provide all participants whose work demonstrated competence in terms of the outcomes in the relevant unit standards with a Certificate of Competence. The programme was based on a number of *Further Education and Training (FET) Language unit standards*, primary of which is *FET-S/21 (2153); National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 5*.

Based on this testimonial, the Consortium put forward a one-year time plan (Appendix II) of how the project was going to be executed.

By the end of the year therefore, the BCP success would be evaluated by evidence that:

- 80% of learners were assessed as competent against the full complement of unit standards by the end of the project
- at least 85% of learners assessed as competent were black
- at least 54% of learners assessed as competent were female
- high quality materials were available within the Department of Labour to help sustain communication skills development
- at least ten people within the Department of Labour were trained as mentors in communication skills
- a model for the development of communication skills training would be piloted and evaluated by the project

These indicators would serve as a testament upon which the overall success or failure of the programme in the case study would be determined.

On the 27th February 2004, the first group of twelve learners at the Introductory Phase, five at Intermediate and one at the Advanced Phase graduated at a ceremony backed by the UNISA Chorale and attended by dignitaries from the European Union, the Department of Labour, SACHED, and the University of South Africa.

1.2 Research context

Given that the Business Communication Programme was conducted in the Department of Labour, which is a government department, it would be helpful to consider the social, political and language issues that obtained in South Africa between 2003 and 2005.

In terms of the social and political reality, it is worthwhile noting that South Africa comes from a history of the apartheid system of government in which the white citizens dominated and discriminated against the black people. After many years of struggle by the black people, the apartheid rule ended in 1994, and the new government made changes to give a chance to the black people who had been deprived of quality education and job opportunities. It was during this time when the language policy was changed as well. While in the apartheid regime the official languages of government were Afrikaans and English, Afrikaans received more prominence than English did (Silva 1998). But after 1994, the constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) advocated the use of eleven official languages. However, at the national and international level, communication in South Africa takes place in English (Silva 1998) and English "has typically been seen as the language of liberation and black unity" (Gough in Silva 1996: xviii).

In the case of the black participants, most of them came from a background of using English as the language of learning for at least eight of their twelve years of schooling. However, they did so in unfavourable circumstances marked by poor learning and teaching facilities and resources. Because of this background, few were able to achieve good control of English in such areas as concord, spelling and tenses as the portfolio samples will show in Chapter 3.

At the South African Government level, different approaches have been prescribed in various South African Government papers such as the *Learnership Act of 1998* and the *National Skills Development Strategy of 2001*. The Learnership Act of 1998 states its objectives as: "To provide an institutional framework to devise and implement national, sector and workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce; to integrate those strategies within the National

Qualifications Framework contemplated in the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995" (Act No. 58 of 1995). The National Skills Development Strategy of 2001 adopted the following mission statement to encapsulate the goals of the national skills development strategy: "To equip South Africa with the skills to succeed in the global market and to offer opportunities to individuals and communities for self-advancement to enable them to play a productive role in society" (Section 5(1) (a) (ii)).

The BCP programme was an example of an attempt by the Government to respond to work skills development in a workplace. Therefore, this was an important project and its success would have a bearing on the success of the South African Government policy.

The Labour Market Skills Development Programme (LMSDP) says of the BCP: "The present Business Communication Programme (BCP) is an important initiative by the Department of Labour to put its own requirements into practice.....The aim is to develop the business communication skills of the Department of Labour members of staff particularly in terms of business writing skills. Listening, speaking and reading skills will, however, also receive attention." (Business Communication Programme, p.5) The manual further states that the programme was "being scrutinised for its suitability as the fundamental component for learnerships in the Department of Labour" (p.5). Therefore, the Department of Labour also regarded this programme as a very important pilot project, which would act as an exemplar of the best practices in workplace training.

The BCP project was part of the R368 million EU funded Labour Market Skills Development Programme in South Africa that provided technical assistance and expertise to the Department of Labour for systems and capacity development related to the introduction of a new, equitable, integrated skills development system (*This Week in Review*, 2005). The amount allocated to the BCP project was R900 000. Since the European Union Commission to South Africa sponsored the programme, the commission was interested in seeing that the programme addressed the improvement of the communications skills of the South African Department of Labour staff. To illustrate the importance of this project, two EU contract staff were placed in the Department of Labour to monitor and evaluate the BCP project.

In the case of the John Povey Centre, the success of this programme was going to link well with its fundamental dreams because the Centre was funded through a will left behind by John Povey, who was a scholar

and a lover of Africa. After his death in 1992, John Povey left a will in which he made a bequest to UNISA for funds and his working library of professional and art books to further the study of the English language in Africa. The Centre workforce knew very well that to continue living the legacy the Centre needed to excel in scholarly work and projects that would make it financially viable and therefore self-sustaining.

SACHED Trust was also well known for its active role in supporting and promoting previously disadvantaged individuals with 95% of its staff being previously disadvantaged women.

The training providers therefore attached a lot of importance to this programme because its success would not only boost the financial capacity and image of the institutions as centres of excellence in the provision of workplace training but would also symbolise their contribution to the national skills development. Therefore, all the stakeholders were particularly motivated to see that the programme succeeds.

1.3 Rationale for the study

I decided to investigate the conditions that are necessary in implementing this type of learning with a view to informing those who would like to use this mode of teaching or learning so that lessons drawn from our experience can be used to prevent shortcomings.

What justifies this study even more is the fact that online mentoring is a relatively new concept in South Africa (National Research Foundation, 2004). Nevertheless, practitioners and learners have found this form of learning a highly appealing mode particularly in the workplace setting because of the fact that it helps the learners to do their studies at long distance with little interference with their job tasks. Quite apart from the newness of mentoring, in general, mentoring has been portrayed as an experience that guarantees positive results. More often than not, practitioners and learners enthusiastically take this learning route in the naïve belief that they would always get the promised benefits. However, this case study and the literature covered have punctured this myth. The study demonstrates that mentoring is conditional, and any mentoring that is not grounded on the recommended guidelines is likely to be unsuccessful. At the same time, online mentoring has the potential to deliver huge benefits to its users if it is effectively conducted.

Given the current South African situation, it can be stated that tender opportunities will continue to come up in language communication in various government departments and other business circles. Pundits will

always cobble the most persuasive proposals within the tightest of deadlines. Promises will be made. Fears of lessons learnt from past failures will be expressed and they will solemnly be allayed. However, until conditions are established and solutions are offered, the problems of planning, implementing and evaluating mentoring programmes will remain tripping points, at the very least, for all who will try to use this mode of learning. It is therefore important to spell out the conditions that would lead to success in online mentoring.

1.4 Problems to be addressed in the study

Much as the programme appeared to have so much promise to succeed, its implementation became fraught with daunting problems. Some of the problems encountered from the training providers' side were that most of the mentors were brought in while the programme was being administered and so they were not part of the preparation of the materials. Furthermore, the original consortium of experts changed after six months when the two experts from Wits withdrew from the project in June 2003. By December 2003, two other key experts from UNISA decided not to continue though one of them had in fact initially indicated that she would only be available to March 2003. This meant that the programme was finally left with only two of the original experts from UNISA and SACHED.

As the reports will show in Chapter 3, the initial training materials were not all relevant to the programme, and contrary to what had been proposed about the availability of the multimedia materials, no CD-ROMs or Internet materials were developed for the programme to support interactivity among learners and mentors.

Mentors and tutors disagreed over the standards used in judging the English skills of L2 learners. Furthermore, although the mentors were deemed to be at the centre of certifying that the learners' portfolios had met the acceptable passing levels, they could not enforce their role with authority as the assessors who adhered to the disputed assessment standards overruled them. This led to mistrust among mentors and assessors. In turn, learners could not trust their mentors' guidance since the final assessors could overturn their decisions. In the end, the learners could not meet the various assessment standards, thereby confirming the truth of the risk DoL had initially expressed about the DoL learners' history of not meeting assessment standards. Once again, the training providers were unable to overcome this risk. This problem emanated from lack of agreement on the materials and approach by the training providers.

Although the initial arrangement was that the programme would take one year from January 2003 to February 2004, the programme was prolonged because learners could not produce work in time, usually citing the competition between their daily office work and their portfolio work. In the face of this development, the fear of depleting the DoL staff during training became real. Learners ran into conflict with the demands of their immediate supervisors to attend to their job tasks before they could attend to the training tasks, and in such conflicts, supervisors withdrew their support for implementing the programme. On their part, mentors were unable to meet various deadlines as proposed in the timetable of activities because learners could not produce work on time. The assumption that learners would improve their skills as they moved from one level to another turned out to be incorrect, as the learners' skills did not seem to improve as was anticipated.

Overall, the programme did not fulfil its proposal of making the programme tasks as relevant as possible to the job requirements of the learners despite the fact that a needs analysis was conducted. The programme therefore turned out to be too general to be useful to every learner. For instance, learners who worked in the Accounts Section could not see the benefits of writing Parliamentary Questions since there was a particular section that dealt with communications issues of that nature in the Department of Labour.

After nearly two years into the programme, many learners dropped out and only 14 of the original 46 in Elementary managed to pass both Elementary and Intermediate level courses. In essence no learner managed to progress from the Elementary Level and complete the Advanced Level.

One lesson drawn from this experience was that learners needed high levels of motivation in order to succeed on the programme. The study will therefore address problems of motivation in online mentoring.

Some learners did not have the appropriate computer hardware and software and did not have the necessary skills to perform computer tasks for them to communicate effectively with their mentors online. The study will provide solutions to problems concerning computer and Internet efficacy.

This case study therefore presents a chance to identify the problems that are common in mentoring programmes that fail and to provide solutions to address such problems in order to attain success in online mentoring. As the research findings will show in Chapter 2, these challenges are not just idiosyncratic to this case study; these are problems common to all

workplace learning that uses online mentoring approaches. Interestingly, the findings suggest that common as the problems are, they are usually taken lightly by training providers, leading to calamitous results. It can therefore be hypothesised that once these problems are addressed, success in online mentoring can be guaranteed. Consequently, the problems experienced on this programme will be brought into the focus of this research lens in order to offer empirical solutions to such problems.

1.5 Aims, objectives and hypotheses

1.5.1 Aims

In this study, I seek to determine the conditions for the success of online mentoring using a writing process approach in English for the benefit of those who would like to conduct this kind of learning successfully.

1.5.2 Objectives

The study will use the case study on mentoring the staff of the South African Department of Labour and the literature survey to determine the conditions necessary for the success of process approach using online mentoring. In determining these conditions, the study will be addressing the central question: What are the conditions for the success of online mentoring in the workplace?

The following hypotheses will guide the study:

1.5.3 Hypotheses

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by:

1. The degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors;
2. The quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner;
3. The degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring;
4. The participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner.

1.5.3.1 Rationale for the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors.

Literature is vast on commenting on learners' writing, portfolio assessments and outcomes based education (Camp in Bennet and Ward, 1993; Gill, 1993; Herman and Winters, 1994; Spady and Marshall, 1994; Brown and Hudson, 1998; Lehmann, 1998; Hamp-Lyons and Condon, 2002; Williams in Sunstein, 2000; Hyland and Hyland, 2001; Song and August, 2002; Goldstein, 2004). The literature here suggests that learning materials invariably produce different interpretations in the hands of different teachers, mentors and assessors. Since different mentors are likely to use different approaches, this could in turn affect the learners' response to the mentors' comments thereby affecting the outcome of the final piece of writing. This problem was encountered on the DoL mentoring programme as well. The justification for guidelines for the standardisation of all aspects of the mentoring programme is therefore evident.

Hypothetically, it can be argued that these problems would be avoided if all mentoring stakeholders are familiar with all aspects of the mentoring programme.

Hypothesis 2

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner.

This hypothesis was supported by previous studies such as Homer (1955); Phillip-Jones (2002); MacCallum and Beltman (1999); Boshier (1999); Eby *et al* (2000) which highlight the importance of selecting and pairing mentors and learners.

Arising from the quality of the mentor and learner relationship is the issue of trust. Literature is rich about the importance of trust on the topic of online mentoring. The classical concept of mentoring in Homer presents mentor as a trusted companion of the king who was tasked to look after the king's son in the king's absence. So the relationship between a learner and a mentor is one of trust. The literature goes further to examine the notion of trust beyond learner and mentor relationship especially in multicultural contexts (Brinson and Kottler, 1993; Bowman *et al* in Murrell *et al*, 1999; Thomas, 2001; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero,

2004) and online environments (Iacono and Weisband, 1997). This literature therefore ropes all mentoring stakeholders into the importance of trust in a multicultural programme.

Problems of trust were experienced in the case study. It is therefore necessary to capture this in a hypothesis which will contribute to successful online mentoring in similar circumstances.

Hypothesis 3

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring.

Motivation has long been found to play an important role in the success of learning in any environment. Studies (Miltiadou and Savenye, [sa]; Harmer, 1999; Zimmerman in Zimmerman and Schunk, 1989; Pintrich and De Groot, 1990; MacCallum and Beltman, 1999, and Motivating and Retaining Adult Learners, 2002) emphasise the importance of motivation and self-regulated learning.

The problems encountered on the programme suggest that learners seemed to lack motivation to improve their language competence once the basic adequacy was achieved. Therefore this reality and the supporting literature compel the hypothesis for the need for the high degree of motivation in online mentoring if online mentoring has to succeed.

Hypothesis 4

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner.

Literature, Berge and Collins in Berge and Collins (1995), Moore and Kearsley (1996); Harasim (1996); Ferris and Hedgcock (1998); Matthews and LaRose (2000); Magagula (2005) is incisive on the need for computer efficacy for learners and mentors in executing mentoring activities online. Additionally, Microsoft Word makes it possible to mentor a draft at varying levels of sophistication in commenting and in making and tracking changes. Creative Technology software (sa) can also be used to help teachers in making commentary faster and efficiently. However it is important to note that this type of software works well where students have the basic knowledge of grammatical and syntactic terminology. Unless learners have been prepared up to the appropriate level of competence this raises possibilities of a mismatch between mentor and learner in how to communicate online.

As problems of a similar nature were experienced from the case study, it is justified to formulate a hypothesis on the importance of learner and mentor computer efficacy and computer capacity so that these are planned for before commencing an online mentoring programme.

These hypotheses are therefore well supported by the literature and the experiences encountered in the case study.

1.6 Testing procedures

I observed the subjects from the moment I joined the programme as a mentor up to the end. I attended the two meetings I was invited to and took notes throughout the programme. As I observed the programme, I consulted literature on the different aspects of online mentoring and the writing process in workplace settings. I was able to see a link between the literature and the problems which we were encountering on the programme. This was the basis for the formulation of the general hypotheses.

Based on the observations and the literature review, I tested the hypotheses through questionnaires for the learners and mentors. I further tested them using the reports, Minutes of the meetings and correspondence. I also verbally interviewed one learner and one mentor. The option to interview one learner and one mentor was necessitated by the fact that learners and mentors had been orally interviewed earlier on by Morake (2004) who was appointed by the Department of Labour and the European Union Commission to write a report on the progress of the programme. As this report was made available to this study, it was decided that oral interviews should be minimised to avoid duplication of the approach used in the report.

1.7 Research design

The research was approached from a case study point of view. The initial plan was to collect data through quantitative questionnaires and analyse the data statistically (Nunan, 1992). Two questionnaires were designed to obtain data from the learners and mentors respectively. The response from the learners was not favourable enough. Because of the huge challenges encountered in running this programme, it was extremely difficult to get co-operation from some participants in answering the questionnaires sent to them in the aftermath. Out of the targeted 38 learners, only 6 were able to respond which represented 15% turn-over. Most of the participants referred to similar submissions they had made to the DoL/ EU (Morake 2004) report. Nevertheless, 6 of the 9 mentors who worked on the programme for a fairly long period were able to return

their answered questionnaires, recording a 66% turn-over. With a good response from the 38 learners, validity and reliability were going to be enhanced. The poor response from the learners however posed a threat to the issue of reliability of the data as statistically, the collected data could not be representative enough. The study could therefore not lend itself solely to the quantitative design.

To overcome this potential threat to reliability, it was decided that the data collected be used in triangulation with the information left behind in the process of mentoring.

To strengthen reliability, I subjected the findings of the study to a form of local peer review (Nchindila, 2005): *Writing-process mentoring as a tool in workplace English learning* – a paper I presented at the 33rd Annual Conference of the South African Association for Language Teaching (SAALT) held from 4th to 6th July 2005 where I received useful comments about the challenges of mentoring in South Africa.

I further subjected the findings to an international peer examination (Nchindila, 2006): *Portfolio Assessment of Process-writing in Workplace English for Business Communication online Mentoring* – a paper I presented at the 5th Annual International Conference on Internet Education held from 11th to 13th September 2006 in Cairo, Egypt. At this conference I was able to confirm the importance of English as a second language in business communication in an environment where Arabic is the predominant language. I was also able to compare the levels of advancement in the use of technology in language learning in Southern Africa, North Africa and the developed world.

The findings from the two conferences widened the scope of the readings covered on this study and provided critical feedback that was used in directing this study.

Through this triangulation a hybrid was achieved between quantitative and qualitative methods (Leedy, 1993) with low control of the data.

The reliance on a variety of sources in this study is well supported by the findings made by Yin (1994) who argued that one of the benefits of a case study is that it depends on multiple sources of data as evidence.

1.8 Sources of data

1.8. 1 The questionnaires

I used two questionnaires to correlate the hypotheses with the findings from the case study. One was administered to the mentors and the other was given to the learners.

1.8.2 Other sources of information

Given that the mentoring programme under study took a period of almost two years, it left behind a wealth of literature that could be exploited in many different ways. Because of this plethora of information a decision was taken to use critical materials only. To this end, the following sources of information were found suitable for use as key funds in informing the study:

- the DoL/EU/BCP tender document
- the learner manual
- assessment guides
- mentor and learner guidelines
- reports to DoL from the Consortium, trainers and mentors
- minutes of meetings between DoL, the EU representative and the consortium
- correspondence between UNISA, SACHED and DoL
- a selection of learner portfolios containing a record of online mentoring activities
- the learner lists over the duration of the programme
- learners and mentors' questionnaire results
- interview with a mentor
- interview with a learner

1.9 Research procedures

The information collected from the sources and the questionnaires was used to reflect the awareness of the four hypotheses. In order to demonstrate the extent of the effect of the lessons learnt in the case study, the findings were collated under each of the four hypotheses.

The study used statistical and interpretive analyses (Nunan, 1992:6), in arriving at the conclusions on the conditions for successful online mentoring. Data are supported by the findings in the literature review.

1.10 Preview of the rest of the chapters

Chapter 2 presents the review of literature to validate the four hypotheses. This is followed by Chapter 3 where the findings from the case study are presented, collated and discussed. In Chapter 4, conditions for successful online mentoring are presented. The limitations of the study are discussed followed by suggestions for further research.

The study closes after a discussion of the implications for the teaching of English as a second language.

Chapter 2

2. 0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

After studying the different elements used in this training, which are mentoring, learning online, using a process approach in writing, portfolio assessments and cross-cultural issues, I looked to literature about these aspects.

2.1.1 On-line mentoring

In order to put the issue of mentoring in its historical perspective, we begin by tracing the origins of mentoring going as far back as 18 B.C. literature (Homer, 1955), where we learn that Mentor, in Greek mythology, was the faithful companion of Odysseus, King of Ithaca. When Odysseus set off for the Trojan wars, he left Mentor in charge of the household with particular responsibility for ensuring that the king's son, Telemachus, was raised to be a fit person as heir to his father's throne.

It is however worth noting that while some studies seem to recognise these classical underpinnings of mentoring (Hamilton and Darling in Hurrelman and Engel, 1989), Murray (2001) argues that basing mentoring on its origins creates an impression of myth and the world of fairy tales and fantasy. Therefore, Kram (1985: 2) defined mentoring as "a developmental relationship that involves organisational members of unequal status, or less frequently, peers". Darwin (2000) even ventured into the possibility of juniors mentoring seniors in a workplace. A broader definition of a mentor is however given by Hutto *et al* (1991: 84), who defined a mentor as "an experienced, successful and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship". Nonetheless, for the purposes of this research, mentoring is defined as a developmental relationship between a less experienced person and a more experienced person from an external mentor point of view and not just involving members of the same organisation.

Education in the cyberspace has been a subject of great debate since the late 1970's when the Internet was still in its infancy stage. Available literature thus shows a proliferation of arguments for and against

promoting education in virtual space. While some researchers glorify the evidence of reality in virtual space and the benefits that accrue with the advancement of the Internet technology (Bassi, Benson and Cheney, 1996), others have questioned whether in fact concepts like mentoring which seem to assume a strong social dimension can be promoted in a systematised channel like the technologically influenced cyber world (Kealy and Mullen, 2003). Where some research has challenged whether cyber technology can be used as a substitute for face-to-face education (Sinclair, 2003), research by Bassi, Benson and Cheney (1996) suggest that the two approaches are not comparable as they are affected by totally different circumstances and available resources, and are therefore aimed at solving different problems.

Although the debate is still out on the superiority of online education compared to the traditional methods of face-to-face education or indeed using post office mail or courier systems, it is clear that distance education practitioners will be eager to embrace the most effective mode of education in distance learning. With the undeniable reports that cyber education cuts down on distance and time, it is self evident that this mode is attractive and therefore it becomes important to invest in exploring what conditions are necessary for the success of this type of education.

At a micro level, the findings from this study should be useful to the John Povey Centre where the mentoring project was based because the Centre is part of the University of South Africa which specialises in distance training.

At a macro level, mentoring in South Africa should be extremely desirable as the nation embarks on addressing the equity problems created by the apartheid system of government in which black South Africans did not have the opportunities to acquire the skills needed for them to play a major role in academia or be able to perform their duties in any other workplace setting (Learnership Act of 1998 and The National Skills Development Strategy of 2001). Therefore, a study of the suitable online learning methods used in a distance education mode provides a peerless opportunity for incisive research. Such findings would not only enhance the pace of skills development in South Africa but also determine the best practices in distance education as cyber technology continues to influence learning across the globe.

2.2 Issues reflecting the need for all providers to collaborate in standardising delivery

The literature on writing instruction via online mentoring reflects divergent views on the crucial issues of feedback, assessment and outcomes. If experts in the field cannot agree on these matters, it is unlikely that a team consisting of materials developers, face-to-face tutors, online mentors and independent assessors will implement a common policy without working closely together beforehand to establish that policy.

2.2.1 The importance of prior planning

The emphasis on prior planning in the literature on online mentoring should serve as a warning that any programme that skimps on this is likely to render itself ineffective.

MacCallum and Beltman (1999: 29-30) illustrate the necessary thoroughness when they specify the following guidelines for the planning stage of the mentoring programme:

2.2.1.1 Phase 1: Establishing a programme

Purpose and Goals:

- A well-defined, written purpose statement should be given at the onset of the programme.
- Agreed outcomes should be set with the involvement of all stakeholders.

Planning the Programme:

- Written administrative and programme procedures should be planned.
- Appropriate measures must be taken to ensure inclusiveness of racial, economic and gender representation if these are relevant to the programme.
- Issues of risk management, confidentiality policies and generally accepted accounting practices should be considered at the planning phase.

This study agrees with most of the points made here. However, the issue of racial representation is one that is difficult to implement in South Africa in that most of the skilled mentors are white. To this end, it might be difficult to ensure that black and white faculty are equally represented.

Coordinator or Team:

- There should be a team of good field staff who liaise between mentors, learners, and the concerned institutions.

Resources:

- There should be adequate financial and other forms of resources so that suitable time, human and material resources are acquired before the mentoring process.
- There should be collaboration with diverse groups such as professional organisations and universities.

2.2.1.2 Phase 2: Selecting and training programme participants

In recruiting mentors:

- Written eligibility requirements should be specified for programme mentors.
- There should be good matching between the programme goals and the mentor expectations.

Screening and selection of mentors:

- Potential mentors should be carefully selected and they should be supervised on an ongoing basis.

Preparing and training mentors:

- Mentors and learners should be trained in such areas as active listening skills, and learning styles.
- Mentors should be prepared for the mentoring role with continuous assistance and training.

The importance of mentor training and support is fully appreciated in this study. However, in the real world, training practitioners would rather utilise the resources economically by hiring mentors who already have the necessary skills than spend their time and resources on training inexperienced mentors on the job.

In the process of selecting learners, MacCallum and Beltman (1999) argue that the following issues need to be considered:

- The programme goals and resources should be relevant to the learner's needs.
- Learners should give personal consent to taking part in the mentoring programme.

Preparing learners:

- Learner participants should be prepared before the programme regarding expectations and behaviour once the programme starts.

Matching mentors and learners:

- Mentors and learners should be paired in a sensitive way, encouraging choice where possible.

From the findings on selecting and training programme participants, it is clear that careful matching and pairing of the learners and mentors is important in mentoring. However, again, it must be appreciated that it might not be practically possible for the learners to choose who should mentor them, particularly in group mentoring programmes such as the one this study was based on. Therefore the onus lies on the training providers to ensure that mentors have broad experience and training to cater for the specific needs of as many learners as possible.

Goldstein (2004) emphasises the importance of the context in which the learning is taking place. He defines context as a special combination of factors stemming from the institution and the programme within which the writing, commenting, and revision takes place, and factors that teachers and students bring to the process. Some of the fundamental aspects he suggests when considering the context are:

- the attitudes and expectations of the institution towards learners
- the attitudes and expectations of the programme towards learners
- establishing philosophies of the programme and its administrators towards what teachers should be commenting on and how
- the range of commenting practices the teachers could employ
- establishing the entrance and exit requirements for the programme and its elements
- establishing channels of mediation among teachers and students in situations where conflicts arose between the requirements and sound commenting and revision practices
- from the very beginning, establishing the workload for the teacher and the student in such matters as the average class size and the number of drafts and revisions expected from each student in a specified period of time

Goldstein however concludes that decisions can be made about factors that can be critical to the programme and those that can be modified. This too illustrates the importance of prior planning to establish policy.

2.2.2 Agreement on feedback

Process writing is defined as an approach in which learners engage in writing multiple drafts with their mentors before submitting a final written piece of work. Critical to the writing process therefore are the mentors' comments on the work of their learners. Here the main point observed is that the feedback provided to the learners must be effective.

There seems to be no consensus on how much should be commented on in process writing, with some scholars advocating that mentors should comment on every error a learner makes while others recommend that mentors only concentrate on errors which are severe. It is likely that similarly divergent views will exist between different participants in a programme.

Lehmann (1998) advises mentors to comment on what they care most about so that if a mentor is much more concerned with grammar, the students should know that. Among other considerations, Lehmann urges mentors to:

- try to strike up a good working relationship with the learners
- balance criticism with praise and show what the good parts of the learner's writing are
- meet the deadlines whenever humanly possible because the best critiques are the ones the learners get with enough time to use them in revision
- remember that improvement takes time so mentors are likely to see the same mistakes, even though they have told the learners about them before

However, other studies suggest that teachers should concentrate on the weaknesses the student's writing reveals (Arndt in Brock and Walters, 1993; Charles, 1990; Cresswell, 2000 and Muncie, 2000). While on the one hand Lehmann recognises the importance of praise for the student's work, Hyland and Hyland (2001) argue that praise comments should be genuinely deserved and not gratuitous. Other thought provoking issues on the subject of teachers' commentary have been expounded by Goldstein (2004) who has asked whether teachers should be asking questions in their comments, telling the students exactly what to do, or showing the students exactly how to make a particular revision and indeed where to put the comments. While Goldstein (2004) has recommended writing brief final comments at the end of the learners' work, Ferris and Hedgcock (1998) have favoured writing comments next to the point being observed, arguing that this carries immediacy.

Studies on teachers' commentary on students' writing indeed go further, and cardinal in this field are those that examine what individual students actually do with teacher commentary and the relationship between teacher commentary and student revision on a general level covering issues such as audience, purpose, logic, content, organisation and development. Some of these studies have found that students vary in how they use the commentary they receive from their teachers (Chi, 1999; Goldstein and Kohls, 2002; Hyland, 1998 and 2000). While some studies show that students find teachers' written commentary useful (Anglada, 1995; Crawford, 1992; Cohen, 1991 and Saito, 1994) there is evidence that students perceive commentary differently as some students find commentary confusing (Arndt in Brock and Walters, 1993; Chapin and Terdal, 1990; Dessner, 1991 and Ferris, 1998). There is also variation in terms of how much students feel they have understood of their teacher's commentary (Cohen and Cavalcanti in Kroll, 1990; Anglada, 1995 and Brice, 1995). Other research has also shown that sometimes students think they have understood a comment when they have not, and so some teachers' comments have been misconstrued (Goldstein and Kohls, 2002). Students have also reported using teacher written feedback without understanding the reasons behind it (Crawford, 1992 and Hyland, 2000). This points to the fact that it is not only the delivery team that needs a common approach to feedback; learners must be informed too.

Given all of the above research findings, it is clear that the issue of communication between mentors and their learners is key particularly with regard to making commentary effective in process writing. However some of the solutions to the problems raised might be found in what MacCallum and Beltman (1999) listed under the requirements for the implementation stage of the programme as:

Practicalities:

- There should be regular, consistent contact between the mentors and learners.

Activities for mentors and learners:

- Specific tasks should be set up: diversity could be allowed in activities while still encouraging individual choice.

Ongoing support for the programme participants:

- A support system should be provided for mentors such as adequate communication and training.

This parcel of literature presented on the question of making commentary on the learners' work in the writing process is crucial to the investigation of the practices employed in the mentoring of the Department of Labour staff. As the research variables will show later, different mentors used different approaches towards making and placing commentaries. But since learners were sometimes mentored by different mentors, they were then subjected to these different approaches which had effects on the way the learners adjusted to each mentor. Clearly, there was a need for adequate, regular and consistent communication between mentor and learner on the programme.

2.2.3 Agreement on assessment

However much students might dislike being assessed, they are more likely to tolerate it if they understand the approach being used and are confident that it is being applied impartially to all students.

According to Song and August (2002), portfolio assessment of writing, which makes use of multiple writing samples produced at different times, has been found to be ideally suited to programmes that use a curriculum influenced by the writing process due to the fact that portfolios can accommodate and even support extensive revision. They can also be used to examine progress over a period of time, and can empower students to take responsibility for their own writing. Furthermore, Song and August (2002) argue that the "assessment criteria seem less arbitrary for portfolios than they might when applied to a single, impromptu piece" (p. 49).

Research is rich in support of the use of the portfolio assessment system (Camp in Bennet and Ward, 1993; Gill, 1993 and Herman and Winters 1994). Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2002) advocated the use of portfolios for students of English as a Second Language because they found them to be especially suitable for non-native English-speaking students.

However, much as portfolio assessment promises huge benefits for curriculum and assessment, it also faces challenges. According to Brown and Hudson (1998) five disadvantages of using portfolio assessment can be identified as: the issues of validity, reliability, design decision, logistics and interpretation. These researchers found that portfolio assessments were time-consuming and that the issues of reliability and validity of the assessments remained unresolved in this type of assessment. Song and August (2002) further posed searching questions such as, how can we ensure that psychometric reliability such as scoring consistency is achieved in the portfolio assessments? How can we achieve scoring fairness? More crucially, the researchers ask how it can be established

that portfolios adequately exemplify students' writing abilities so that the decisions made about students are accurate.

In response to the questions raised on the issue of assessments, Yancey (1999) argues that scoring consistency can be achieved through negotiations among assessors. Huot and Williamson in Yancey and Weiser (1997), on the one hand, have supported portfolio assessments saying that the fact that the portfolio assessment system resists psychometric standardisation makes it a better assessment instrument, arguing that reliability and validity in the narrow psychometric sense are undesirable factors in evaluations. On the other hand, even researchers such as Hamp-Lyons and Condon (2002) who have supported portfolio assessments have conceded that reliability and validity are necessary if this type of assessment is to replace the other types because psychometric data tends to be more convincing to decision makers. Williams in Sunstein (2000:138) further minces no words in asserting that "standardised procedures are necessary in establishing performance standards. Without standards for implementation and outcomes, portfolio assessment will become whimsical, capricious, and unfair because it increases the subjectivity teachers bring to evaluation" and that "this unreliability will threaten any benefits portfolio assessment brings and make it lose its appeal because portfolio assessment was, indeed, developed with the goal of making the evaluation of classroom writing more objective, more fair, and more realistic".

The literature suggests that unless deliberate efforts at standardisation are made beforehand, different assessors will rate learners differently. As learners from the same working environment are likely to compare assessments, they will resent any unfairness. In the case of the DoL mentoring programme, there were disagreements between assessors and mentors on the standards used in assessing the portfolios. Some learners even challenged the training providers' assessment criteria. Therefore to avoid such misunderstandings there is a need for an agreement on the assessments by all the participants.

2.2.4 Agreement on outcomes

One of the other important issues encountered in the mentoring of the Department of Labour staff was the question of implementing Outcomes Based Education (OBE) policies as advocated in the preamble of the mentoring materials. In the South African context, education is largely perceived to be fulfilling if it is outcomes based. However, while the literature on outcomes based education is rich in demonstrating its benefits, it appears that the meaning of OBE requires a deeper understanding as it is fraught with different interpretations.

According to Furman (1994), assessment issues also arise from any use

of outcome-based education because the central premise of OBE is the alignment of outcomes, curriculum, and assessment. The OBE design process stipulates that assessments be developed after outcomes are defined and tailored to authentically assess the outcomes. Therefore, OBE implies that the educator must develop original, authentic, performance-based assessments linked to specific outcomes.

Towers (1996: 19) argued that "Education that is outcome-based is a learner-centred, results-oriented system founded on the belief that all individuals can learn". Towers listed four points to this system that he believes are important to make OBE work. He first stressed the need to identify clearly what the student must learn. This is followed by the need to base the student's progress on demonstrated achievement. He then called for having multiple instructional and assessment strategies to meet the needs of each student. Finally, Towers advocated provision of adequate time and assistance to the student so that each student could reach the maximum potential.

However, Lorenzen (2004) cautioned that even though good outcomes are learner centred, it is possible to focus too much on the outcomes at the expense of the student.

More thorny issues about OBE are raised by Spady and Marshall (1994: 20-21) who reflected:

"Outcomes are clear, observable demonstrations of student learning that occur after a significant set of learning experiences. They are not values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, activities, assignments, goals, scores, grades, or averages, as many people believe. Typically, these demonstrations, or performances, reflect three things: (1) what the student knows; (2) what the student can actually do with what he or she knows; and (3) the student's confidence and motivation in carrying out the demonstration. A well-defined outcome will have clearly defined content or concepts and be demonstrated through a well-defined process beginning with a directive or request such as 'explain,' 'organise,' or 'produce.'"

There appears to be a contradiction in this definition in saying that outcomes are not attitudes or beliefs and then stating that a good demonstration of an outcome is a student's motivation or confidence in carrying out a demonstration. Since motivation and confidence are essentially elements of attitudes and beliefs, the definition seems contradictory. Nevertheless, it helps us to get varied ideas about this type of education. The conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that it is not easy to reach agreement on what outcomes are and how

to decide whether or not they have been met. This study however takes the view that agreement on the outcomes is crucial in measuring the extent to which the aims and objectives have been met.

In contributing to the issue of the agreement on outcomes MacCallum and Beltman (1999) recommended the following:

- Programme evaluation and ongoing assessment should be conducted.

Who should do the Evaluation?

- all participants involved but preferably independent evaluators

Both process and outcome data should be collected and considered:

- Data should be collected throughout the period of the programme.
- Data should be related to the goals of the programme.

Using the Evaluation Data:

- Data should be used to provide feedback and assess the impact.

This study appreciates the importance of the agreement on outcomes from the beginning of the programme. However, unless there is uniformity and clarity among different mentors about what the outcomes should be, mentors are likely to have different ideas about what outcomes should be presumed. The study also finds the literature by MacCallum and Beltman (1999) on the importance of evaluating the programme highly relevant. Indeed the programme needs evaluation as it is being conducted so that any identified problems can be addressed in a timely manner. The final evaluation would help to determine the general success or failure of the programme.

According to the DoL/EU report (Morake, 2004) the programme evaluation only came up when the Department of Labour observed that a high number of learners had dropped out. As this report found the project unsatisfactory, it marked the abrupt end of the programme and no information exists to show the final evaluation to assess the final impact by the training consortium.

This suggests that the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors is crucial to the success of mentoring using a process approach.

2.3 Establishing a relationship between mentor and learner

Phillip-Jones (2002) argues that successful mentoring is in details. She emphasises the need to pay attention to detail when exploring the possibility of starting a mentoring relationship with the learner, and some of the details she recommends during this process are:

- recognising the mentor's other commitments and how the mentoring relationship could enhance or hinder them
- identifying how this potential relationship ties to the mentor's personal vision and main values
- what help the potential learner expects or is actually asking for
- how often and for how long the learner would like to interact with the mentor

For the process of building the relationship in mentoring, she advocates a number of details, chief of which are:

- contact information for the mentor and the learner
- appropriateness of phone and e-mail contact between meetings
- when to expect to hear back from the other
- specific details of what the learner tells the mentor about his/her life, career, and dreams for the future
- establishing exact ways of developing trust
- exploring tangible ways of learning about the learner

In the process of negotiating the arrangement of mentoring between a learner and a mentor, Phillip-Jones suggests various important details, some of which are:

- establishing learner's tentative goals and objectives
- agreeing on confidentiality rules
- establishing the role of the learner's supervisors
- how to give each other feedback
- establishing ways of measuring the learner's progress and the quality of the mentoring relationship

Phillip-Jones next alerts mentors to keep track of the following in the process of helping the learner to develop:

- knowing every goal and development activity the learner is trying at every stage
- establishing what the mentor and the learner agree to do at each step
- respecting meeting dates and when goals are to be reached
- establishing helpful resources

Phillip-Jones further argues that there is the need to pay attention to

details in ending the formal mentor and learner relationship. She advises mentors to consider:

- specifically what the mentor has observed in the learner
- finding effective ways to convey appreciation, observations, and good wishes for the future to the learner
- getting feedback from the learner about how the mentor could be a better mentor
- establishing future options for the relationship and what contact (if any) to expect from each other after the mentoring programme
- completing all requirements of the mentoring programme

While Phillip-Jones calls for mentors to be aware of what is going on and what is likely to come next during the process of mentoring, she warns against over-structuring the mentoring relationships as this could kill the fun and therefore advises that mentors should adopt the details that are most relevant to their situation.

This study recognises the importance of building a developmental mentoring relationship between the mentor and the learner. Indeed such a relationship grows from a shared vision and purpose between the learner and the mentor and is necessary for the development of mutual trust. As the literature shows, this inevitably suggests that mentors and learners must forge close contacts. However, the issue of keeping contacts between mentors and learners faces enormous challenges especially in online learning modes where success depends not only on the participants but the Internet facilities as well. This study will therefore tease out these challenges from the lessons learnt on the mentoring programme under study and offer solutions to such problems.

2.3.1 Mentoring across culture

Studies on the question of mentoring across culture and race are more common in the United States of America since the race struggles have a longer history there. While the apartheid system in South Africa lasted for a fairly short time, America has been battling with the problem of race for over 300 years.

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) in the studies conducted in an American Academic set up reported that there is a component of western society that supports the idea of whites being in the more powerful position. According to the proponents of this view, there are set rules and expectations of mixed-race relationships in which the fear of authority is expected of the black person. Therefore, a cross-cultural mentoring relationship between a white mentor and a black learner can be faced

with many challenges particularly in the process of building the necessary trust. Bowman *et al* in Murrell *et al* (1999) identified white guilt in black and white mentoring teams as a barrier to having open discussions on the question of racism in multiracial mentoring programmes. In contributing to this issue, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) argued that white guilt in the mentoring relationships could be a form of reaction to the awareness of unearned white privilege or might be a natural defensive reaction to black protest. To highlight the imbalance of power between a white and black academic the research gives an example of the tales of a female academic who was harassed by the campus police as she left her classroom because the police never accepted her as an academic and of her being rescued by her white student who spoke on her behalf to confirm that she was an academic even though the student produced no credible evidence. The situation is compounded by the fact that this black female academic was always faced with outright hostile resistance from her white students.

The research goes further to suggest that the question of race plays a bigger role in mentoring than that of gender by showing that although there are more white males than white females who find time to take part in cross-cultural mentoring, there are more conflicts arising from race differences. This research therefore suggests that it does not matter much if a person is mentored by a male or a female mentor but that the difference in race matters more.

Apart from the relationship between the mentors and the learners this research brought to the fore the undeclared power struggles that are inherent among white and black mentors in academia in America. According to Epps (1989: 25) black faculty are usually perceived in mentoring programmes as “interlopers” and are not accepted as “rightful participants”. To overcome this state of affairs Blake in Murrell *et al* (1999) argued that it was important for cross-cultural mentoring groups to spend enough time addressing the burden of racism that black academicians come across in the process of mentoring. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) even pointed out that race-based research could be perceived as provocative in many conservative academic circles, and according to Menges and Exum (1983), this is more evident among the old guard. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) finally concluded that people generally wish to be mentored by and to mentor those from their own racial group. Thus where appropriate, mentors and learners should be given a say in whom they choose to mentor or who should mentor them. Although this research covered the intricacies on cross-cultural mentoring in America as earlier pointed out, it touches on very fine aspects of mentoring worth paying attention to in any other cross-cultural mentoring setting where issues of race imbalances have been identified.

For instance, as the case of the mentoring that took place concerning the South African Department of Labour staff involved white and black mentors and black and white learners, it would be interesting to see how these American experiences compare with the South African situation, since the programme was conducted by a university section albeit in collaboration with an independent organisation.

However, the South African situation might be slightly different from the American environment in that skilled manpower is predominantly white. Because of this, it might not be possible for learners to be mentored by those from their own racial group. Therefore, black learners are likely to be mentored by white mentors whereas white learners are likely to be mentored by white mentors. In South Africa, the issue is further complicated by language in that a black mentor is assumed to be an L2 speaker of English which carries negative connotations. Against this background, it is possible that even black learners might not prefer to be mentored by fellow blacks as the English language skills of black tutors are generally doubted.

2.3.2 Trust in cross-cultural mentoring

The foundation of any successful mentoring relationship is trust. However, according to research (Brinson and Kottler, 1993; Bowman *et al* in Murrell *et al*, 1999; Thomas, 2001) establishing trust in a cross-cultural mentoring relationship is more difficult than in same-race mentoring relationships. Whereas trust in same-race mentoring situations is a matter between mentor and learner and should be reciprocal, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) argue that in cross-cultural mentoring the issue of trust is complicated by historical legacies and societal tensions.

In contributing to the conditions for the success of cyber education, Iacono and Weisband (1997) claimed that establishing trust in the cyber space was possible. The researchers conducted studies in which participants communicated through emails. By way of narratives, participants acknowledged that trust was established during the process of learning. In these studies we are reminded of the role of trust as one of the key factors identified in the classical notion of mentoring. The studies can therefore be perceived as confirmatory of the classical school of thought. Indeed, as the researchers cite, we confirm the issue of trust as we see examples of people who purchase products on the Internet even if they have never known the sellers. They simply pay for their goods trusting that what they see virtually is what they will get in reality. It is also illuminating to learn from this literature that trust can even be sustained after it has been created.

The pattern emerging from this literature on mentor and learner relationship and trust is that mentoring cannot flourish where there is a lack of trust between mentor and learner. The onus for making the relationship work rests with the mentor, with implications for mentor selection and training. However, these requirements may be complicated by issues of race and gender.

2.3.3 Positive characteristics ascribed to mentors

Boshier (1999), in *Characteristics ascribed to mentors by their protégés*, contributed insights into the dimensions of mentoring. In this study, we come across data from nearly 2,000 people surveyed for their views and descriptions of mentors. More structured information from 555 of the respondents which was factor-analysed, yielded eight factors, each of which described a cluster of mentor characteristics. Standardised scale scores were developed from factors and used to examine how these various learners differed with respect to the characteristics they ascribed to their mentors. Later, one-on-one interviews were conducted with selected learners to explore how such mentoring characteristics manifested themselves in their relationships with these mentors and in day-to-day work settings.

Boshier's analysis of the positive characteristics found that authentic mentors were those who were genuine, helpful and wanted to empower others. Nurturance was identified with mentors who were kind, patient, and empathetic to others while approachability was identified as a positive condition in mentors who were humorous, communicative, positive, and open. Competence was associated with mentors who were knowledgeable, bright, enthusiastic, professional, insightful and informative to others and inspiration was associated with mentors who were risk-taking, visioning and creative, challenging and assertive. Conscientiousness was linked to mentors who were efficient, organised, consistent, strict, and available to others. Hard-working mentors were found to be dedicated, motivated, ambitious, and workaholics who tended to be demanding of self and others.

An awareness of these attributes could help mentors to focus on what is expected of them during the mentoring programme. Where mentors may be lacking, they could strive to improve their skills before they engage in mentoring. Therefore these attributes are necessary because they build the learners' confidence and trust in the mentor, which can lead to a more fulfilling mentor and learner relationship.

However, what seems to be prominent in these findings is that the work appears to have been centred on the positive attributes. For this reason,

it is important to balance the perspectives by investigating negative attributes as well, though by implication it can be argued that the opposites of these descriptions would represent negative descriptions.

2.3.4 Negative characteristics ascribed to mentors

To balance Boshier's seemingly lopsided studies we can turn to Eby *et al* (2000), in the *protégés' perspective regarding negative mentoring experiences*, who tried to develop a nomenclature of negative mentoring experiences using descriptive accounts from the perspectives of the learners. In their preamble, the researchers acknowledge the benefits of mentoring but argue that not all mentoring is capable of yielding positive results, and unless we are aware of the negative mentoring aspects as well, we might not know how to avoid them.

The content analysis revealed 15 types of negative mentoring experiences. The respondents described mentors who were narrow-minded and did not value differences in people. Others reported about their negative mentoring experiences involving mentors who would compromise quality once someone they respected requested a favour. In terms of work-style, respondents identified mentors who were reactive, not proactive, and had different views about the form of success. Others reported that personalities and habits of the mentors and learners were different. Neglect was associated with mentors who seemed uninterested in the learners' specific careers. Some mentors were found to be excessively focused on their own careers, thereby being self-serving. Some mentors practised intentional exclusion by playing favourites, and ignored others as mere resources and not part of the inner circle. Tyranny was associated with mentors who used their positions of authority to put learners down while inappropriate delegation was associated with mentors who overloaded themselves with work because they were unable to delegate even though they had good helpers while some mentors gave the assignments they should have done themselves to others. Sabotage was associated with mentors who expressed negative impressions about their learners to their immediate supervisors behind the learners' back. Other mentors were found to be taking credit for all good things and gave blame to learners for all bad things. Some mentors were found to be deceptive and hence could not be trusted by their learners while other mentors were found to be incompetent as they never communicated well and were not familiar with the subject content. Some mentors were reported to make protégés waste energy by spending unnecessary time being critical of what others were or were not doing instead of concentrating on their work. Other mentors allowed personal and family problems outside to interfere with their work.

Quantitative analyses indicated that learners were more likely to report that their mentors had different attitudes, values, and beliefs when describing their most negative mentoring relationships compared to their most positive mentoring relationships.

These studies by MacCallum and Beltman (1999), Boshier (1999) and Eby *et al* (2000) point to the need for detailed information about learners and mentors. Although not all of these findings can be found in every mentoring situation, they are suggestive enough of the typical attributes found in mentoring relationships that fail and those that succeed. In the case of the mentoring programme under study, there is evidence of an example of bitter exchanges between a mentor and two learners which later led to the mentor being removed from the programme. Other mentors were removed from the programme as they were found to lack the necessary expertise. There is also evidence of unsatisfactory mentoring communication in which a mentor coined a phrase that did not exist in English. This literature on the negative attributes associated with some mentors is therefore admissible to this study. Hypothetically it can be argued that if the training providers had been aware of these attributes before hand, they could have prepared the mentors to be conscious of the things that could go wrong.

2.4 Motivation in online distance education

Scholars like Aristotle and Plato have acknowledged the importance of motivation in any form of learning. In recent studies, Harmer (1999) defined motivation as some kind of internal drive that encourages somebody to pursue an action. Harmer found that strongly motivated students with long term goals were easier to teach than those who had no such goals and therefore such students had better chances of success in language learning.

In an attempt to search for evidence of studies which have tried to assemble the fragmented pieces on this topic, reference can be made to the research conducted by Miltiadou and Savenye [sa] under the title: *Applying Social Cognitive Constructs of Motivation to Enhance Student Success in Online Distance Education*. The research can be recognised as a step further in putting together knowledge on conditions necessary for learners in online education by identifying six motivational constructs as: (a) self- efficacy (b) locus of control (c) attrition (d) goal orientation (e) intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and (f) self- regulation. Well researched and reasoned literature is reviewed on these constructs. Various results and analyses are also given.

From these studies it is gratifying that the two researchers recognised self-regulation and self-efficacy covered by the other scholars as

common features of the conditions for success. This makes these data admissible to this research as reliable information. As the other researchers' work mentioned earlier on this topic in this review centred on the traditional form of learning, this title suggests very useful information concerning online distance education.

A closer evaluation of Miltiadou and Sevenye's research however reveals that although the researchers made use of the vast literature in online distance education, they seem to have prescribed how the conditions could be applied in online distance education without necessarily conducting the actual online distance education research themselves. The validity of the findings can therefore be challenged because in the absence of the actual application of the conditions mentioned to the online education setting, it becomes problematic to accept that the conclusions the researchers arrive at are supported by their own independent data as the research seems to be over reliant on other researchers' work.

In presenting this critique against this approach, however, this study is mindful of the fact that some research can be based purely on literature reviews, and therefore, in spite of this seeming shortcoming, credit is given to the researchers for their efforts in plumbing such great depths in collecting so enormous a body of literature on the subject matter. So the research is still admissible, and to use this as a learning moment, this study will aim at overcoming such lapses by utilising the actual primary data based on the studies of the Department of Labour participating staff. In this way, it is hoped that the controversy that might surround the fulfilment of this topic will be resolved.

Equally important is the degree of support that learners should receive from their line-managers. Learners are likely to be intrinsically motivated if the training is perceived to be beneficial to them by improving their performance at work which might lead to their being promoted. MacCallum and Beltman (1999:29) suggested that "there should be support for the mentoring process from the system such as reward motivation for the mentors and learners." Another qualitative study is reported in which the critical incident technique was used to examine the perceptions of managers regarding their beliefs, behaviours, triggers, and outcomes when they serve as facilitators of learning for their employees (Ellinger *et al*, 1999). It can be concluded from these studies that managers' support is catalytic of the learners' success in workplace learning.

2.4.1 Self-regulated learning

One of the related factors recommended in the success of process writing particularly in a distance learning mode is self-regulation.

Literature provided by Bothma, and Montait (2004) revealed abundant information on self-regulated learning. According to these researchers, self-regulation can be defined as the students' ability to understand and control their learning. These studies were conducted in a South African setting. The purpose was to establish if self-regulation played a part in distance learning, and if so, to establish which variables of self-regulation were critical to the success of long distance learning.

Zimmerman (1989) linked self-regulated learning to two components which are (a) learning strategies, which include cognition and meta-cognition, and (b) motivation. Zimmerman argued that self-regulated students employ cognition and meta-cognition planning. They organise, self-instruct, and self-evaluate at various stages during the process of information acquisition. According to Zimmerman, students who are motivated perceive themselves as self-efficacious, intrinsically motivated, and goal directed. Pintrich and De Groot (1990) believed that self-regulated students were academically superior to students who were not self-regulating their learning experiences.

Zimmerman in Schunk and Zimmerman (1994) later identified four attributes of self-regulated learning as (a) self-motivation, (b) self-monitoring, (c) manipulation of social and physical environment, and (d) self-confidence. Zimmerman defined self-motivation as motivation that is derived from the students' self-efficacious perceptions and their use of self-regulatory learning processes, such as setting goals. Self-monitoring was defined as the students' awareness and self-checking during a learning process. Manipulation of the social and physical environment referred to the students' ability to request help from people who they know are capable, and to organise and restructure their skills in order to get the best out of learning. Self-confidence refers to the planned or automated methods of learning. O' Neil (1978) referred to these methods of learning as learning strategies, and Weinstein and Mayer in Wittrock (1986) classified them into two main categories: (a) learning strategies associated with outcome goals, and (b) learning strategies associated with process goals (such as monitoring, controlling, planning, organising, transforming, and memorising). Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1986) have defined the latter type of learning strategies as self-regulation.

Pintrich and De Groot (1990) included several of these strategies in their Self-Regulated Learning Strategies scale. Studies conducted recently (Motivating and Retaining Adult Learners.....2002), show series of research articles with information on how to develop intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among adult learners in distance education using online methods. These studies provide practical solutions in building learner attrition rates to motivate learners so that they do not lose interest and drop out of an online learning programme.

The importance of self-regulated learning lies in the fact that in reality improving L2 language competence is very difficult, especially once basic adequacy has been achieved. Therefore this requires high intrinsic motivation on the part of learners and extrinsic motivation of learners by all stakeholders. One of the indicators of failure of the DoL mentoring programme was the high number of learners who could not complete the programme. With hindsight, this problem would have been tackled if the training providers had benefited from the literature reviewed here on how to ensure that learners are fully motivated in their learning.

2.5 Computer and Internet learner and mentor-efficacy

As this study encompasses online activities, it is important for us to establish the extent to which learners are effective in Internet use if they have to accomplish required tasks. Matthews and LaRose (2000) reported on the importance of Internet self-efficacy. These researchers stated that Internet self-efficacy focuses on what a person believes he or she can accomplish online at the time or in the future. They further elaborated that this does not refer to a person's skill at performing specific Internet-related tasks, such as writing Hyper Text Mark up Language (HTML), using a browser, or transferring files, for example. Instead, it assesses a person's judgement of his or her ability to apply Internet skills in a more encompassing mode, such as finding information or troubleshooting search problems.

Although it has been argued that Internet self-efficacy is not a skill but a belief, this study emphasises the importance for the learners and mentors to be confident that they can fulfil online tasks. Without this belief they would spend unnecessary time on overcoming the fear of the complexities associated with Internet use.

2.5.1 Computer mediated communication

One of the most important topics of current research in distance education is the use of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in both online classrooms and as a supplement to face-to-face instruction. According to Berge and Collins in Berge and Collins (1995:1), CMC is "the ways in which telecommunication technologies have merged with computers and computer networks to give us new tools to support teaching and learning". CMC offers many advantages as a delivery medium in online environments. Among these advantages is the fact that CMC has the potential for high levels of student to student and student to instructor interaction, and the fact that Computer Mediated Communication can use both synchronous and asynchronous aspects.

The synchronous aspects can be identified through the "live" discussions between students and their peers and students and their teacher, while the asynchronous aspects allow for ample time for the students to work on the topic under discussion. Types of Computer Mediated Communication include electronic mail, computer conferencing, bulletin boards, and newsgroups.

Studies done by Moore and Kearsley (1996) and Harasim (1996) reported on the issue of the selection and utilisation of the appropriate technology in a distance learning environment. Some of the reasons for the extensive research in the field are:

- the rapid rate at which technology and computer networking is growing
- More and more the online courses are becoming cost effective.
- It is becoming much easier to access educational materials by students who otherwise would not be able to participate in classes for various reasons.
- More evidence is coming up to show that traditional face-to-face courses are being enhanced by distance learning methods of web-based delivery of instructional material.

According to Moore and Kearsley (1996) educators believe that computer networks will one day provide virtual classrooms as an alternative to traditional education. Harasim (1996) argues that computer networks and online educational developments may change the future of educational institutions.

The Internet efficacy ties in well with Microsoft Word 2000 which makes it possible to mentor a draft at varying levels of sophistication in commenting and in making and tracking changes. According to Word 2000, a teacher can easily add and edit comments by:

1. highlighting the text that you wish to make a comment on and clicking **Comment** from the **Insert** menu
2. typing the comment in the text bubble provided in the right margin
3. clicking the **Close** button to close the comments window and return Word to its normal state

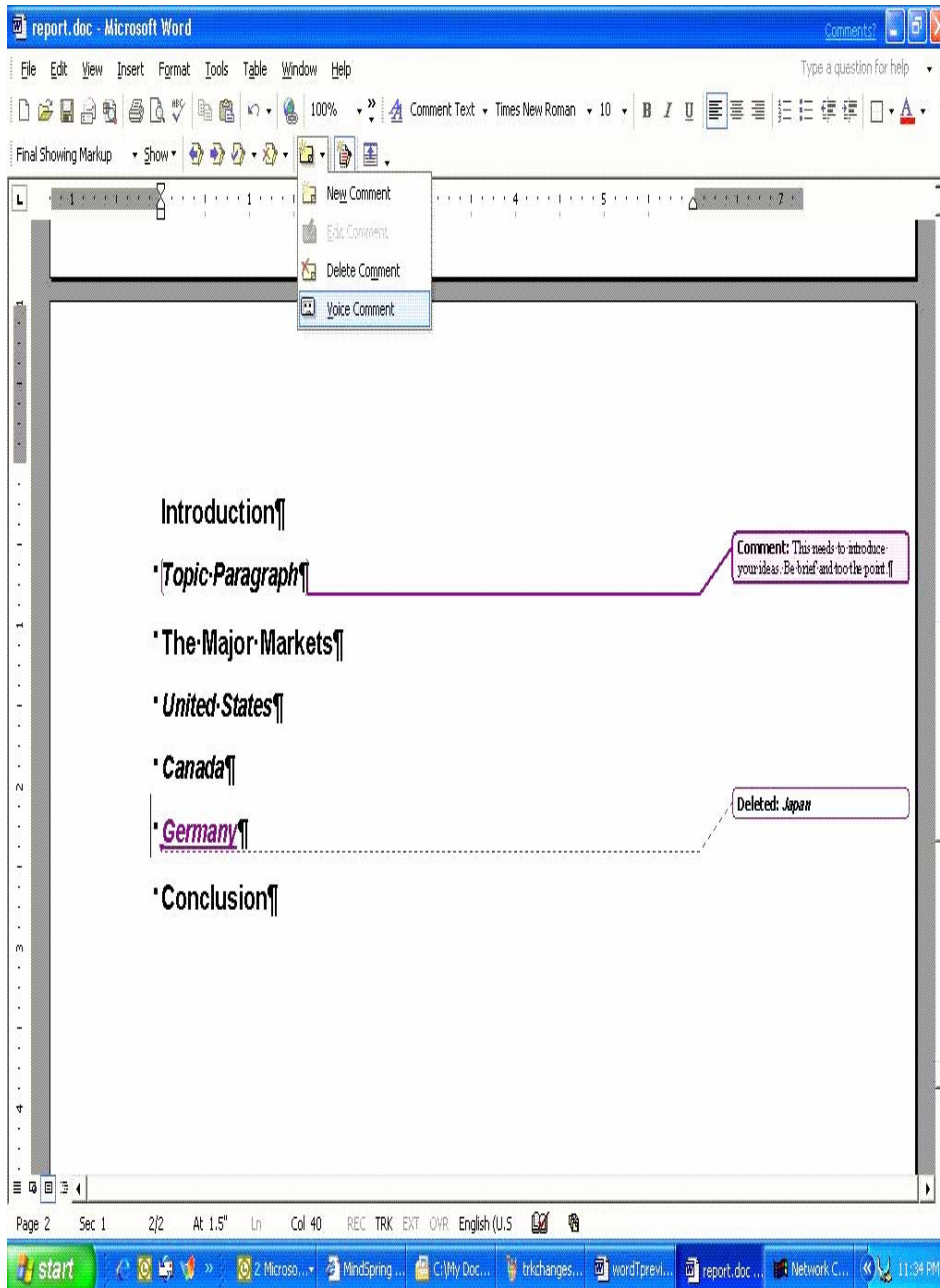


Fig. 1: Word 2000 in picture form

Creative Technology software [sa] can also be used to help teachers in making commentary faster and more efficiently. It is however important

to note that this type of software works well where students have the basic knowledge of grammatical and syntactic terminology to understand what a verb is or what the subject-verb agreement rule is.

Research on the importance of computer efficacy has been reported in the literature in studies done in Swaziland (Magagula, 2005) in which some learners were initially found to have models of computers lacking in software and hardware capacity. This research also reported that learners turned out to have lower skills needed in operating the computer and the e-mail system than initially expected. With careful planning, learners were prepared before the course to reduce the anxiety they experienced when learning using the computer and the Internet. The study concluded that this prior familiarity with the computer operating functions by the learners and the guidance given on the computer capacity contributed to the success of the programme. In this case the awareness of the training providers of the computer requirements enabled them to address possible problems on the programme, which supports the view that computer and Internet efficacy for both mentors and learners is crucial for the success of online training.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature makes a solid case to argue that the conditions for successful mentoring can be developed from the various lessons learnt from the findings. Acquaintance with the literature might have warned the providers that it was courting trouble to add to the delivery team in stages instead of involving the full team in planning and materials development from the beginning. Based on this literature review therefore, it can be safely concluded that the success of online mentoring is crucially affected by:

1. The degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors;
2. The quality of relationship that is between mentor and learner;
3. Motivation;
4. Computer and Internet efficacy.

To this end the hypotheses are supported by the literature.

Chapter 3

3.0 Findings

3.1 Introduction

The following sources were consulted for their relevance to the four hypotheses under consideration:

- 3.3.1 the DoL/EU/BCP tender document
- 3.3.2 the learner manual
- 3.3.3 assessment guides
- 3.3.4 mentor and learner guidelines
- 3.3.5 reports to DoL from the Consortium, trainers and mentors
- 3.3.6 minutes of meetings between DoL, the EU representative and the consortium
- 3.3.7 correspondence between UNISA, SACHED and DoL
- 3.3.8 a selection of learner portfolios containing a record of online mentoring activities
- 3.3.9 the learner lists over the duration of the programme
- 3.3.10 learners and mentors' questionnaire results
- 3.3.11 interview with a mentor
- 3.3.12 interview with a learner

The findings relating to each of these sources are summarised in section 3.3 below.

Both the tender document and the plan of action put forward in response by the consortium reflected an awareness of some conditions for the success of online mentoring. However, the problems that arose during the implementation of the programme and the steps that were taken to remedy them added greatly to this initial awareness and brought the conditions for successful online mentoring clearly into focus. In fact, it was the very richness of the lessons learned during the programme – and that they were so necessary – that prompted this research.

3.2 Timeline

The initial timetable of activities was worked out in the *Service Tender Submission Form* of August 2002.

The following table compares the plan with what actually took place.

	Planned dates	Actual dates
Tender awarded		August 2002
Materials completed		December 2002
Initial assessment and placement		January 2003
Phase 1 training & mentoring	Feb & March 2003	Feb to October 2003
First mentor guidelines		July 2003
Submission of portfolios of evidence	31 March 2003	Nov 2003 – Jan 2004
Revised mentor guidelines; learner guidelines		Nov 2003
Phase 1 graduation	April 2003 (for 40 learners)	Feb 2004 (for only 18 learners)
Phase 2 training & mentoring	May & June 2003	Jan to Nov 04
Submission of Phase 2 portfolios of evidence	30 June 2003	Sept to Dec 04 (incomplete)
Phase 2 graduation	July 2003	Did not take place
Phase 3 training & mentoring	Aug & Sept 03	July to Nov 04
Submission of Phase 3 portfolios of evidence	November 2003	Oct to Nov 04 (incomplete)
Phase 3 graduation	Nov 2003	Did not take place
DoL internal mentors trained	Jan – Mar 2004	Did not take place

Table 1: Timeline

3.3 The Sources

3.3.1 The Tender Document

The Tender Document reflects a strong awareness of the importance of motivation in a language development programme (Hypothesis 3), but does not mention relationships between learners and mentors

(Hypothesis 2) or computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4) directly.

Regarding Hypothesis 1, the tenderer assumes that the whole is likely to be at least as great as the sum of its parts, asserting, “the consortium brings an impressive team together through its partnership, each with extensive experience in materials development, training, project management, assessment and mentoring” (p. 4). It was only once the programme was underway that other sources drew attention to problems that arose through a lack of collaboration between materials writers, trainers and mentors.

The importance of motivation in the tenderer’s view can be seen in the following extracts from the Tender Document:

- “an accredited learning programme *adapted to the communication needs of the learners* will be developed
- accreditation would also provide learners ... with an incentive to engage in the learning programme
- It is encouraging that the Department of Labour has provided employees with the opportunity of actively engaging in a programme that they have identified as critical to their own further development within the workplace. We believe that learners engaging in a programme that is not foisted on them will take ownership of the programme” (p.1).
- “All training will be situational and context specific. It will be based on typical daily experience and involve role play, decision making and communicative and personal interaction within realistic circumstances.
- Our training materials will be adapted ... to reflect the actual circumstances which characterise the communicative needs of the Department of Labour” (p.3).
- “Step 1: Conduct a needs analysis ... by collecting examples of business communication from the Department of Labour
- Assess current competency ... in order to establish a starting point for tuition and to establish the goal competencies against which the success of the training can be measured
- ... minimise disruption to normal work function” (p.4)
- “Unisa will provide Certificates of Competence.
- Each participant will receive eight hours of personalised tuition through one-to-one consultative sessions and e-mail support” (p.5).

3.3.2 The BCP learner manual

The BCP learner manual contained the curriculum of activities as

presented in Chapter 1. Each task had assessment guides to help the mentors guide their learners towards meeting the outcomes.

The BCP Learner Manual (2003:3) shows the importance of motivation (Hypothesis 3) in the following extracts from the forewords in the three phases:

- “The BCP is based on needs expressed by people like yourself who want to improve their business writing and presentation skills and it has been divided in three phases so that people do only those parts of the programme that they need”.
- “....to build ...confidence and capacity to communicate effectively in the workplace, verbally and in writing and to make the programme the learners’ own”

The manual also reflects the awareness of relationships (Hypothesis 2) in the forewords stating that learners would have:

- “....contact with ...tutors”
- “...the opportunity to use.....tutor as on-line colleague and editor during the programme”

However, there is no evidence of the awareness of hypotheses 1 and 4.

3.3.3 The assessment guides

The assessment guides were provided in the first BCP learner manual of 2003. They were revised in 2004 in an attempt to standardise mentoring and direct mentors to aspects of editing that certain mentors were overlooking. It is clear from this list of general editing guidelines for the assessment of Introductory Phase tasks that mentoring was meant to be comprehensive:

- The structure of text is coherent, logical and well sequenced.
- The text conforms to the major features associated with the text type.
- The text fulfils its purpose, and its register is appropriate to the audience and context.
- Major language errors are identified and the required changes are made.
- Layout, spelling, punctuation and small grammatical errors are checked and corrected where necessary.
- Information is checked for accuracy and correctness.
- The edited text makes use of plain, clear language and is clearly an improvement on the original.
- The final copy is proof-read to ensure that it is completely satisfactory.

In assessing the individual tasks, mentors were required to address content, organisation, language and presentation.

These assessment guidelines are relevant to Hypothesis 1 in that they emanated from the materials writer and provided the basis for all others – participants, trainers and mentors to share a common understanding of what was required. A report on the participant's interaction with the mentor was also required, thereby providing information relevant to the hypotheses relating to relationships and motivation as well.

3.3.4 Mentor and learner guidelines

The first set of Mentors' Guidelines was drawn up in July 2003 in order to standardise mentoring. As may be expected, it did little more than list the editing guidelines in 3.3.3 above and specify the turn-around time for both mentors and participants.

The mentoring continued to be unsatisfactory in several ways, and the consortium therefore revised the guidelines in February 2004.

The new guidelines focussed mainly on Hypothesis 3, although the editing guidelines remained, and the following instructions also imply an awareness of the need to standardise mentoring:

- "Make feedback explicit and not too cryptic to be of real use.
- Use the Outcomes to direct learners to aspects of the task to be achieved" (p.2).

There is also one instruction that relates to Hypothesis 2: "Be friendly and professional at all times ..." (p.2).

However, most of the new instructions in the Mentors' Guidelines (2004: 3-4) suggest that the dominant concern by now relates to Hypothesis 3 – keeping participants interested and active:

- use workplace visits to gain an insight into the demands of the learner's work environment and to deal with issues related to the learner's writing and/or presentation skills
- use the opportunity to help the participant schedule her/his work in order to create a regular flow of work between the mentor and the learner
- return portfolios in a face-to-face meeting with the learner, especially if some tasks were still not regarded as competently done
- encourage learners to be equally pro-active in terms of checking whether the tutor had received work and/or returned work, which

- the learners may not have received
- aim at returning work within 48 hours of receiving it
- call or email the learner to explain and reschedule the return of drafts if, for any reason, you could not fulfil the promise made to return the work

In addition, these Guidelines introduced a new portfolio requirement: two real workplace tasks from each learner's particular circumstances. This was the first recognition of the need to individualise the programme; despite the apparent authenticity of the original materials, it had become obvious that writing tasks that were performed by some DoL employees were never performed by others.

The revised Guidelines also aimed to standardise presentation and ensure record-keeping, and in this they are relevant to Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 4 (computer efficacy). The learners were required to

- send drafts to their mentors and copies to DOL@unisa.ac.za and to SACHED@icon.co.za
- identify in the subject line of their e-mail, the task(s) they were sending
- provide their name at the head of the document, the name of the task, the draft number (e.g. Draft 1, Draft 3, Final draft), the date, the initials of the person who worked on the document last
- save it under its new draft number
- copy the mentored draft and paste it above itself at the top of the document
- re-name the top draft and work on it, leaving the original in place below so that the latest draft would carry the whole history of revision
- type the name of the file as the footer at the bottom of the document – and number the pages when the document came back with comments.

When the task satisfied the assessment criteria, learners were supposed to print out the full history of the document, from draft 1 to the final draft (with all the comments from the mentor) for filing in the portfolio. (See Appendix III for the full version of the guidelines).

3.3.5 Reports

3.3.5.1 Consortium reports

The consortium was required to submit monthly reports to DoL. These included a general report from the consortium plus reports by trainers,

reports by mentors, and invoices for work done. The first report was presented in February 2003. However, the second report from March 2003 was only presented in July 2003. The third report for the activities from August was presented at the end of September 2003. The fourth report for the activities from October 2003 was presented in December 2003. The fifth report from January 2004 was presented at the end of March 2004. The last report was presented in June 2004.

The report of July 2003 was the most crucial among the early reports. In it the providers brought into focus the critical needs of the programme in materials and on-line mentoring.

For the materials, the providers identified the following as matters where consensus had not been reached:

- (1) final format requirements of learners' portfolios
- (2) technical issues such as header and footer requirements
- (3) language consistency and spelling usage

Concerning on-line mentoring, the report states "on-line tutoring if conducted appropriately serves the following purpose:

1. learners and mentors lay a foundation for good relationship
2. learners become skilled at filling information appropriately, heading information appropriately and gathering information appropriately
3. if tutors pick up on learners' needs, tutoring takes place effectively as learners have tutors comments, exemplars ideas on screen and can use them effectively
4. learners learn by example so – if a tutor takes care with comments, learners pick up on effective ways of expressing themselves" (p.3).

Referring to the Portfolios of Evidence submitted for the Introductory learners at that stage the report further observes, "It is apparent that little care has been taken with these learners. The kind of comments made, in most cases, are extremely unhelpful. Little effort has been made to direct learners to adhere to the tasks at hand and where there is focus it has been on the use of verbs and prepositions" (p.4).

It is clear from this report that there was a need for collaboration in materials development and mentoring expertise (Hypothesis 1), foundations for mentor and learner relationship (Hypothesis 2), learner needs and motivation (Hypothesis 3) and computer and Internet technical issues for writing headers and footers, correcting spellings and gathering information appropriately (Hypothesis 4).

The need for mentor training was initially mentioned in the Report to the Department of Labour of October to December 2003. In this report, the

consortium set dates when the mentors were going to be trained.

The report therefore reflected the need for standardising the mentoring delivery (Hypothesis 1).

The report to DoL of January-March 2004, under 'provider development', further acknowledged the lack of accord among material developers, trainers and mentors: "Perhaps due to the speedy development of the BCP, and also due to the fact that the materials developer was contracted by SACHED and is not part of the UNISA staff, there seems to have been difficulty in developing a shared and coherent agreement around, and understanding of, the learning programme amongst all role players in the consortium," (p.3).

The report also acknowledged the effect this had on the learners: "Students have noted that trainers, mentors and assessors often have significantly different views about the programme and the activities required of them. ... Trainers and mentors have expressed a lack of clarity about the programme, the materials and the methodology" (p.3).

To address these problems, the consortium made suggestions to 'tighten' the relationship between the programme development and the programme implementation. The report shows that mentors E1, T2, E2 and T5 attended the mentors' workshop held on 20 February 2004. Other mentors did not attend this training, as they were not aware of the workshop.

The report of June 2004 was an important report because it was the final report of the consortium to DoL. The report carried the assessment reports of the Portfolios of Evidence for the second time on the whole programme after the graduation in February 2004.

As far as the assessment and moderation of the portfolios were concerned, this report should be evaluated in corroboration with the findings contained in the Minutes of the meeting held on the 17th May, 2004 at which DoL set conditions for the continuation of the BCP contract.

It can be concluded from this report that the performance of the learners was mixed: it notes that learners 7, 16, 29, 31, 48 and 28 were inactive. Learner 27 had been sending in one draft per month to his mentor, which was unacceptable. Learner 12's PoE submissions were inadequate. Learner 4 did not complete and submit her PoE; nor did 39, 1, 16, 35, 17 and 38. However, all the six of Mentor T5's learners (42, 6, 5, 1, 2 and 46) completed and submitted their PoE's by June 2004. Similarly,

learners 8, 14, 13, 23, 32, 26, 3, 47, 18, and 21, of various mentors also completed their PoE's. However, the assessment statements show that Mentor T5 who was assigned to mentor the learners intensively for the purposes of submitting the PoE's was more successful in helping her learners than the learners of the other mentors.

This report reflects the need for motivating learners (Hypothesis 3) and collaboration on training delivery.

In all the reports demonstrate the stakeholders' awareness of the problems that lurked the programme.

3.3.5.2 Trainers' reports

Trainers' reports were characterised by positive comments from both trainers and learners.

Where trainers expressed reservations, they had to do with Hypothesis 1 and with relevance and motivation (Hypothesis 3):

"The lack of a 'Trainer's Manual' was felt and meant that we were not entirely sure if our interpretation of the task was what the writers had in mind originally. For example, Activity 5 (p.21) is titled 'Write a proposal', the list of activities further down on the page then talks about reports. This confused us trainers, and completely frustrated our attempts to make the process explicit, because we then had to try and do some damage control. How successfully, we have yet to see" (Trainer T2's Report of 13 August 2003: 2).

"The job advertisements that were chosen were not appropriate or useful to the participants, most of whom felt that ALL of the jobs were way beyond their abilities and ambitions" (Trainer T2's Report of 19 June 2003:1).

Naturally, this affected motivation during on-line mentoring.

However the report of 18 March 2004 written by Trainer T2 shows that the trainer had a difference with his two female students. From this report we learn that two learners reported late for training, which infuriated the trainer. When the trainer asked the participants why they had come for training when the session was about to end, he was told that the learners' supervisors had instructed them to attend the session only after completing some other job tasks. The trainer responded, "I have had enough of this stupidity" (p.1). When he was challenged by one of the

students to explain whether or not he meant the learners were stupid, the trainer explained that he was referring to the stupidity of the situation: being sent to the training session when it was virtually over. He later tried to pull the learner out of class by hand but she refused to leave. He further argued in the report that sensitivity to cross-cultural issues was a two-way issue to which learners and trainers were all accountable.

The trainer was removed from the programme as a result of this incident. Although the incident might be said to be an isolated case, it brings into focus the need for mentor training and expertise (Hypothesis 1) which would lead to better cross-cultural sensitivity in mentoring relationships (Hypothesis 2).

3.3.5.3 Mentors' reports

In contrast with the picture of innocence the learners give in the Morake Report (3.3.5.4 below), mentors' reports throughout the two years of the programme express their frustration with the lack of co-operation of certain of their learners. At the same time, they appreciated the difficulties these learners were experiencing, both from workplace pressure and because of the nature of the writing process itself.

In September 2003, for example, a mentor wrote that "the big concern that I felt before meeting my two learners was that they would feel very demotivated by having to redo, rework, retry it ALL again! And my fears weren't unfounded. Learner 1 in particular felt hurt and angry at this. She felt that 'they' had no knowledge of the amount of time and effort that had gone into the tasks, and coming from a very weak language position she had in fact made huge steps in improving her overall work standard"(p.1).

Here are some examples from the SACHED Report for the period October-December 2003:

- Mentor M2: "It was extremely difficult working with 34 and 14. Despite many e-mails to them, they did not wish to bring closure to their PoE's (Portfolio of Evidence). I also sent many e-mails to (Mentor) E2 and phoned her on numerous occasions as I did not know how to proceed with either of these learners. She assured me that I was not alone in this and that many mentors were experiencing the same problems" (p.40).
- Mentor CS also had problems in getting co-operation of three of her six learners. These were 29 who had only submitted one draft; 28 who had only submitted one draft and 27 who did not respond about his work for a long period. However, CS noted her pleasure in working with learner 30. Her other two learners, 12 and 3 also

completed and submitted their PoE's.

- Mentor E2 reported that her seven learners did not complete their mentoring activities. Learner 24 had indicated that she did not wish to complete outstanding tasks. Learner 49 had only submitted two drafts for three activities. Learner 11 had only submitted first drafts of five activities. Learner 23 had not yet submitted final drafts. Learner 8 had submitted an incomplete PoE and learner 25 had stopped because of pressure of work
- Mentor M3 also reported that her two learners, 16 and 15 did not complete their PoE's.
- Mentor M5 reported that her three learners, 6, 20, and 41 did not submit their portfolios despite several interventions.
- Mentor E1 reported that three of his four learners did not complete and submit their PoE's. Learners 12 and 47 did not submit their final drafts while learner 18 did not submit any activities due to ill health.

However, E1 also noted the "Excellent work submitted" (p.4) of his learner 21.

There were some other positive reports: two learners, 7 and 9 Mentor M4 guided were reported to have completed their tasks although they did not submit their PoE's by December 2003. The two learners, 39 and 38, guided by Mentor M5 both completed and submitted their PoE's. The learners guided by Mentor T2 –2 and 1 – also completed and submitted their tasks. Similarly, all the three learners who were guided by Mentor M1 completed and submitted their PoE's.

In summary, it can be stated that almost all the mentors had difficulties in securing their learners' co-operation even though there were isolated reports of learners who were punctual in meeting their portfolio obligations. The need for motivating learners (Hypothesis 3) is therefore self evident.

3.3.5.4 The DoL/EU final report by Morake (2004)

The Morake report is important because it was after these findings that the BCP mentoring was halted. The report was commissioned by the DoL/EU as a form of evaluation of the impact of the BCP mentoring programme.

Using a series of oral interviews and documents, Morake concluded that learners dropped out of the programme for the following reasons:

"lack of relevance of the training to the immediate job responsibilities,

pregnancy, ill health, lack of time to do assignments and job tasks, too much work, high demand of course requirements, change of jobs or responsibilities, change of tutors or mentors, the need for higher level training and poor mentoring” (p.6).

The report further states that learners who were able to complete a level attributed their success to intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation.

The report therefore confirms through the learners the importance of accord among all mentoring stakeholders so that training can be relevant to the immediate job responsibilities and match the learners’ level (Hypothesis 1). It is interesting to note that the report brings out the question of placing learners at appropriate levels because this compares well with what Mentor T2 had observed about the need to judge the language skills of L2 learners appropriately so that learners could be motivated (Hypothesis 3).

On the whole, the findings of this report were that the BCP Programme had failed. (See the full report in Appendix V). Although this report may have been a bit simplistic in arriving at its conclusions and was largely based on oral interviews with little use of the written evidence, the researcher was able to get more learner responses than this study managed to do. Therefore the report is a useful document.

The reports reviewed in this study attempt to capture the picture of what obtained on the mentoring programme between July 2003 and June 2004. In terms of the Consortium reports to DoL, the ones reviewed here represent 4 out of the 5 reports presented on the programme from July 2003 when the consortium started taking stock of the programme. The findings are therefore representative of what went on during this training and mentoring.

The DoL reports are supported by mentors and trainers’ reports. However, the individual mentors’ reports are few because most of them were included in the consortium reports.

In summary, it can be observed that the reports show a one way direction of posing the challenges by the mentors and trainers to the consortium and the Department of Labour. The reports seem to carry very little information showing how the problems posed were acted upon by the stakeholders for implementation. To get a more rounded view therefore, the study has attempted to get further insights from the Minutes of the meetings held from July 2003 to May 2004 in order to include what might have escaped the reports.

3.3.6 Minutes of meetings between DoL, the EU representative and the Consortium

In the course of this mentoring training a number of meetings were held between UNISA, SACHED and DoL with the representatives from the European Union who were attached to this programme at DoL. As a result, a rich resource of information was produced. Of relevance to the Hypotheses covered in this research the study has identified the following Minutes:

- the summary of decisions and requests made of the Business Communication Programme Meeting about on-line mentoring of 8 July, 2003
- the meeting of 7 August 2003 held at the John Povey Centre
- the Business Communication Programme: Project Team Meeting of 8 September, 2003
- the meeting held on 4 November, 2003 at the Department of Labour
- the meeting of 6 January, 2004 held at the Department of Labour
- the meeting of 12 February, 2004 conducted at the Department of Labour
- the Business Communication Programme Management team meeting of 29 March 2004
- the meeting of 10 and 17 May, 2004 held at the Department of Labour.

At the meeting of 8 July 2003 decisions were made about:

1. the need to streamline the interactive assessment process so that the whole history of the drafting and commenting process would be included in a single document
2. the need for developing the database carrying information on learner course attendance, face-to-face meetings of learners with their mentors
3. progress being made in terms of the portfolio of work
4. the need for additional mentors

These decisions reflect the need for collaboration on learner guidance and mentor expertise (Hypothesis 1) and, to some extent, the awareness of Internet requirements and computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4). The weakness of the awareness of Internet and computer efficacy lies in the fact that the meeting did not address how the learners were going to be effective in using computers and the Internet even though participants were expected to be involved in online communication and contribute to the database.

The meeting of 7 August 2003 covered the following items:

1. reports on student progress to the DoL
2. feedback from students on tutoring and on-line mentoring
3. student commitment
4. the role of portfolios in moving from one level to the next
5. course content and the structure of the Advanced course

The Minutes here seem to reiterate the need for collaborated efforts in materials and assessments (Hypothesis 1). The meeting also covered elements of the Internet (Hypothesis 4), and motivation through “student commitment” (Hypothesis 3). The Minutes however seem to be silent on the question of cross-cultural mentor and learner relationships (Hypothesis 2). Nevertheless, this was an improvement on the deliberations of the previous meeting where only the need for Hypotheses 1 and 4 was reflected.

The Minutes of the meeting of 8 September 2003 show that the following matters were discussed:

1. Portfolio assessments and results
2. Mentoring
3. Learner dropouts

Items 1 and 2 above point to the necessity for Hypotheses 1, and item 3 reflects the need for motivating learners to complete the programme (Hypothesis 3). At this meeting, Mentor T2 questioned whether the Unit Standards were designed for L1 or L2, and whether they were appropriate for L2 learners. This was indicative of the problems of assessment that would affect the programme. Mentor E1 who was the key expert charged with the task of assuring the quality of mentoring also noted the crucial importance of mentoring observing, “...whilst the programme included a series of common tasks, it is in fact a highly individualised learning process that can not happen if people do not receive quality mentoring” (p.3). He added that up to that point, “the mentoring had been uneven, with much of it not rigorous nor detailed enough” (p.3). And that mentoring needed to take several forms: telephonic, on-line and face-to-face. In essence, E1 was making inference to the need for strong bonds between learners and mentors (Hypothesis 2) and the need for using eclectic training methods leading to motivation. The fact that learners had dropped out even before the first graduation was enough warning for concern on the importance of motivation (Hypothesis 3). At this meeting, four learners were reported to have dropped out.

The following items were tabled at the meeting of 4 November 2003:

1. Mentoring for students
2. Consortium tasks and roles clarification
3. Guidelines (referred to as Protocols) for mentors and trainers
4. Database
5. DoL requirements in terms of competence of learners

Under item 1, it was reported that learner 11 had changed mentors following the departure of Mentor M6. He was now allocated to E2 until another UNISA mentor was appointed to mentor learner 11. It was also reported that learner 28 had dropped out. At the same meeting it was reported that one learner seemed to be “vulnerable having recently lost a close friend and returned to work after having a baby” (p.4). Another learner had been sent to Cape Town and that his e-mails suggested he might be depressed, and so DoL needed to follow up on him.

Under item 2, a need for streamlining the roles among training providers was expressed. The following roles were proposed: Mentor, Trainer, Assessor, Moderator, Material Writer and Learner Management Systems. The need for guidelines was expressed at this meeting under item 3. It was agreed that the assessment guides would be worked out by SACHED.

It was also reported that the database had been established and that it had proved to be useful in preparing reports to DoL.

From these Minutes, it can be concluded that the consortium was aware of the need for collaboration in materials development, assessment standards and management issues (Hypothesis 1). This suggests that these were the most pressing challenges identified by the Consortium at the time. However, the information about the two learners who seemed to be respectively “vulnerable” and “depressed” reflects a different need for strengthening mentor and learner relationships (Hypothesis 2), as the learners seemed to require individualised emotional support. It was clear from the reports that these personal problems were affecting the learners’ performance on the programme.

The fact that the training providers were able to identify these needs was positive. The challenge however lay in what measures were taken to address the identified problems. In the main, these problems also reflected the need for motivation (Hypothesis 3) just like the problem concerning the learner who had dropped out. The positive report about the database is reflective of the potential benefits that can be drawn from learner computer and Internet efficacy (Hypothesis 4). The stakeholders therefore needed to strengthen this element to reap all the benefits fully.

Positive observations of how the consortium was going to address the challenges experienced in 2003 were generally expressed at the meeting of January 2004.

Decisions concerning the time-lines for reviewing the materials and working out the implementation plan were made. It was at this meeting that the inclusion of two workplace tasks to the PoE's was discussed. The date for holding the first graduation ceremony was set and all PoE's were supposed to be submitted in time for the graduation ceremony in February 2004.

The consortium further provided a Merit exemplar (Appendix IV) of the criteria used for the assessment of a Letter of Application as a response to the request by DoL at the previous meeting to provide assessment guidelines for the portfolio tasks. However, examples of other marking grids and the exemplars of Credit, Merit and Retry for the other portfolio tasks were not presented, and they remained pending.

Expert CS made a follow up on her earlier concerns she had expressed at the meeting of the 4th November on what the Department of Labour had done about the two learners who needed emotional support.

The Minutes of this meeting reflect an attempt to implement what had been decided in the previous meeting. Credit can be given to expert CS for making a follow up on the need for developing learner relationships in mentoring (Hypothesis 2). Similarly, the attempt by the consortium to work out a Merit exemplar as a follow up to the DoL request was a positive sign of implementing programme demands. However, the results show that neither the DoL nor the consortium had provided a sufficient solution to the assignments they had been given. This failure to address important observations would later have telling effects on subsequent activities.

According to the Minutes of the BCP project team meeting of 29 March 2004, four students appealed against the results they received for their portfolio, questioning why they had received Credits and not Merits. DoL also showed concern about the lack of a credible explanation of what made a Credit different from a Merit. The consortium had no ready answers at the time. The portfolios were assessed by an assessor and a moderator. Although students' mentors were requested to indicate grades for their learners these were overruled by the senior assessors. The mentors were therefore not part of the final assessment except for the assessor and the moderator. The merit exemplar in Appendix IV did not help matters much to resolve the controversy surrounding the grading system.

It can be stated that as far as the assessments were concerned, the effects of the failure to address the observations expressed in November 2003 were finally felt by the consortium. The consortium had no choice but to abandon the grading system so that learners would only be graded under Pass or Fail.

The first meeting in May took place on 10th May 2004. The following issues were tabled at this meeting:

1. The position on the role of the UNISA Team Leader
2. Performance of the consortium
3. Unit standards and accreditation of the programme

Regarding item 1 above, DoL stated that it had observed a shift in the functions of the UNISA Team Leader position performed by E1 to the John Povey Centre Director. The matter was later clarified that the Director was initially part of the team of experts although the contract did not categorically state so.

On the performance of the consortium, the EU representative put it on record that “apart from training sessions, most activities requested of the consortium had been delivered late” (p.3). She further reported that the performance of the consortium was at that point a matter of extreme concern as students had failed to produce their portfolios in time. Only one student for the Introductory group and none for the Intermediate had reportedly met their deadlines. The Department of Labour felt that “whilst some students might be negligent in their assignments, the poor performance of the mentors was in large part responsible for the non-performance of the students” (p.3).

In response to these comments, Expert E1 from UNISA noted that the non-performance of the students needed to be located in a broader context. He observed that “he had been appointed as a key expert but that significant aspects of project design that he felt were central to the success of the programme had been ignored notably” (p.4).

It is interesting to note that E1 specifically referred to the need to attend to the “significant aspects of project design” as being “central to the success of the programme” because this was a glimpse of the awareness that the consortium needed to apply project management skills. This relates to the need for collaboration among training providers (Hypothesis 1).

At the same meeting, the John Povey Centre Director further explained that the Unit Standards were not appropriate for the Advanced level and

parts of the Intermediate level. This implied that the standards were only UNISA accredited and not registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The DoL observed that the programme needed to be registered with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as planned.

The information revealed by the John Povey Centre was important because the tenderer had indicated that accreditation of the course under the NQF was intended to motivate the learners. In this case, it can be argued that although the course was going to be accredited with the University of South Africa, this might have demoralised the learners because this was not the original agreement.

Given the gravity of the matters raised at this meeting, a follow-up meeting to discuss the future of the BCP programme was set to be held on 17 May 2004.

At the meeting of 17 May 2004, the two consortium partners expressed the desire to continue the programme. The Department of Labour was gratified to note that the partners wished to continue this training. However DoL attached the following conditions before the continuation of the programme:

1. Improving the project management
2. Commitment and support to workplace learning approach
3. Portfolios of Evidence hand-in by learners

On the question of improving project management, DoL requested that the consortium should present reports monthly in order for the Department to monitor learner progress and give support at the appropriate time. Regarding commitment to and support of workplace learning, DoL showed concern that there was no agreed approach to workplace learning and that expertise existed within the consortium in language learning and mentoring in workplace that appeared to be ignored and not used by the consortium. As a third condition, DoL further demanded that the Introductory and Intermediate learners be immediately and intensely supported to complete their portfolios by the 31st May 2004 as they had missed their hand-in deadlines by two weeks.

To achieve this, UNISA assigned Mentor T5 to attend the workplace frequently to help learners put their portfolios together.

Given that only one learner from the Introductory group had handed in the portfolio by this time, the suggestion to support the learners on an intensive level by mentors was a welcome one. However, the suggestion made by UNISA to assign Mentor T5 to these duties meant that this

opportunity for mentors was transferred to one mentor. Therefore the mentors who were not aware of the set deadline did not use this opportunity. To this end, the results of the final learner portfolios and assessments reflected in the June 2004 report to DoL should be appreciated within the context that mentors who were not previewed to the contents of this meeting could not effect the decisions made.

This study has reviewed Minutes of nine of the ten meetings held from July 2003 to May 2004. As the meetings were supposed to be conducted monthly, the reviewed Minutes represent 90% of the deliberations that took place concerning this programme. Therefore, the findings from these Minutes do significantly represent the real picture of the activities that took place on the programme.

3.3.7 Correspondence

Correspondence among the stakeholders symbolised attempts to make follow-ups on important matters which could not wait until the following meeting. The documents are therefore useful in reflecting some matters of immediate concern.

3.3.7.1 The EU correspondence of December 2003

The European Union in a correspondence of December 2003 signed by the Training Advisor and the Programme Manager highlighted the need for effective mentoring. The document requested an implementation plan that would state how trainers, mentors and assessors would be supported to perform their roles during the course of the project. The correspondence also called for a statement of the moderation process that would be used to ensure that all mentors and assessors worked to similar standards and enabled the learners to reach competence against the SAQA unit standards.

Although this correspondence brought into focus the need for addressing the challenges in general it specifically reflects the need for a positive interface among mentors, trainers and assessors (Hypothesis 1) in order to ensure that assessments were standardised.

3.3.7.2 John Povey Centre Board correspondence of September 2003

In the correspondence of 29 September 2003 by the John Povey Centre Executive Board to the consortium partner, SACHED Educational Trust, concerns were raised about the inadequate consultation and collaboration on the development and delivery of materials, the

scheduling of training and the quality assurance of mentoring and students' work. This shows that UNISA was aware of the need for collaboration in materials development and delivery (Hypothesis 1).

3.3.7.3 John Povey Centre correspondence of 24 July 2003

An e-mail from the John Povey Centre of 24 July 2003, entitled Feedback on DoL Meeting of 24 July 2003 stated that the Department of Labour had been experiencing severe IT Problems for over a week and there was no way of knowing whether the materials that had been sent by mentors had gone through. This reflects the need for Internet efficiency (Hypothesis 4).

3.3.7.4 Mentor correspondence of December 2004.

Later a mentor reported on how materials were lost following the Group-Wise mail disturbance experienced at UNISA during the programme.

<p>Date: Wed, Dec 15, 2004 10:30 AM Subject: Advanced Portfolio</p> <p>Dear "42"</p> <p>I have tried to phone you, but you don't seem to be in. I spoke to "E1" and he indicated that you are waiting for drafts from me? Would you mind sending those drafts that you are still waiting for so that I can have a look at them. Perhaps they fell by the wayside with the email problems we had. I will not be in the office until Tuesday again. Have you managed to rework the presentation? I look forward to hearing from you soon.</p> <p>Kind regards "T5"</p>
--

Fig. 2: Internet problems.

Mentor T5's note suggests that UNISA had experienced Internet problems. The problem reflects the need for using a reliable internet facility (Hypothesis 4).

3.3.8 Samples of mentoring activities

The writing of the portfolio tasks was the hub of the mentoring that took place. The mentors' comments were therefore crucial in this exercise. The information from selected samples of the mentors' comments shows that there was a wide range of approaches in the way learners were guided.

Sample 1

Mentor M1 used the Microsoft Word comment task as in the following example:

<p>"Dear Ms Modise Position as Human Resources Practitioner (1) L</p> <p>As an experienced person in Human resources issues (2) I am applying for your position as Human Resources Practitioner as advertised in the City Press on the 20 June 2003."</p>	Comment [U1]: Centre this and make it bold
	Comment [U2]: Remove this

Sample 1: Mentor M1's comments

However, this approach caused a misunderstanding as the senior assessors were not able to read the comments and therefore they thought that the mentor was passing texts without commenting on them. Although the position was clarified later and many other mentors were able to use the comment task, the mentor could not use this approach on all the students. This was because two of the four learners Mentor M1 guided were using old computers which did not have the right hard and software. In the end, Mentor M1 changed his approach to making comments within the text to suit all his learners' needs.

From this mentoring sample it can be concluded that the need for computer hardware and software efficacy (Hypothesis 4) had come into focus at this point. However, this encounter also demonstrates the one way effect of the reporting procedures used on this programme. It is interesting to note that although the training providers became aware of the shortcomings about the capacity of some learners' computers, they did not move to improve the conditions of the computers. Instead the mentor had to adjust his approach to suit the learners who used old computers. However, from this sample it can be stated that apart from the fact that the mentor restricted his comments to the subject matter which could have motivated the learner, the approach does not lend itself well to nurturing the learner and mentor relationship (Hypothesis 2). Therefore this should be supplemented by comments under the text, deliberately addressing the issue of relationship building.

Regarding structuring the comments, the information obtaining from the learner portfolios of Mentor M1 shows that he did not structure his comments based on content, organisation, language and presentation as prescribed in the mentor guidelines. This is because Mentor M1 was not availed these guidelines. It is therefore interesting to note that one of the reasons given by the assessors for the failure of one of the learners Mentor M1 guided was that the mentor did not base his guidance on the prescribed structure when the guidelines were not circulated to all the

mentors.

Mentor T2 varied his guidance. Sometimes he used the Microsoft Word comment tool as in the following example:

Sample 2

"TO: ALL OF THE COLLEQUES
SUBJECT: FINANCIAL & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP"

Comment [U3]: spelling

Sample 2: Mentor T2's comment approach

From this example we can tell that even though this learner was able to use Microsoft Word, she did not utilise the Microsoft Word Spellchecker. This supports the need for learner computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4).

In another case, Mentor T2 highlighted the parts of the text that the learner needed to correct and made the following final comments:

Sample 3

"Hi 1

This letter is BRILLIANT! Very good work. All that needs sorting are the highlighted areas:

1. Position as Senior Administrative Clerk --- because this is the Subject line of the letter, you should either underline it, or make it bold.
2. responsibilities and are dealing with --- grammar rules would need this to be in the Present Simple: "and deal..."
3. performance areas as listed in --- in this case you don't really need the word I have highlighted. Delete it and the sentence is actually easier to read.
4. of my achievement. --- you have many of these, therefore put an "s" on the end of the word.

And that's that!
Well done.
T2"

Sample 3: Mentor T2's comment approach

Although the mentor seems to over-praise his learner by saying "This letter is BRILLIANT" and yet he points out a couple of errors, this represents how dynamic the mentor was in varying his comments, if in this case "And that's that! Well done" does not sound just a tinge sarcastic. To this end the need for agreement on how to make comments (Hypothesis 1) may be evident here. It is also interesting to note that when Mentor T2 used the Word Comment tool, he was able to limit his comments to the requirements of the text of his learner. This might be suggestive of the superiority of the Microsoft Word comment task.

In summary, these two samples by Mentor 2 show that his comments

were also not based on the content, organisation, language and presentation prescribed later in the mentoring guidelines because the guidelines were not available by the time these comments were made. By the time the guidelines were worked out, Mentor T2 had in fact been removed from the programme.

Mentor E2 generally spent a lot of time trying to teach her learners. In one example she made the following comments at the end of the learner's text:

Sample 4

<p>"NOTE1: From the way the question has been phrased, Mr Modise is only interested in the target vis-à-vis learners with disabilities. Your answer is feeding him with information about blacks and women, which, in terms of his question, are merely distractors. Can you rephrase your answer so that it focuses exclusively on the developments with regard to learners with disabilities in learning programmes?</p>
<p>It is also unclear (deliberately?) whether the strategies in part (b) of your answer help to account for the current statistics or whether these can be regarded as additional strategies to reach the target of 4 %.</p> <p>NOTE 2: I know that this is not a feature of your answer so much as it is of the source from which these figures come, but the second and third bullets in (a), which distinguish between learners in Level 1 programmes and learners in programmes at all levels, including Level 1, are really difficult for the first time reader to work out. Do you agree? How would <i>you</i> make the difference clearer? When you have thought about it and made your own proposal, go to the end of this document and see what I might suggest.</p> <p>Comments</p> <p>Content: As has been mentioned before, the information is still submerged in other data that is not of interest to the questioner. The information about learners with disabilities nevertheless appear to be appropriate and accurate – its source should be cited. As is indicated in Note 2, the information is not presented in a way that helps the reader to understand the data. {Would a table be easier?}</p> <p>Organisation: As indicated in the second paragraph in Note 1, the text provides information but the relationship between parts (a) and (b) is unclear. This may, of course, be a deliberate ploy. The answer will be shorter, and more to the point, once only the data dealing with learners with disabilities has been extracted.</p> <p>Language: Good, as usual. One small suggestion to use 'has been achieved' rather than 'is achieved'.</p> <p>Presentation: Neat and laid out in conformance with the structure of the PQ.</p> <p>"38", I am away Friday 8th and over the weekend, so please get second drafts or new work to me early in the week and I'll try and get them back to you before I go.</p> <p>Are you enjoying this? "E2".</p>

Sample 4: Mentor E2's comment approach

Based on this sample, it can be argued that E2 devoted a lot of time to making comments. This approach may prove to be motivating to learners in that it enforces mentor and learner contact thereby building on mentor and learner mentoring relationships (Hypothesis 2). The mentor also tried to engage her learner by asking if she was enjoying the mentoring exercise. Although there is no evidence of the learner's response to the question, Mentor E2's effort to get feedback from her learner was positive when she asked, "Are you enjoying this?"

However, given that learners did not have a lot of time to spend on their mentoring activities it might be argued that comments like these were too long. In fact if Mentor E2 had used the Word comment task, she could not have managed to make such lengthy comments because the information would look overcrowded. There is also a danger of making uncontrolled comments when a mentor has to write so much. However, the mentor's intention here was to motivate the student, which shows awareness of Hypothesis 3.

In terms of variability of her comments, Mentor E2's comments show that she was one of the early users of the structure later prescribed in the mentoring guidelines. This should be expected because E2 was the architect of the learner materials.

In comparison, Mentor M3 also used the approach in which she tried to teach rather than comment. The difference was that her approach was more precise. The following is a sample of her notes to one of her students.

Sample 5

"Dear 15

Thank you for this project plan. You seem to have covered all the issues that would have to be dealt with in such a project. The following suggestions and pointers may be useful:

Consistency of sentence structure:

You start your project plan table by using active verbs in the infinitive, such as 'Do', 'Develop', 'Get', 'Approach', and so on. I feel this is an effective and clear way of setting out the plan, and expresses the idea that you are reporting on proposals for *action*.

It would be a good idea to be consistent in using these forms throughout your document. This would mean that you would need to look at columns such as 'Accommodation' and find ways of expressing this in a similar way, such as '*Find* accommodation'. You would then also have to adapt 'To approach', 'Identification', 'to get' and so on.

This is particularly clear in point 4, under the third bullet, where you have written '*Layout* (noun) of the building from the Department of Health and *request* ...'. You could make this consistent by using another verb such as 'Obtain'.

Questions in reported (indirect) speech:

The items in your fifth point, 'Day to day running of the centre', seem to be expressed as reported questions. Here, too, you seem to be reporting on proposals for *action*. Again, I feel you should start each of these with a verb such as 'Find out (how)', 'Decide', 'Develop' and so on.

I hope these suggestions are useful.
Best wishes,
M3"

Sample 5: Mentor M3's comment approach

Although Mentor M3 did not structure her comments according to the guidelines, her comments seem to take the learner through the process well. They are therefore motivating. Her comments do also show that she limited her guidance to the subject matter restricting her extra thoughts to the courteous statement, "I hope these suggestions are useful" and "Best wishes". It is clear from this tone that Mentor M3 was forging a positive mentoring relationship with her learner.

Mentor T5 started by making comments next to the part of the text that needed correction. The following is an extract of her approach by April 2004:

Sample 6

Personal Profile

A capable, highly energised, punctual candidate with five six <Which is it? Five OR six? Be specific.>years<> experience in a working environment <what type of working environment? This is a bit too vague>. A candidate who handles challenges <in a>constructive, diplomatic, professional manner. She is passion with her work. <A person who is passionate about her work.>

Sample 6: Mentor T5's comment approach

However Mentor T5 later tried as much as possible to encourage her learners. The following sample of her comments to learner 42 can demonstrate this attempt.

Sample 7

"Dear 42"

Thank you for this draft. It is a good effort. I forgot to mention in my note to you that you should also CC Sached@icon.co.za. My apologies.
Please take note of the following points:

Content:

Your content is good. Your content is adequate. There are a few things that need to be rephrased, but the general content is fine.

Organisation

Try to break away from the words used in the sample letter. Try to say the same thing in

your own words.

Language:

Minor errors. See my comments in the text below.

Presentation:

Refer to the example in the materials for the requirements.

Regards,

T5”

Sample 7: Mentor T5's comment approach

Though Mentor T5 may have been repetitive in the use of the word, “content” above, her comments were aimed at motivating the learner. The fact that she was able to structure her comments according to the guidelines means that she was one of the Mentors who received the final guidelines. In terms of variability of her comments, later samples of her mentoring show that she was quite dynamic in making comments. Although she did not use the prescribed structure consistently in her mentoring of learners from September 2004, Mentor T5 was able to make comments using Microsoft Word AutoShapes task. This further shows that her computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4) helped her to manoeuvre around her learners’ writing tasks well.

Generally, mentor T5 was successful in mentoring her learners from February to May 2004 although all the learners who were assigned to be taught by her from September 2004 all finally dropped out.

Mentor M2 had a different experience when learner 14 felt that she did not have to make any changes to her document in spite of the fact that Mentor M2 had made some corrections and suggestions underlined in the learner’s text. Below is the extract of the interaction with her learner:

Sample 8

“ INFORMATION ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOP

I would like to inform you about the details of the above-mentioned workshop to be held at Roodeplaat dam conference centre from the 6 to 7 March 2003.

As our main speaker, please note that accommodation and transport provisions have been made for you. Please confirm if this is in order by 28/02/2003 at 10:00.

Please indicate any assistance and other special dietary needed. (Please have a look again at this sentence. See comments below)

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR: EMPLOYMENT SERVICES”

Sample 8: Mentor M2's comment approach

Learner 14 replied:

"NB: According to myself there is nothing wrong with this fax, I can't erase or add something. This is satisfying."

Mentor M2 responded:

"Comments

'14' as you can see I have corrected some of your language errors. Although you indicate that there is nothing wrong with the fax, I do think you need to look at the language and sentence structure in the following sentence : "Please indicate any assistance and other special dietary needed". It really makes no sense at the moment and although I know what you are trying to say, you need to rephrase it. My suggestion is that you read it out loud to yourself carefully and slowly! I am sure you will realise what the changes are that need to be made".

From this encounter the need for establishing a positive relationship with a learner is apparent. If such a relationship had been built between the mentor and the learner, the learner would have trusted her mentor's guidance. The need for hypothesis 2 was evident in this mentoring relationship.

Regarding the issue of variability in the mentor's comments, this sample shows that Mentor M2 did not structure her comments according to content, organisation, language and presentation. These comments were made before the guidelines were worked out. In fact learner 14 was later assigned to Mentor M1 who mentored her for the Intermediate level. Later samples however show that the mentor had received the new guidelines and used them.

Mentor E1 successfully mentored learner 21 from the Intermediate level to the Advanced level. The following is an extract of his approach in making comments on the writing of his learner.

Sample 9

Summary
<p><u>It has become common knowledge that</u> (delete – adds little; perhaps you could begin with 'The Minister said in his Budget vote speech that ...' You would have to change present tenses below to past tenses; I haven't indicated them.) one of the factors constraining our economy from growing and increasing job opportunities is the skills deficit. <u>Given the significance of this matter</u> (delete?), the Department of Labour since the beginning of 2001 to date <u>has a total</u> (not clear: in what way does the Department 'have' this total?) of no less than 3 128 737 people <u>that</u> (who/) have received training <u>relevant to their work or relevant to trades and occupations they aspire to enter into</u> (delete?). (Missing: the figures for the period before 2001: they're the basis for 'the 250% improvement' you refer to below.)</p>

Sample 9: Mentor E1's comment approach

In this extract, Mentor E1 underlined the part that he felt needed correction and made comments in brackets next to the underlined part. From this

sample it can be stated that Mentor E1 kept his comments to the subject matter. Considering that learners did not have much time to spend on the writing tasks, this approach can be said to be motivating to the learners. However, the approach does not seem to cater for the development of a mentoring relationship or the need for computer efficacy. The fact that the comments are made inside the learner's sentences breaks the flow of thought of the learner for a reader following these comments.

In terms of variability, this sample shows that E1 did not structure his comments under content, organisation, language and presentation.

In another encounter, Mentor CS used a word she thought did not exist in English.

Sample 10

"My query was not based on disbelief but really an embarrassment of 'quirking' (I am sure this word doesn't exist but it certainly expresses what I feel) a sentence here and there – because that's all I can really do".
--

Sample 10: Mentor CS's comment approach

These comments by Mentor CS were made before the mentor guidelines were worked out by the programme experts. So the mentor did not structure her work under content, organisation, language and presentation. However, later samples from the portfolios of her learners show that she applied the structure prescribed in the guidelines. This is expected because CS was a member of the team that worked out the guidelines.

This study has presented extracts from ten samples of the comments of eight mentors. The findings are that all mentors varied their comments. Further samples from learner portfolios show that in some instances mentors used more than one style of commentary on one text. The samples also show that before the guidelines were worked out, only Mentor E2 structured her comments under content, organisation, language and presentation. This means that the group of learners who graduated in February 2004 was not mentored under this structure. Moreover, the mentoring guidelines were not finalised as late as March 2004. Since the portfolios were submitted in May 2004, it can be concluded that the mentors who were given the guidelines were only able to use them for one month in May.

The efficacy of the guidelines could have only been established through the samples of the learners who were taken by Mentor T5 up to December 2004. However, the samples of her learners' texts show that Mentor T5 did not base her comments on the prescribed structure in all her mentoring of the learners from September to December. She instead

coloured the parts she identified for correction, drew lines using the AutoShape task and made comments next to the part that needed correction.

From this summary it can be concluded that the mentoring guidelines did not have much effect on the quality of the mentors' work as far as making commentary was concerned. The only pattern that seemed common among mentors was that most of them coloured the parts, they commented on. However, this too was not consistently used. Therefore it is reasonable to conclude that comments were varied, and this was problematic because learners were mentored by different mentors.

3.3.9. Learner lists

3.3.9.1 Learners mentored by different mentors

The following information from learner lists shows how many learners were mentored by different mentors and for how long. The first row represents the two years of the programme. The letters on the second row show the months from June 2003 when the importance of keeping records was realised. The first column on the left shows numbers representing the 49 learners who were mentored. The letters with numbers represent the mentors (M1= Mentor 1, E1=Expert 1, CS= SACHED Chief Executive and Moderator, T1=Trainer 1).

	2003						2004										
	J	J	A	S	O	N	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N
1	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	M3						
2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	M3				T5	T5	T5
3	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	T2	CS						
4	T2	T2	T2	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1						
5	T2	T2	T2	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
6	T2	M5	M5	M5	M5				T5	T5	T5				T5	T5	T5
7	T1	T1	T1	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4						
8	T1	T1	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2						
9	T1	T1	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2	E2						
10	T1	T1	T1	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4						
11	T3	T3	M6	M6	E2	E2											
12	T3	T3	M5	M5	M5	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
13	T1	T1	T1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
14	T3	T3	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1				T5	T5	T5
15	E2	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3						
16	CS	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3	M3						
17	T1	T1	T1	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4	M4						
18	T2	T2	E1	E1	E1	E1											
19							E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
20	M5	M5	M5	M5	M5	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
21	T2	T2	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
22	M6	M6	M6	M6	E2	E2	E2	E2	T5	T5	T5				T5	T5	T5
23									E2	E2	E2						
24									E2	E2	E2						
25									E2	E2	E2						
26	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS						
27	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS						
28	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS												
29	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS												
30	CS	CS	CS	CS	CS												
31	M6	M6	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2						
32	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2						
33	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M1	M1	M1	M1	M1						
34	M6	M6	M6	M6	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2						
35	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2						
36	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2	M2											
37	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4							
38	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4											
39	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4							
40	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4	T4											
41	M5	M5	M5	M5	M5												
42	M5	M5	M5	M5	M5				T5	T5	T5				T5	T5	T5
43	M5	M5	M5	M5	M5												
44	M5	M5	M5	M5	M5												
45	T3	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
46									T5	T5	T5				T5	T5	T5
47	T3	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1	E1						
48									M4	M4	M4						
49							E2	E2	E2	E2	E2						

Table 2: Learners and their mentors

Table 2 shows a tabulation of learners with their mentors based on the information from the learner lists.

Ten mentors were engaged by the John Povey Centre to take part in this mentoring programme. These were E1, T1, T2, T3, M1, M3, M4, M5, M6 and T5. Mentors T1 and T2 started from the beginning of the programme. Of these, Mentor T1 mentored learners up to August 2003 when she terminated employment due to ill health. Mentor T2 went on up to March 2004 when he was removed from the programme. Mentors T3, M3, M5 and M6 joined the programme in June 2003. Mentor T3

discontinued in July 2003 as she decided to leave employment. Mentor M6 decided to stop in September 2003 due to other commitments. She was followed by Mentor M5 who stopped in October 2003. Mentor M3 mentored learners up until May 2004.

Mentor E1 was one of the key experts who acted as the head mentor and portfolio assessor. Although he was involved in this project from the beginning, he only took part in the actual mentoring from July 2003 to May 2004.

Mentor M1 joined the programme in August 2003 and mentored learners up to May 2004.

In October 2003, mentor M4 was recruited. He was removed from the programme in May 2004.

In February 2004, Mentor T5 was engaged to teach with Mentor T2 and mentor the learners who decided to continue training up to the end of the programme. However, by January 2005 all learners lost interest abandoning the programme.

In essence, no mentor from the John Povey Centre team took part in mentoring the learners from the beginning of the programme to the end.

Four mentors were engaged through SACHED. These were E2, CS, M2 and T4. Two of these mentors mentored learners from the beginning of the programme to May 2004. These were Mentor E2, who was the materials developer, Mentor CS, who was the moderator of the learners' portfolios. Mentor T4 was engaged in January 2003 and took active part in training and mentoring. Mentor M2 joined the programme in July 2003 and left in May 2004.

In actual fact, Mentors E2 and CS were the only mentors who took part in mentoring from January 2003 to May 2004.

The gaps in the table represent moments when learners were not mentored. Where the information shows that a learner was mentored from July but not up to November 2003, it means that the learner had dropped out before graduation in February 2004. Similarly, if a learner was not mentored up to May 2004, it means the learner had dropped out before the second submission of the portfolios. Where learners had gaps in between mentoring, it means that they spent moments without being assigned a mentor after their mentor had left the programme.

The mentors from Wits University were terminated by June 2003.

Because these mentors' involvement in the programme was brief, their contributions were negligible and therefore had no effect on the programme.

Whereas the table summarises information on the issue of mentors leaving the programme resulting into learners being mentored by different mentors (need for hypothesis 1), it also brings into focus the learner and mentor relationships (Hypothesis 2) which suffered because the learners were making new relationships each time they learnt under a new mentor. This may have demotivated the learners (hence the need for hypothesis 3).

3.3.9.2 Learner lists showing learner workplace sections

Learners came from ten different sections of the Department of Labour. These were: National Skills Fund (NSF), Employment Services (ES), Planning Unit (PU), Programme Management Unit (PMU), Training and Development (TD), National Skills Authority (NSA), Management Services (MS), Skills Development Planning Unit (SDPU), Public Relations (PR), and Human Resources Management (HRM).

The following table shows the distribution of the 25 learners who were able to follow the programme up to May 2004 according to the sections they came from.

Section	NSF	ES	PU	PMU	TD	NSA	MS	SDPU	PR	HRM
Number of learners	5	5	1	3	1	2	4	1	3	1

Table 3: Distribution of learners who followed the programme up to May 2004 according to their workplace sections

It can be concluded from this information that learners had specific needs according to the requirements of their sections. The data therefore reflect the need for collaboration in materials development so that training is tailored to the specific learner needs (Hypothesis 1). If learners' needs are catered for they would feel motivated to complete the course (Hypothesis 3).

3.3.9.3 List of learner drop-outs

The following table illustrates the final list of the learners who did not want to continue and their reasons.

Learner	Level completed	Reason
32	Intermediate	<i>'Too difficult'</i>
22	Intermediate	<i>'Not work related'</i>
20	Intermediate	<i>No reason given</i>
14	Intermediate	<i>No reason given</i>
7	Introductory	<i>'Too much work'</i>
10	Introductory	<i>'Don't want to continue'</i>

Table 4: Learners who did not want to continue the course

The reasons given by learners 7 and 32 suggest that these learners found the level of the writing tasks beyond their capability. The response of learner 22 suggests the need for individualising work. Although the other learners did not give reasons for discontinuing, it can be concluded that the learners all needed motivation (Hypothesis 3).

The following learners were found to be unsuitable to continue

Learner	Level on	Reason
17	Intermediate	<i>Did not pass the intermediate portfolio</i>
42	Introduction	<i>Took transfer</i>
43	Introduction	<i>Did not submit introductory portfolio</i>
39	Advanced	<i>Did not submit advanced portfolio</i>
37	Advanced	<i>Did not submit advanced portfolio</i>
29	Advanced	<i>On maternity</i>

Table 5: Learners whom the training providers found unsuitable for continuing their course

For the learners who could not submit their portfolios, the reasons could have relevance to all the elements of the four hypotheses. To this end there was a need for collaboration in training and mentoring by mentors so that learners could understand what they were learning; learners needed to get inspiration from their mentors through mentoring relationships; learners needed to be motivated by getting support from their line managers so that they could see the benefits of the course, and learners needed to be computer efficacious so that they could perform their tasks well.

The reason of maternity attributed to learner 29 is expected in a programme involving adult female learners. In fact this was not significant on this programme. Similarly, the reason of transfer attributed to the withdrawal of learner 42 is also expected in a big organisation that has many branches. This too was not significant on this programme.

3.3.9.4 Learner lists showing male learners and their mentors

Evidence from the learner lists shows that male learners who were mentored by female mentors decided to withdraw from the programme.

The information can be tabulated as follows:

Mentor	E1 (Male)	M4(Male)	CS	E2	M5	M3	T5
Male learners mentored	21	17	27,28	11	37,40	16	46
Withdrew			27,28	11	37,40	16	46

Table 6: Male learners and their mentors

The information shown in Table 6 suggests the need for strong mentor and learner relationships in cross-cultural mentoring. Given that the male learners who were mentored by male mentors did not drop out of the programme, it can be concluded that the awareness of gender issues is important in cross-cultural mentoring. This reflects the need for Hypothesis 2 (Relationships).

The information shows that out of the 49 learners who took part in this mentoring, 23 dropped out. Of the 49 learners, 17 learners completed Introductory Level. Nineteen learners completed the Intermediate Level and only 2 learners completed the Advanced Level. The total number of those certified competent at various levels therefore was 38. Of the 2 learners who completed the Advanced level, one entered at the Advanced Level and the other at Intermediate. The other 4 learners who attempted the Advanced Level were not able to complete the course. One took transfer and the rest were not able to submit their portfolios. Of the 19 learners who completed the Intermediate stage, only 7 of these had started at the Introductory Level, which means that 12 learners actually joined at the Intermediate Level. Of the 38 learners who were certified competent, 36 were women thereby recording a 95% success of the total number of those certified as competent. The projection in the proposal was that at least 54% of the learners who were certified as competent would be women. Therefore, the achievement here was even above the target. However, out of the 38 certified learners, 7 were white

which means that of those who completed at least one level of the course 81% were black. The projection in the proposal was that at least 85% of those certified as competent were black. So what obtained was below the target.

The progress evaluated in terms of the completed levels can therefore be illustrated as follows:

	Percentage of learners certified as competent
Introductory	17/49= 34.6%
Intermediate	19/49= 38.7%
<i>Advanced (assumed to have reached a level of competence against a full unit complement)</i>	2/49= 4%
<i>Women</i>	36/38=95%
<i>Blacks (among those certified competent)</i>	31/38=81%

Table 7: Learners certified as competent

In terms of the progression rate from one level to the next, the information can be presented as follows:

Level completed	Progression rate
Introductory and Intermediate	7/49=14.3%
Intermediate and Advanced	1/49=2.0%
Introductory , Intermediate and Advanced	0/ 49 = 0%

Table 8: The progression rate of the learners across completed levels

From this information, it can be concluded that no learner who started from the Introductory level was able to complete the Advanced level. The low progression rates are also indicative of how difficult it was for learners to progress from one level to the next.

3.3.10 The questionnaires

The main aim of the questionnaires was to test the validity of the hypotheses as they applied to the case study of the mentoring done.

3.3.10.1 Findings from the learners' questionnaire

Forty questionnaires were issued to the learners who took part in the programme. The first part of the questionnaire was based on a five-point-

scale. The final part requested the learners to choose from four options. The results are summarised as follows:
Questionnaire for learners

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral/ Not sure	disagree	Strongly disagree
The BCP catered for my particular writing needs	33%	0%	17%	50%	0%
The BCP was relevant to my daily work at DoL	0%	50%	17%	33%	17%
The training and mentoring had similar teaching aims	0%	0%	17%	50%	33%
All mentors were similar in their approach	0%	0%	17%	33%	50%
The contact training sessions taught me a great deal	17%	0%	50%	33%	0%
The online mentoring was <i>positive</i> for me because it improved my					
<input type="checkbox"/> ability to write clearly	33%	17%	17%	33%	0%
The mentoring process was <i>negative</i> for me because					
<input type="checkbox"/> pressure of DoL work interfered with my online writing tasks	83%	0%	0%	0%	17%
<input type="checkbox"/> my mentor was not very helpful	17%	33%	17%	0%	33%
<input type="checkbox"/> I learned very little from it	0%	17%	17%	33%	33%

Table 9: Questionnaire for learners

Turnover time: Learners were asked to indicate how long it usually took them and their mentors to deal with a task and return it.

	Same day	1 – 3 working days	About one week	More than a week
You	0%	17%	83%	0%
Your mentor	0%	83%	17%	0%

Key: 17%=1, 33%=2, 50%=3, 67%=4, 83%=5, 100%=6

Table 9: Questionnaire for learners

Regarding collaboration in training and mentoring (Hypothesis 1), the information can be summarised as follows:

- (i) No learner believed that training and mentoring had similar teaching aims
- (ii) No learner believed that mentors had similar teaching aims

It can be concluded that the need for Hypothesis 1 was significant

among the learners who responded to the questionnaire.

Concerning learner and mentor relationship (Hypothesis 2), the results are that half of the learners believed that mentors were not helpful. The need for Hypothesis 2 can therefore be said to be average.

The table also shows that most respondents agreed that:

(i) Learners learnt a lot from mentoring=66% which is motivating to the learners (Hypothesis 3).

(ii) Mentors returned work in stipulated time =83% which must have motivated learners to work on their drafts in good time.

It can be concluded from these results therefore that the programme attempted to motivate learners.

However, the results show that the learners had mixed feelings in the way they felt motivated. For instance whereas half of the learners believed that the BCP was relevant to their daily work and that mentoring improved their writing ability, 83% of the respondents reported that pressure of DoL work interfered with their mentoring. Similarly, few learners felt that:

(i) BCP catered for the learners' needs= 33%

(ii) Contact sessions taught learners a great deal =17%

(iii) Learners returned their work in stipulated time= 17%

What is even most striking about these results is that the highest number of learners (83%) reported that *mentors returned work in stipulated time* while the same number reported that *pressure of DoL work interfered with their mentoring*. From this sharp contrast, it can be argued that learners perceived the negative effects of motivation as coming from the challenges they faced from their workplace rather than from the commitment of their mentors.

Aspects of the need for learner computer efficacy (Hypothesis 4) can be deduced from the response that 50% of the learners believed that mentoring improved their writing ability because computer efficacy helps learners to write well just as the awareness of improved writing skills gives learners a sense of fulfilment leading to motivation. However here again, the result shows that only half of the learners believed that they benefited from the use of computers.

To sum up, it can be stated that the results show a mixed response of the learners in relation to the four hypotheses under consideration. However, because of the poor yield of the filled questionnaires returned by learners, these findings may not be conclusive. Nevertheless, these results are suggestive and therefore will be used in support of other

findings from the various sources identified for this study.

3.3.10.2 Findings from the mentors' questionnaire

Eleven questionnaires were sent to the mentors who took part in mentoring up to May 2004. Nine mentors responded.

In the first part of the questionnaire, mentors were asked to agree or disagree with the statements.

The second part tested the mentors' responses on a five-point-scale. The final part requested the mentors to choose from four options. The results are summarised in table form as follows:

		Yes	No
1.1	I was involved in the initial planning of the BCP	17%	83%
1.2	I was involved in the writing of course materials	17%	83%
1.3	I was involved in teaching some of the contact sessions	67%	33%
1.4	I was involved in online mentoring	100%	0%
1.5	This was my first experience of online mentoring	83%	17%

Table 10: Questionnaire for mentors

For each statement, mentors were supposed to put a tick in the block closest to their view.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral/ Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The online mentoring was <i>positive</i> for learners because it improved their spelling and punctuation	0%	17%	0%	33%	50%
grammar	0%	0%	17%	33%	50%
ability to write clearly	0%	0%	33%	33%	33%
ability to organize their ideas	0%	0%	17%	50%	33%
awareness of audience and purpose	0%	0%	17%	50%	33%
computer skills	0%	67%	17%	17%	0%
The mentoring process was <i>negative</i> because pressure of other work interfered with my online mentoring tasks	17%	83%	0%	0%	0%
my students' language skills did not seem to improve much	33%	67%	0%	0%	0%
(most of) my students lacked commitment and needed to be nagged for work	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%
It dragged on for too long	33%	33%	17%	0%	17%
It involved too much record-keeping and reporting	50%	50%	0%	0%	0%

There should have been more collaboration between mentors and moderators on portfolio assessment	83%	17%	0%	0%	0%
Gender was not an issue in any of my relationships with learners	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%
Race was not an issue in any of my relationships with learners	67%	33%	0%	0%	0%

Table 10: Questionnaire for mentors

Turnover time: Mentors were requested to indicate how long it usually took their students to deal with a task and return it.

	Same day	1 – 3 working days	About one week	More than a week
You	33%	50%	17%	
Your student	0%	0%	50%	50%

Key: 17%=1, 33%=2, 50%=3, 67%=4, 83%=5, 100%=6

Table 10: Questionnaire for mentors

Concerning collaboration in materials development and training (Hypothesis 1) the information shows that few mentors were

- (i) Involved in initial planning=17%
- (ii) Involved in writing course material=17

Similarly, all the mentors who responded reported that there was too much record-keeping and that there was not much collaboration in portfolio assessment. Most of them also reported that this was their first experience=83%. However, most mentors also reported that they were

- (i) Involved in mentoring=100%
- (ii) Involved in some contact teaching=67%.

This is evidence that there was some collaboration in mentoring and teaching. In fact, the fact that all the mentors reported that they were involved in mentoring proves that the questionnaire was given to the right audience.

These data suggest that the responses were mixed as far as Hypothesis 1 was concerned. Nevertheless the responses lean on the negative side since four out of the six items tested concerning this hypothesis are negative. It can be concluded therefore that 66% of the respondents were negative leaving 44% who were positive.

Regarding relationships (Hypothesis 2), the summary shows that all the mentors believed that:

- (i) Gender was not an issue=100%
- (ii) Race was not an issue=100%

As these responses may imply that mentors believed that the gender and race of their learners were not relevant to the mentoring programme, this information will be corroborated later with other findings to establish whether this position taken by mentors in their relationships with their learners contributed negatively or positively to the programme.

Motivation can be looked at in two ways: (a) Learner motivation and (b) Mentor motivation.

Although learner motivation is more important than mentor motivation, it is necessary to look at both because mentoring is a special type of teaching that requires both learners and mentors to be totally committed to the programme if mentoring has to work. In terms of learner motivation the results were that:

- (1) very few of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' spelling and punctuation=17%
- (2) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' grammar
- (3) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to write clearly,
- (4) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to organise ideas
- (5) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' awareness of audience and purpose
- (6) most of the mentors believed that the learners' language skills did not improve=66%
- (7) none of the mentors reported that learners returned their work in stipulated time
- (8) all the mentors believed that most of the learners lacked commitment

These items relate to motivation because they are elements of achievement and any sense of achievement inspires the learner to work harder. These results show that most of the mentors' beliefs about the learners' achievement were negative.

However, there is also evidence of a positive response as 66% of the mentors believed that the mentoring improved learners' computer skills. Nevertheless, this view was just one out of the nine items tested concerning learner motivation. The results therefore incline toward the negative perception by 8/9 or 88%. This perception is therefore significant.

Although mentor motivation may not be crucial because mentors are expected to be motivated since teaching is their duty, it is important to note that most of the mentors felt that “mentoring dragged on too long=66%”. Similarly, the information shows that all mentors felt that “mentoring involved too much record-keeping”. Although the issues of record-keeping fall under the need for agreement on management reporting procedures (Hypothesis 1), if reporting procedures are cumbersome, they can be quite demoralising to mentors. This can lead to mentors’ loss of motivation.

Regarding the need for learner computer and Internet efficacy (Hypothesis 4), the study identifies the following items:

- (1) very few of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' spelling and punctuation
- (2) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' grammar
- (3) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to write clearly
- (4) none of the mentors believed that mentoring improved learners' ability to organise ideas
- (5) most of the mentors believed that the learners' language skills did not improve
- (6) none of the mentors reported that learners returned their work in stipulated time

3.3.11 Mentor interview

A mentor interviewed shared how he experienced frustrations on the programme. He reported how he was requested to make apologies to his learners for the learners' failure to submit portfolio work. He also reported how he felt humiliated when he was told that he lacked knowledge of the English grammar and therefore his learners were going to be reallocated to a more capable mentor. He reported how he felt helpless because he expected that the mentoring system would provide him with a more nurturing assistance whereby if senior mentors had captured errors in his work this would be rectified in a timely and congenial manner since senior mentors always received copies of the activities between mentors and their learners. It turned out that the only time the mentor was made aware of the errors in his work was after the portfolios were submitted. To this end, the mentor felt that the issue of copying all activities to the senior mentors ultimately only served the purpose of the mentor exposing his errors which finally incriminated him. When his learners failed therefore, the mentor felt he had failed together with his learners.

The need for collaboration in materials development and sound programme management approaches (Hypothesis 1) is evident in this interview.

3.3.12 Learner interview

In an interview with one learner who took part in the initial group, the learner reported that most participants had different expectations of how this mentoring course was going to be conducted from what it turned out to be. According to her observations, the participants were promised a lot of fun on this programme and this was exemplified by the boot camp outing that took place on the onset of the programme. Indeed the training manual expressly mentions the need for the learners to have fun on the programme. However, it turned out that the programme was highly structured and lessons were delivered in a classroom situation either at the University of South Africa Sunnyside campus or the Department of Labour training room.

In essence the learner was expressing the need for training providers to use eclectic methods of training which can motivate learners (Hypothesis 3).

3.4. Collating the results

3.4.1 Hypothesis 1

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors.

3.4.1.1 Possible problem: Not involving all mentors in initial planning and running the programme

The evidence from the Mentors' questionnaire results shows that:

- 83% of the mentors reported that they were not involved in the initial planning of the BCP leaving only one who reported that he had been involved.
- 83% of the mentors reported that they were not involved in the writing of course materials.

The concerns raised by the EU of December 2003 representatives underscored the need for mentor development. These observations support the view that not all mentors were familiar with all aspects of mentoring.

On the other hand, the mentors and learners guidelines (Appendix III) are indicative of the efforts of the training providers to put the programme back

on course. They also indicated feedback by the training providers in response to the observations made by stakeholders. They were therefore an example of the benefits that could be achieved from the familiarity of all stakeholders with the programme demands. However, the evidence from the portfolio samples shows that mentors did not consistently make comments based on the structure of content, organisation, language and presentation.

The consequences of not involving all mentors in the initial planning were that mentors who were brought in while the programme was running did not have clear knowledge of the programme aims, objectives and expectations. Some mentors ended up interpreting the aims and objectives in ways which were at variance with what the architects of the programme had in mind. This led to disagreements between some mentors and assessors. For instance, the question raised by Mentor T2 about the standards used to judge the language skills of English L2 learners do in fact confirm that this mentor was not fully involved in the initial planning because the question he raised at that time should have been dealt with in the planning stages.

Similarly, the observations made by the mentor who was interviewed show that this mentor was not involved from the beginning, and was not adequately prepared. The removal of this mentor from the programme meant that his learners were to be reassigned to another mentor. Since this mentor took over the students who were mentored earlier by another mentor as he only joined the programme in October 2003, his removal meant that the learners he had been mentoring would be given to another mentor thereby being mentored by three different mentors. Such problems would only be avoided if mentors were familiar with all aspects of the mentoring programme so that they perform to the expected standards. This could be achieved if mentors are involved in planning the programme from the onset. Where they are not recruited from the beginning, they should be given sufficient training to meet the objectives. In this case, the workshop held on 6th February 2004 was the only one which mentors and four DoL trainee mentors were able to benefit from. The SACHED report to DoL of January-March 2004 mentions that only mentors E1, T2, E2 and T5 attended the mentors' workshop held on 20 February 2004. However, given the magnitude of the problems the mentors and learners encountered, two workshops would not have been enough for the mentors even if they had all attended the second workshop. As 83% of the mentors reported that this was their first mentoring experience, they needed ongoing training in order to perform well.

Regarding the mentoring guidelines, much as these guidelines were

sterling efforts by the consortium to respond to the challenges on the programme, these recommendations would only work if mentors and learners:

- had enough time to spend on the programme in relation to any other commitments
- were fully supported in terms of resources and development
- were fully involved in arriving at the recommendations so that they could all agree on what was possible and what was not
- all received the recommendations

In this case, mentors and learners did not have enough time to attend to the programme. To make matters worse not all mentors were involved in arriving at the recommendations as they were worked out by the senior mentors, and the guidelines were not given to all mentors. Moreover, because the guidelines were not worked out and effected from the beginning of the programme by the time they were proposed many learners had already been subjected to the faulty mentoring approach the guidelines were trying to address belatedly and therefore this was too little too late. In fact, the learners who graduated in February 2004 were not mentored under these guidelines.

Similarly, the information from the reports, Minutes of the meetings and the correspondence shows a one-way communication approach in which mentors made reports but received no feedback. The point is that although the BCP training was about teaching English as a Second Language, it was run as a project. This meant that the programme brought together practitioners with varied teaching approaches. Working in such teams requires practitioners to be open to different ideas. As the Department of Labour noted in the meeting held on 17 May 2004, the consortium experts seemed to ignore the resource that was available among ordinary mentors. This approach was at variance with the requirements of running a project because by its very nature, running a project is a cyclic process that starts from identifying a particular need and follows a strategically plotted route until the evaluation process certifies that the solution has been found or not. If the project management dynamics had been observed, the consortium could have attended to the problems that arose in a timely manner, which could have contributed to the success of the programme. Unfortunately, the findings suggest that the consortium was much more pre-occupied with the elements of teaching the English language-oblivious of the context in which this learning took place.

Although expert E1 mentioned the importance of applying project design methods at the meeting held on 17 May 2004, this was almost realised at

the end of the programme. Indeed one mentor was knowledgeable in project design and management. However, the “know-it-all” approach employed by the experts made it impossible to contribute ideas outside what the experts believed in. The solution to this problem therefore lies in involving all mentors in planning and running of the programme.

3.4.1.2 Possible problem: Setting unrealistic programme targets

The results from the time plan show that the plan was behind schedule and that the projected number of learners who were going to benefit from this mentoring programme was much higher than what was possible.

From the time-plan, it is clear that the programme commenced later than was planned. For instance, while the projections indicate that 30-40 learners will have been certified as competent four months after commencement of the programme, in reality, only 18 out of 49 learners received certification ten months later in February 2004. This represents 20% achievement as opposed to the projected 80%.

The assumption that learners would improve their skills as they moved from one level to another may have also been unrealistic because in reality improving language skills of L2 learners to an acceptable level requires a lot of time and effort (see Table 8). Given the problems experienced on the programme it can be said that the programme had set unrealistic targets to expect that the learners would reach the proposed level of competence within three months of each level of training.

In the same vein, the time-plan indicates that mentors will have been identified and prepared by February 2003. In reality, attempts to train mentors were only made a year later on 6th and 20th February 2004. So clearly, it can be concluded from the time-plan that there was a wide disparity between what was projected and what was achievable. Although a new calendar was worked out by the beginning of 2004, arguably it can be reflected that the time-plan was probably way too ambitious.

3.4.1.4 Possible problem: Lack of accord among material developers, assessors, trainers and mentors

The evidence from the trainer and mentor’s reports, English Empowerment materials, learners and mentors’ questionnaire results (Tables 9 and 10) and SACHED report to DoL of January-March 2004, the Trainer and mentor’s reports which highlighted the problems the trainer and mentor experienced in implementing the materials, the

disagreements about the use of the English Empowerment materials, the mentor questionnaire results which show that 100% of the mentors believed that there should have been more collaboration between mentors and assessors and the SACHED report of January-March 2004 attest to the fact that there was no accord among material developers, trainers and mentors. However, the evidence provided here of the awareness of these problems by the stake holders is representative of how resilient the programme drivers were in trying to address the problems that lurked the programme. Therefore these problems provide useful lessons that should be learnt for the benefit of similar programmes.

3.4.1.5 Possible problem: Disagreements about materials development and delivery among training providers

The original consortium of experts changed after six months when the two experts from Wits withdrew from the project in June 2003 due to the irreconcilable differences of opinion on how to conduct the programme. By December 2003, two other key experts from UNISA decided not to continue. This meant that the programme was finally left with only two of the original experts from UNISA and SACHED. Nevertheless, the mentors from the John Povey Centre, and SACHED continued the project, in 2003 and 2004 to support the key experts. In the correspondence of 29 September 2003, the John Povey Centre expressed concern about the lack of collaboration on the development and delivery of the materials and the issue of quality assurance.

The observations made by the trainer about the lack of usefulness of some materials to the learners and the difficulty in interpreting the objectives of the tasks had negative implications for the evaluation of the success or failure of the programme. The concerns of the John Povey Centre about the lack of collaboration on the development and delivery of the materials and the issue of quality assurance of the mentoring programme was also important because it was the Centre's contractual mandate to ensure that this training was conducted to the required standard.

The consequence of lack of consultation between trainers and material developers was that the trainer found materials difficult to implement. Even when the English Empowerment materials were used, their suitability was disputed because they were originally developed for different purposes. Records show that of the 49 learners who passed through this programme 18 learners used the English Empowerment materials between the 9th and 24th October 2003. The materials developer argued that the materials contained grammar points which

learners could have already learnt at secondary school level. So the materials were discontinued. The fact that 30 learners did not use the materials means that the majority of the learners were not affected by these materials, whether or not they were efficacious. However, this is evidence that different learners were subjected to different learning materials as a result of the disagreements that arose between the main trainer and the materials developer.

In the same vein, the irreconcilable differences reported between the team of experts from the University of Witwatersrand Writing Centre and the Consortium on how to deliver this training may have affected the programme in that the mentors who were brought in from the John Povey Centre came at a time when the programme was already in the implementation stage. As they were not involved from the beginning of the programme, they did not have the same understanding of the programme concept as the Wits team whose resumes contributed to the awarding of the contract. On the other hand, the concerns raised by the John Povey Centre management about the need for collaboration in materials development and training delivery prove the fact the providers appreciated the problem that arose. It also supports the concern expressed by the Department Labour that the consortium had enough expertise that was not utilised. Good collaborations among the training providers would therefore lead to success in team teaching arrangements like this one.

3.4.1.6 Possible problem: Different mentors using different approaches in giving guidance

The information contained in the guidelines of the consortium reflects the importance of the mentor's commentary in the writing process because after the face-to-face training, the development of the learner's writing was going to be realised through writing. Commentaries were therefore going to direct the learner appropriately if they were effective. Since the guidelines allowed mentors to use their own approaches in making commentaries, some edited and instructed learners on what to write, others highlighted errors and made comments later while others gave comments and suggestions and left learners to work out the solutions. The information from the samples of the portfolios shows that mentors varied their guidance.

Variability

Giving actual corrections to the learner

In this approach, Mentor M2 made the actual corrections and followed this up with comments.

One of the advantages of using this type of correction style was that students could easily see the right word particularly where students' language skills were so weak that they could not work out what to write without being given the answer. However, the weakness of this style was that it was problematic to view the work as the students' own efforts or to know whether given similar tasks students could in fact produce work of equal standard without this kind of help. Because of this problem it was difficult to compare these learners' work with those who were asked to find the answers.

Requesting learners to use their own words

In contrast to the earlier example, we can look at a different approach in which mentors tried not to give the actual words to use but rather helped the students to work out the answer themselves. Samples 1, 2, 6, 7, 8 and 9 illustrate this attempt.

The advantage of using the approach in which learners used their words was that learners made efforts to find answers.

Colouring errors

Samples 1, 2 and 3 show an approach in which errors were coloured. In these samples, the mentors highlighted the part that they felt needed to be worked on and made comments below. In fact the information from the portfolio samples shows that almost all mentors used this approach at one time or another. Some made comments next to the coloured part while others placed the comments outside the text.

The good thing about placing the comments outside the text was that the mentor did not change the writing of the learner by writing within the text. However, some learners did not possess good enough language skills to identify the actual error they had made because the portions which were coloured included words which were right. As a result they were likely to make wrong changes, often worsening the error instead of correcting it.

This non-standard approach to making commentary in fact gave some mentors such unlimited liberties that although there was an understanding for promoting the use of plain English, Mentor CS used a word she was sure did not exist in English but described how she felt.

In this comment, the mentor deliberately uses the word 'quirking', which

she admits does not exist, but she justifies the use all the same. The mentor's use of a word which does not exist does not provide any learning opportunity for the learner. Even if the word existed, the motive of the mentor to use a word she was not sure of when she could have used a more familiar one seems unjustifiable, and given that the communication is between a speaker of English as a first language and a learner of English as a second language, this was a clear abuse of both the language and the learner. Moreover, since the programme recommended the use of Plain English, this contradicted the objectives of the programme. Ironically, the senior mentor seemed to have in fact departed from the mentor guidelines she helped work out which called for making "feedback explicit and not too cryptic to be of real use," (Mentors Guidelines, p.2).

The DoL/EU report by Morake (2004:5) also spotted this problem stating that "there was no standard agreed upon style and structure of what to look for in the learners' tasks and how to jointly coach them on what and how to improve the standard of their work."

Ultimately, using different approaches by mentors in commenting on the learners' work created problems of assessment because learners received different forms of help from their mentors and so it was difficult to compare the efforts of the learners.

3.4.1.8 Possible problem: Learners being mentored by more than one mentor

The results from the learners' questionnaires (Table 9) show that none of the learners agreed that all mentors were similar in their approach. This therefore shows that the learners were mentored by more than one mentor. This is supported by the information from the learner lists presented in Table 2.

The transfer of learners from one mentor to another was problematic because it meant that learners and mentors had to establish new mentoring relationships. Apart from this, as each mentor had his or her own approach, learners had to adapt to the new mentor's approach. This adjustment took time, and so it may have slowed down the process of mentoring. In the end this problem also contributed to the prolonging of the whole programme. The solution therefore lies in all participants working to an agreed approach.

3.4.1.9 Possible problem: Mentors and assessors had different assessment standards

The mentors' questionnaire results show that all the mentors believed that there should have been more collaboration between mentors and moderators on portfolio assessments. The fact that four students reported in the Minutes of the BCP meeting of 29 March 2004 challenged the grading system used on the programme brought into focus the need for mentors and assessors to work to the same assessment standards. This problem emanated from the fact that the assessment guidelines were not worked out in consultation with the mentors. Information from the samples of the portfolios also shows that mentors did not adhere to the stipulated assessment structure.

The fact that mentors and assessors had different standards about the assessments may have led to fragmentations among training providers. These divisions may have resulted in the learners' loss of confidence in the assessment system because learners were able to compare work amongst them. Records show that of the 16 learners who graduated on the 27th February 2003, eight of them graduated with Merit grades. Of these, only one black learner received a Merit grade.

Although in general black learners had weaker language skills having come from a deprived apartheid educational background, they needed to be convinced that the assessment standards were impartial. However, when the four students challenged the system the training providers did not have immediate answers to this challenge. Instead the grading system was abandoned, and learners who completed their courses later were not graded beyond pass and fail. This change was an admission on the part of the training organisers that the assessment guides were problematic. If all mentors and assessors had worked to the same assessment standards, the learners would have worked closely with their personal mentors to ensure learner satisfaction. In any case, learners should have challenged their personal mentors rather than the assessors because the mentors were supposed to be the first in the line of assessment. In the end it became difficult to measure the success or failure of the whole programme against the programme outcomes.

The challenges discussed here prove the hypothesis that the success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors. These challenges are significant and therefore they had effect on the programme.

3.4.2 Hypothesis 2

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner.

3.4.2.1. Possible problem: Lack of regular contact

In some cases, mentors and learners rarely interacted face-to-face. Whereas mentors T2 and T5 consistently had opportunities of having face-to-face contacts with their learners during training, other mentors hardly knew their learners. The Minutes of the meeting that took place on 17 May 2004 where it was announced that Mentor T5 would be assigned to work more closely and frequently with the learners in order to ensure that the portfolios were completed on time are proof of the need for regular contact.

Similarly, the evidence from the learners' questionnaire results shows that only 17% of the learners believed that contact sessions taught them a great deal. While this response might imply that the contact sessions were not useful, it might also suggest that most of the learners wanted to benefit more from face-to-face learning.

The results also show that all the learners agreed that online mentoring and contact training did not have similar teaching aims. This lack of a link between what trainers taught during the contact sessions with the type of guidance the mentors gave might have confused the learners. For instance, we see from sample 9 how learner 14 declared that her work was perfect so it did not require any changes by Mentor M2. This was a sign of lack of a mentoring relationship between the mentor and the learner.

Although 67% of the mentors reported that they took part in teaching some of the contact sessions, this number might not be reflective of the value of regular contact as these mentors did not train the learners on a regular basis.

Relationships are naturally nourished by regular contacts. Such contacts may be either telephonic or electronic where face-to-face is not always possible. With the unreliable Internet system used on this programme, contact by e-mails was not guaranteed. Telephonic contacts were also not always possible because learners and mentors had other job commitments. Worse still, since some mentors did not take part in face-to-face training, they hardly made contact with their learners and therefore mentoring relationships hardly ever grew. This point may be

supported by the fact that Mentors T2 and T5 were generally more successful in guiding their learners as shown in the SACHED reports of October–December 2003, and June 2004 for Mentor T5.

Although mentor T2 later experienced a problem with two of his learners in his capacity as a trainer, it is apparent that his face-to-face contact with all the learners enhanced his mentoring relationship with his learners. However, for the mentors who did not have frequent contacts with their learners, mentoring relationships that might have tried to develop eventually died because they could not be sustained. Although the training providers insisted on mentors conducting workplace visits, the benefits of such visits were extremely limited. As such the contact only served the purpose of fulfilling the learners' portfolio requirements. However although it was reported from the Minutes of 17 May 2004 that Mentor T5 was assigned to work closely with all the learners at the Department of Labour to ensure that portfolios were submitted, the results show that this contact was only beneficial to the learners who were mentored by Mentor T5.

In the end the lack of regular contact created a distance between the mentors and learners. Therefore the solution lay in supporting efforts for all mentors to have better contact with their learners.

3.4.2.2 Possible problem: Lack of gender and cross-cultural sensitivity

Cross-cultural awareness

The trainer's report in which he had a difference with his two female students reflects the need for cultural sensitivity in mentoring across culture. Although the problem reported here concerned this mentor in his capacity as a trainer, the incident had telling effects on the programme because this trainer was not just a mentor but a key member of the training providers who was involved in this programme from the beginning.

However, although the trainer argued that learners were also required to be culturally sensitive, the position is weakened by the fact that trainers are expected to be better informed in such matters than their learners. In this case, lack of cross-cultural awareness clearly endangered the trainer and learner trust which is part of the learner and mentor relationship. For example, in the African culture any form of public rebuke of an adult female by a male is taken to be demeaning the grace of a woman. In this case, the female learners reacted angrily to the trainer because the public reproach they had suffered meant that they had lost face before

the male trainer and their colleagues.

The attempt by the trainer to manhandle one of the female learners out of the class was also unfortunate because this was a clear indication of male aggression against a defenceless woman. Such an action could attract strong reactions particularly from feminists who champion the rights of women. So this had gender implications as well. Indeed in many cultures, unauthorised touching of a woman's body by a male can be construed as a form of abuse of a woman. The actions of the trainer therefore had wide ranging consequences which had the potential of throwing the consortium into disrepute. Consequently, the mentor was removed from the programme.

Gender issue

The information in Table 6 shows that male learners who were mentored by female mentors dropped out of the programme.

Although the mentors who responded to the questionnaire reported that gender was not an issue in their mentoring relationship with their learners, the data in Table 6 suggests that there was a correlation between the higher number of drop-outs among male learners with the fact that they were mentored by female mentors considering that the two male learners who were mentored by male mentors did not drop out. These findings differ from the findings reported in the literature by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004), who argued that gender issues do not matter much in mentoring.

This study is unable to speculate about the reasons behind the withdrawal of the male learners who were mentored by the female mentors. However, the consequence of the discontinuation of the male learners from the programme was that this contributed to the reduction of the total number of the learners who were going to benefit from this programme. If indeed, as the information suggests, male learners were going to be more comfortable being mentored by male mentors, they should have been paired with male mentors to avoid the high rate of drop-outs. To this end, it can be argued that the gender of the mentors mattered on this programme.

The problems discussed in this section show evidence that the success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner. Although these particular challenges were not so many on the programme, they are significant enough to influence the overall performance of the programme.

3.4.3 Hypothesis 3

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring.

3.4.3.1 Possible problem: Lack of relevance of training to workplace tasks for some learners

The information in Table 3 shows that this programme drew learners from a wide range of sections. Although communication can be said to permeate all facets of workplace functions, the fact that learners came from so many sections made it impossible for all of the tasks to be relevant to each learner's needs or job tasks. For example, while most of the learners from the Public Relations Unit could find most of the tasks relevant to their daily chores, tasks like writing responses to Parliamentary Questions may not have been relevant to learners who were from the National Skills Authority, the National Skills Fund or the Employment Services and the Human Resources Management. Because of this problem, only half of the learners responded that the BCP was relevant to their daily work at DoL, and only 33% reported that the BCP catered for their learning needs (Table 9).

These findings are also supported by the Morake (2004: 5) report.

3.4.3.2 Possible problem: Failure to use supporting multimedia, electronic materials

The tender proposed that:

- "Training would be conducted through various media supplemented with remedial tuition by highly qualified language and business writing practitioners.
- All learners were going to receive professionally produced training manuals and resource materials that would be made available both in hard copy format and on CD-ROM or computer disk" (p.3).

These aspects would motivate learners if implemented but results show that none of them was implemented.

3.4.3.3 Possible problem: Failure to use innovative training methods

The *Service Tender Submission Form* asserted that 'all training will be situational and context specific based on the learners' typical daily experiences and involving role-play, decision making, and communicative

and personal interaction within realistic circumstances'(p.3). This shows the original intentions of the providers to use innovative approaches in carrying out this mentoring. If implemented, the programme was going to engage the participants in an interactive way. From the learner interview, it is implicit that learners saw this as a motivation even before they started this training. However, the findings show that innovative training methods were not used. It turned out that the programme was highly structured and contact lessons were delivered in a classroom situation at either the University of South Africa Sunnyside campus or the Department of Labour training room.

Similarly, when the materials were administered, some learners felt that the tasks were not all relevant to their job roles. For instance, learners who were working in the accounts section did not see the relevance of writing a speech to what they did in their job routine since there was a specific section that dealt with writing speeches. Therefore it was not possible for one programme to cover the needs of learners coming from so many sections. Without a synergy between some of the programme tasks to the workplace tasks some learners may have become demoralised.

It can be concluded therefore that the fact that the materials were all book-bound and delivered in a classroom situation without using the interactive media stated in the proposal deprived the learners of the fun that could have motivated them in doing the course.

3.4.3.4 Possible problem: Not enough learner support from workplace line-managers

It was observed by the researcher that:

- Learners had to do their online learning activities during the working hours, which created competition for time between their job tasks and their mentoring tasks.
- There were no declared benefits in completing this programme as the attainment of the certificates had no bearing on job promotion or increase in emoluments.
- Management did not buy-in the view of promoting Plain English in workplace communication when this was advocated in the programme. This made it difficult for the trainers to actualise the outcomes of the curriculum in the desired way.

The learners' questionnaire results show that 83% of the learners responded that pressure of DoL work interfered with their mentoring activities. This supports the view that learners did not receive enough support from their line-managers.

Like the need for the relevance of materials to the learners' job tasks,

support from their line managers would have acted as extrinsic motivation for doing the course. The consequence of not giving specific time to the learners to write up their course tasks after their class work was that they used the time they were supposed to spend on doing their workplace jobs on their course work. As a result they could not perform their job duties to the satisfaction of their supervisors. In such situations they ran into conflicts with their managers who demanded that they attend to their office duties first. As they had to follow such directives, they could not complete their course tasks in good time. Such confusions may have frustrated the learners because they realised that the course was not seen as a priority by their supervisors while mentors kept pressuring them to submit the portfolio tasks. To make matters worse, the completion of the programme did not promise learners any benefits such as promotion or increase in emoluments. Therefore it can be argued that even from the beginning learners were not particularly persuaded to complete the course. From this rich lesson, it can be concluded that support for learners from workplace line managers is crucial in ensuring success in online mentoring.

3.4.3.5 Possible problem: High number of drop-outs

The results from the learner lists show that 34 learners dropped out of the BCP training over two years for various reasons. An analysis of the learner lists shows that 46 learners were initially registered to take the course. Of this number, 14 learners dropped out before the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment. One learner dropped out before training started and 3 dropped out during training in 2003. Sixteen learners dropped out in 2004, even though 16 more learners joined the programme by the same period.

The one thing that was going to save the programme from failure was the total number of beneficiaries. Whatever problems which had been experienced on the programme would have been taken to be part of the learning process had the participants been able to complete the programme levels.

However, as the records show, most learners lost faith in the programme and moved on to other things. Although there are many reasons given by learners for stopping the programme, it can be said that this high number of learner drop-out was a direct expression of lack of motivation. Where learners see the benefits of doing a programme they can persevere to complete it. The high number of drop-outs therefore symbolises the general failure of the programme. As a result of this, the programme failed to fulfil the requirement that "80% of learners were assessed as competent against the full complement of unit standards by the end of the project"(Morake

2004:7) Learners need to be highly motivated in order for them to complete the programme. Because learner retention in an online programme has been a matter of concern in many training programmes it can be concluded that the ability of learners to complete a programme is in fact an indicator of success of an online mentoring programme. Therefore although it is not a cause but an effect of poor motivation, learner retention stands out as a very important yardstick of success.

These problems confirm the hypothesis that the success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring. These lessons were significant enough to have an effect on the success of the programme.

3.4.4. Hypothesis 4

The success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner.

3.4.4.1. Possible problem: Lack of appropriate computer hardware and software

The evidence from the samples of the learners of Mentor M1 and Mentor T2 shows that these mentors were able to use Word 2000 comment function. However the mentors had to change their approach of making comments because some learners did not have computers with the capacity for them to read the comments. This suggests that even though the programme was adequately funded by the European Union, some learners and mentors had substandard computers which were too old to sustain the Reading Comment function recommended for use in writing-process by Word 2000 as demonstrated in figure 1. Although the problem might reflect a lack of good planning of the resources, it also shows the need for the adequacy of the hardware and software of the computers.

3.4.4.2. Possible problem: Lack of learner computer efficacy

The mentors' questionnaire results show that:

- None of the mentors believed that the learners' grammar skills had improved.
- None of the mentors believed that their learners' ability to organise ideas had improved.
- All the mentors believed that their mentoring experience was negative because students' language skills did not seem to improve.

- 83% of the mentors did not think that their learners' grammar skills had improved.
- 67% of the mentors believed that learners had improved their computer skills.

The samples of the writing of the two learners mentored by Mentors T2 and M1 show mentors pointing out spelling errors in learners' work. Indeed there is more evidence of spelling corrections in many other learners' texts. This is evidence that learners were not computer efficacious prior to their training because Microsoft Word has provision for Spellchecker which could assist learners using computers to correct their spelling errors before submitting their work. Learners who are computer efficacious would be familiar with the spell checker facility. In this case the learners were acquiring these skills on the course, which could have delayed the mentoring process.

3.4.4.3. Possible problem: Lack of Internet system efficiency

The e-mail from the John Povey Centre of 24 July 2003 reports that the Department of Labour had experienced IT problems. This is evidence that the Internet Server at the Department of Labour was not reliable.

Similarly Mentor T5's note to her learner in figure 2 confirms that the UNISA Internet system had problems. The problem reported about UNISA occurred because the University of South Africa's Internet server at the time followed an internet policy in which the retention period for messages was 90 days. This included all e-mails in every folder (including sent items and cabinet). All the e-mails and other items that went beyond the retention period would be deleted automatically. Although there was provision to save important e-mails in the back-up system, at the time of this programme, the policy was not fully publicised and so any information that was saved online was lost when the policy was enforced by the end of the year. Because learners and mentors have to interact online, it is extremely important that they use a reliable Internet system. In this case, the information shows that the Internet server for UNISA was not reliable either. Furthermore, no Internet materials or websites were used for the purposes of this training. The consequences of lack of computer and Internet efficacy for learners and mentors are serious especially in an online programme. Whereas this efficacy might not be crucial in any other mode, it is crucial here because without it learners and mentors can not communicate effectively, and in the absence of communication, there can be no progress. Where the Internet is efficient and learners can use Internet websites and platforms, learners can benefit immensely from the internet materials, some of which might be state of the art, to supplement programme materials.

Where there is smooth communication, learners are likely to be motivated in submitting work within required time frames. In addition, if learners use computer software (such as CD's and DVD's) they can have fun while learning.

The lessons learnt here confirm the hypothesis that the success of online mentoring is crucially affected by the participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner. Although the examples of these problems encountered on the programme were not many, they contributed to the richness of the lessons learnt on the programme. Therefore they are significant.

3.5 Discussion of the results

To evaluate success or lack of it, the study refers to the following key indicators of success proposed in the Service Tender (Morake 2004) and the findings from the questionnaires.

Proposed that by the end of the programme:	What obtained
80% of learners were assessed as competent against the full complement of unit standards by the end of the project.	<i>4% % of the learners were able to Complete Advanced level since only 2 of the 49 learners completed Advanced level. (See analysis in Table 7).</i>
At least 85% of learners assessed as competent were black.	<i>The percentage of the black learners assessed as competent was 81% since 7 of the 38 learners who were assessed as competent were white.</i>
At least 54% of learners assessed as competent were female.	<i>This was achieved at 95% as 5 of the 7 male learners dropped out leaving 36 females who completed at least one level out of the total number of 38 certified as competent. (See Table 7).</i>
High quality materials were available within the Department of Labour to help sustain communication skills development.	<i>This was achieved to some extent as some DoL materials were used (Refer to the BCP Learner Manual).</i>
At least ten people within the Department of Labour were trained as mentors in communication skills.	<i>Four people attended a one day training session (Refer to the SACHED report of January-March 2004).</i>
<i>A model for the development of communication skills training would be piloted and evaluated by the project.</i>	<i>This was not achieved.</i>

Table 11: A comparison of the projected indicators of success with what obtained in reality

From the summary of the information in Table 11, it can be argued that only two of the six indicators of success were achieved. These were:

- (a) At least 54% of learners assessed as competent were female.
- (b) High quality materials were available within the Department of Labour to help sustain communication skills development.

From these data it can be stated that the programme only managed to

meet 33% of the targets set. As this percentage is below 50%, it represents the general failure of the programme.

Although the questionnaire results of the learners may be said to be severely limited due to the low number of the respondents, the results agree with the outcome of the analysis in table 11. The results in table 9 may be divided into three categories – the 0% responses being the lowest, the 50% being the neutral point and 83% being the highest. Treating the 50% response as neutral, it can be concluded that the two factors which contributed to the programme success were:

- (a) Mentors returned work in stipulated time =83%.
- (b) Learners learnt a lot from mentoring= 66%.

In essence, the findings in (a) vindicate the mentors' high commitment to the programme. The findings in (b) are also important because they clearly bring out the potential benefit of online mentoring in general. This exercise was therefore not a futile one as it recorded these successes.

However, since these are only two out of the eleven possible items that could be associated with the success of the programme it can be concluded that the learners felt that the programme had failed.

Similarly out of the 21 questions given to the mentors, success can be associated with the following six mentors' responses:

- (a) Involved in online mentoring =100%
- (b) Involved in teaching some contact sessions =67%
- (c) Improved learners' computer skills =67%
- (d) Gender not an issue =100%
- (e) Race not an issue =100%
- (f) Mentors returned work in stipulated time =83%

The data posit that most of the mentors did not think that the programme had succeeded in the other 15 items tested. This indicates that the mentors felt that the programme had failed to meet the expectations raised in the questionnaire.

Also, the results from the learner manual, assessment guides, mentor and learner guidelines, learner portfolios, reports, Minutes, correspondence and interviews show that the programme was beset with many problems. Although these results may be difficult to quantify, they support the results obtained through the questionnaires in qualifying the view that this mentoring experience was negative.

In the main, the problems discussed in this chapter demonstrate a cause and effect relationship of the data under study. The problems therefore

had ramifications on the overall success or failure of the programme.

Considering all these results and consequences therefore, it can be stated that the evidence is compelling enough to conclude that although this programme had a lot of potential to act as a turn key for the South African Labour Market Skills Development Programme, it failed to meet the set targets. However, by bringing the problems under the critical lens of this study, this research has demonstrated that the failure of the programme was caused by a matrix of factors, as discussed in this chapter, which interfaced as the programme went on. In spite of the shortcomings discussed, the study strongly argues that these lessons are too rich to be reduced to “poor mentoring” as suggested in the DoL/EU report by Morake (2004:4).

In this chapter, the study has demonstrated that problems arose in the implementation of the BCP training. The information shows that all the mentoring stakeholders became aware of these problems. The challenge however lay in how the stakeholders were going to address the problem.

The study illustrates that the awareness of the four hypotheses discussed could help in addressing these problems. The four hypotheses are therefore validated.

Chapter 4

4.0 Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

The conclusions and recommendations made in this research are inspired by the overwhelming evidence found in the literature and the parallels found in the case study about the important conditions that must be considered in order to succeed in online mentoring in a workplace.

This research tallies with the findings made by the various researchers reviewed on the different elements of the topic. From the fundamental concept of mentoring by Homer to the very intricacies surrounding portfolio assessments and the Internet, the literature has been quite forthright. Therefore it can be concluded that if the stakeholders on this mentoring programme had benefited from this literature before the programme, they could have made different choices and decisions in conducting the mentoring programme under study. If they had benefited from the literature, they could have been forearmed to avoid or combat the flaws that seemed to dog the programme.

However, much as the findings show the huge difficulties encountered, the researcher having been part of the programme, wishes to state that apart from the fact that none of the literature reviewed in this study was considered at the time of this mentoring programme, the flaws that may be found in the programme were not deliberate. Indeed as the various reports show, the intentions for the programme were good; there were several efforts made to make the programme reach its goals.

Although most of the mentors reported that the system involved too much record-keeping, credit should however be given to the prime movers of this programme for coming up with an electronic system of record-keeping. This system has proved to be a reliable tank of information for this research. Much of this information would have been lost if it had been in paper form. Because of the richness of this information, this study recommends that the developed databank be managed by the University of South Africa as online study materials for the benefit of scholarly reference.

It is this conviction that this programme was well intended that compels the conclusion that anyone wishing to conduct a successful online mentoring programme using the writing-process should make deliberate decisions about planning the programme, implementing the programme

and evaluating the programme. In each of these phases it is recommended that the stakeholders pay attention to the details of the issues of familiarity with all aspects of the programme by all participants, establishing a mentoring relationship between learners and mentors in multicultural environments, developing a high degree of motivation and self-regulation for learners and the need for computer and Internet efficacy for all participants. The position taken in this research is that the future of education using the Internet is bright but that this future does not escape conditions either.

4.2 Contribution of the study

Having evaluated the findings, this study is now able to spell out the conditions for successful online mentoring as follows:

4.2.1 Condition 1: The success of online mentoring depends on the degree of familiarity with all aspects of the programme shared by material writers, tutors, mentors and assessors

From the findings, this study recommends that mentors should be fully acquainted with the materials in a course such as the BCP, where a great deal of input is provided in the materials package and the tasks are specified in detail. In addition, mentors should be acquainted with what happens in contact sessions, during which tasks specified in the materials might be modified.

The best way to achieve this would be by involving the mentors in the writing of the materials and in the delivery of the workshops. Failing this, there should be training sessions to ensure that mentors are fully acquainted with the materials and with the training.

In addition mentors need to interact with their learners according to the same basic approach. The lessons learnt from the guidelines that were worked out at two intervals show that it is very difficult for training providers to arrive at similar standards once the programme is under way.

4.2.1.1 Commentary in writing-process

After considering the merits and the demerits of the various types of commentary used in the case study, this research recommends a standardised approach to making commentary using Word 2000 software. While it is possible that there could be other types of software, Word 2000 is found to be the most suitable as it can be accessed free, and, unlike other types of software, the website for Word 2000 is more

reliable in terms of its lifespan. Websites managed by individual Internet Providers tend to change thereby making the source unreliable. Computers using Windows 98 were found to be suitable in accommodating Word 2000 Comment Function at the time of the research and so it is hoped that versions later than Windows 98 would be suitable for this function too.

The Comment Function can be accessed from the Insert menu on the computer Toolbar, or by clicking on the coloured box with a star in the top left corner, where such a provision is available on the computer (see Fig. 1). This study therefore recommends that planners of the programme take into account this condition in preparing computer resources to apply a standardised approach in making and reading commentary. In recommending Word 2000, this study is mindful of the fact that Word 2000 grammar is quite limited. For instance, Word 2000 grammar correction challenges writers to use the active voice instead of the passive voice even though the passive voice still has a place in writing. Word 2000 also makes suggestions for the user to consider revising long sentences even if they are grammatically correct. For these reasons, many English L1 writers find the syntax suggestions unhelpful. However, Word 2000 is still beneficial to English L2 learners who have not reached an independent level of syntactic command of the English language.

This study appreciates the literature (Charles, 1990; Arndt in Brock and Walters, 1993; Ferris and Hedgcock 1998; Lehmann 1998; Cresswell, 2000; Muncie, 2000; Goldstein 2004) regarding the type of commentary mentors make on the writing of their learners. But having sampled some approaches in the case study, the study recommends that mentors use plain language in their commentary. Minting of words by mentors should be rejected even if they are L1 speakers. Mentors must communicate their ideas in a simple way especially when they are teaching English to speakers of other languages. This is the very essence of promoting the use of Plain English.

Various reports from the case study show that having separate approaches of making commentary for weaker learners and strong learners becomes problematic when judging the learners' efforts. This study therefore recommends a standardised approach for mentors to guide the learners in finding the solution themselves and not to supply or rephrase sentences for the learners. This approach reinforces learning better than working out solutions for the learners as shown in the case study.

Drawing lessons from the case study on the impracticality of the

suggestion for the mentors to point out all the errors in the first draft, this study recommends mentors to make their own decisions about what type of errors they can focus on at various levels of the drafts. Advisably, mentors could start by attending to the most severe errors in the first draft and end with the least severe ones before the final draft. The approach of pointing out all the errors in the first draft is problematic on four grounds. First, pointing out all the errors can psychologically overwhelm the learners. Second, this approach by implication makes the learners believe that once they attend to the errors pointed out in the first draft, they should not be required to do their work again, which is unrealistic. Third, mentors are only human; they can overlook an error and only see it later however careful they may be. Finally, sometimes the value of words changes depending on the new developments made to a sentence and so, within reason, it is possible that mentors can request a change that was earlier rejected, and this is part and parcel of the writing-process. However, in saying this, the study does not encourage irresponsibility by mentors attending to their work in a casual manner to the extent that the process of making corrections is elongated unnecessarily. Deliberate prolonging of the process by mentors is extremely frustrating for the learner and so mentors should work to acceptable deadlines.

4.2.1.2 Assessing electronic portfolios

This dissertation recognises the different arguments covered in the literature review (Camp in Bennet and Ward, 1993; Gill, 1993 and Herman and Winters 1994; Hamp-Lyons and Condon 2002; Song and August 2002) and the challenges encountered in the case study on the question of assessing electronically generated portfolios.

Although some studies advocate no specific number of drafts before the final text for assessment (Lehmann, 1998), in reality this approach might prove to be an endless exercise which might be too time-consuming and therefore undesirable, particularly in workplace settings where time available for learning is highly limited. Therefore, drawing lessons from the case study where two drafts were recommended, this study recommends that learners be allowed a maximum of four drafts. Whereas the second draft can be considered final where the learner has produced the required work, more chances should be given to the learner who seems to be struggling and is believed to be learning more from producing further drafts. So, while learners must be encouraged to produce a good piece of writing at the earliest opportunity, they must be aware of the remaining opportunities available to them so that they are not demoralised when they are asked to produce more drafts later. In the same vein, it must be appreciated that it is possible to have a first draft

that is acceptable, in which case no “tweaking” of the draft might be necessary.

While appreciating the standards set in the case study for learners to produce an error-free draft, this study recognises the need expressed on the programme to be more realistic in judging the language levels of English L2 speakers. The study therefore recommends that while learners should aim at excellence, a text does not have to be perfect in order to be accepted as a final draft as long as there is enough evidence to show that the learners have made the necessary efforts to improve their work and that the learners have learnt from the process so that they are capable now of producing similar work on their own. The primary concern should therefore be that the meaning of the text can be conveyed to the reader even if there might still be some errors. In actual fact, by the fourth draft, most of the errors would have been dealt with appropriately. As in any other type of learning however, work that shows no improvement to an acceptable level by the fourth draft must be failed, considering the various forms of learner support recommended in this study. On the other hand, credit must be given to learners who show excellence in their work in the required areas of writing.

From the experience of the case study where white learners seemed to perform better than their black counterparts because of their English language learning background, this study recommends a careful consideration of the decision to grade or not grade the portfolios. Unless entry assessments are conducted to establish that the learners are within the same range of language competence beyond doubt, the portfolios should not be classified beyond pass and fail.

4.2.1.3 Outcomes Based Education (OBE)

The study gives credit to the care taken by the training providers in aligning the materials to the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) principles and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) National Qualifications Framework (NQF). However, training providers are recommended to pay equal attention to the articulation of these learning principles and their implementation in relation to the conditions obtaining at the time. With all the beliefs people might have about OBE, the findings in this study show that OBE does not work in isolation. The benefits of OBE do not lie in how well the OBE principles are articulated but rather how well the principles are applied. It is upon this condition that OBE can be appreciated, and practitioners are therefore urged to take a more realistic approach when administering OBE in mentoring programmes. From the very beginning, all participants must have an input in what should be achieved so that some form of agreement is reached on the outcomes.

The lesson learnt from the Minutes of the meeting of 17 May 2004, where it was announced that parts of the Intermediate level and the Advanced level did not match with the NQF level requirements is testimony of the need for close alignment of the outcomes with the course content.

Success for Hypothesis 1 would be ensured if mentors bring experience and expertise to the programme. Mentors should also be fully involved in developing the curriculum, the syllabus and the materials. This includes the standardisation of training, making commentaries and applying the assessments objectively to the agreed outcomes. Where new mentors are employed, they must be thoroughly initiated and trained.

4.2.2 Condition 2: The success of online mentoring depends on the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner

As far as the quality of the relationship that is established between mentor and learner, it can only be enhanced if mentors are well equipped with the skills needed in establishing mentoring relationships before the programme starts. Mentors should know their learners' personal needs, aspirations and challenges. They must also be carefully selected so that they are matched with their learners (MacCallum and Beltman, 1999).

This study concurs with the research done by Blake in Murrell *et al* (1999) which recognised the need to talk about cross-cultural issues before embarking on mentoring programmes in multicultural environments. The findings from the case study show that the issue of cultural differences was ignored. This study notes that recognising cross-cultural differences and learning about each other's cultures provide an opportunity to lessen tension in multicultural mentoring settings, and any attempt to ignore the reality of race differences is likely to contribute to the failure of mentor and learner relationships.

For mentoring to succeed, it is important that there is trust among all key players in the programme. From the beginning of the programme the stakeholders must engage in ways of establishing trust among learners, mentors and supervisors. Literature (Iacono and Weisband, 1997) shows that trust can be established in cyberspace.

Trust is highly enhanced when there is a clear demonstration of commitment to the programme by the key players. Once the programme starts therefore all stakeholders involved must abide by the rules of engagement and not just leave responsibility in the hands of one party. The supervisors must trust the mentors and the learners. The learners and the mentors must also trust their supervisors in the same way they

trust each other. There must also be trust among the programme supervisors themselves.

To earn trust all the key players in the programme must equally be trustworthy. To this end, the findings support the study done by Clutterbuck (2004:17) who identified the need for a sound learner and mentor relationship arguing that “in most cases when people come together without guidance and without clarity about the mentoring role it becomes a hit or miss affair. Not only is the quality of the relationship highly variable, but the pairings tend to exclude people who don’t fit the mould, by virtue of their gender, race, culture or some other differentiating factor”.

Mentoring relationships should therefore be established from the beginning so that mentors and learners can work closely.

4.2.3 Condition 3: The success of online mentoring depends on the degree of motivation the learner feels both before and during mentoring

The findings from the case study show that learners became demotivated partly because they lacked support from their line managers. As this training was workplace based, learners were going to be motivated if their line managers supported the programme fully. Similarly, the relevance of the programme tasks to actual workplace writing would highly motivate the learners. As some learners reported that they found the programme beyond their capability it is necessary for training providers to match course demands to learner capability. In the same vein, course demands must be structured according to the time available to the learners.

As far as workplace is concerned, motivation can be linked to monetary benefits or promotion of the learners in their jobs after completing the programme. Where it is not, learners should appreciate other benefits of engaging in a particular programme. One of the benefits, for example, might be the expertise the learners get in their job, which can lead to increased efficiency in performing their job tasks, thereby reducing job stress. Another benefit might be the issue of acquiring sharper skills that the learners can use in more demanding work environments, which can help them transfer to other better sections within their workplace or get better jobs outside their organisations. Once learners are aware of these benefits of workplace learning, they would be motivated to register for the courses and aim to complete them.

As for mentors, they must be both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated

because the job of mentoring is a privilege bestowed upon a trustable person, a role model, or a coach. Learners are always proud to learn from the best, and so mentors must strive to be the best among the best in their field. In today's world where employment has been left in the hands of head-hunters, to be given a mentoring opportunity is to be head-hunted in a fierce jungle of endless résumés. Mentoring is therefore an honour that must be conducted to the best of a mentor's ability because it creates a sense of self-fulfilment in a mentor. Naturally, learners would aspire to build a beneficial relationship with a mentor who is a role model and therefore such a rewarding relationship can motivate a learner.

In arguing for mentor expertise, this research also recommends a self-regulated learning approach for learners so that they take responsibility for their own learning. In order to achieve self-regulation, learners should understand their learning situation from the beginning by identifying the time available to them that they can spend on their studies. Learning from the case study where learners reported that they did not have enough time to share between their job tasks and the mentoring tasks, this study recommends that learners should go through a time-management exercise before embarking on the learning programme. This would prepare the learners to be self-regulated in learning even before they start a programme.

The study also recommends that where Group-Wise e-mail communication is being used, learners should be trained in accessing their e-mails even outside their work setting. This gives the learners wider latitude in using the time they have for learning purposes. They can therefore make better decisions on when they can attend to their office work and their portfolio tasks. Alternatively, learners can use individualised e-mail addresses such as those provided by Yahoo, Hotmail or Ananzi so that they can access their work even outside working hours without the limitations of Group-Wise e-mails. These e-mail providers are also better options because they have a longer lifespan of conserving mail received and sent and they allow large documents to be transferred. Thus computer efficacy would boost learner motivation in online learning.

Indeed self-regulated learning can work well in workplace because the learners in this setting are adults who should enjoy taking charge of their learning preferences and being responsible for the outcome of their learning. For this reason, learners in workplace settings should rise above any expectation of being nagged by their mentors to learn. To this end it is regrettable that mentors felt that their learners lacked self discipline in learning on the mentoring programme studied. However, this

study is unable to blame the learners for lack of commitment because of the poor support they received from their line-managers while doing the mentoring tasks. The study notes that although the trainer who had a difference with his two female learners clearly overreacted, this problem was caused by the lack of support from these learners' line-managers who had insisted that the learners should first attend to their job tasks before attending their lessons.

These findings confirm the need for high levels of learner motivation as suggested in the literature (Miltiadou and Savenye, [sa]; Harmer, 1999; Zimmerman, 1989; Pintrich and De Groot, 1990; MacCallum and Beltman, 1999; Motivating and Retaining Adult Learners, 2002).

Based on these findings it can be concluded that the contributing factors to learner motivation would be the specific time given to the learners for attending to the mentoring tasks, learner and mentor computer and Internet efficacy and the support the learners get from their workplace supervisors and mentors even before the programme starts so that the learners can see the benefits of doing the programme. Others are the learners and mentors' punctuality in responding to online tasks, and learners' drive and ability to complete the programme levels thereby keeping the number of dropouts to a minimum. Thus if a programme is being evaluated, the evaluator would be looking for these elements. This study concludes that if these elements are well considered and implemented in a mentoring programme, they can lead to success.

4.2.4 Condition 4: The success of online mentoring depends on the participants' computer efficacy, including the adequacy of the hardware, software and the Internet aspects for interaction between mentor and learner

From the research findings it can be stated that the learners' belief that they can effectively perform Internet computer tasks is essential for the success of online mentoring. This study therefore recommends that learners acquire computer operating skills before the commencement of a mentoring programme.

One of the most critical computer operating skills for the learner is the ability to manipulate the Microsoft Word Spellchecker so that the problem of word spelling is dealt with well before the programme starts. Related to this function is the need for the learner's general awareness of the language programmes available on the computer. For example, learners must always set the language of the text in either UK or American English for the computer to show a wrongly spelt word automatically. This awareness is important because even if the Spellchecker function is

activated, certain words might not be captured if the language is set in other non-standard versions of English as used in some countries other than the UK or America. Indeed decisions should be made from the beginning on what type of English would be used during the mentoring programme. Since online mentoring would involve the use of the computer, there should never be an excuse for learners to make spelling errors in their work once they use the Spellchecker function effectively.

In addition to using Spellchecker, learners can acquire more language skills by making use of the computer Thesaurus. Using the Thesaurus, learners can find meanings of words, synonyms, antonyms, and establish what part of speech a particular word is. For example, learners can easily check if a word is an adjective, a noun, a verb, or an adverb as this would be indicated by the Thesaurus. The spelling, grammar and language functions can be accessed from the Tools menu on the computer Toolbar. Moreover, certain computer versions such as Windows XP come with complete dictionaries in Word Perfect, which can be used as a source of reference. In the light of this fact, this study regrets the observation made in Morake (2004:5)'s report that learners felt that "the grading system seemed to concentrate only on grammar..." because spelling, punctuation and grammar should never be problematic issues where learners are using computers in learning. They should always be foregrounded and they should not be taken to exemplify learner knowledge because these tasks are, largely, performed by a computer and not so much by human intelligence.

Apart from the issues of grammar, learners should be exposed to the use of headers and footers to show ownership of their documents. This can be accessed through the Insert menu under the Auto Text function. It is gratifying to note that the training providers recommended the use of this function in the BCP second set of guidelines and evidence shows that some learners actually benefited from this function.

In addition to these recommendations, learners should, for example, be able to use the Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) converter in saving documents, and use Adobe Acrobat Reader in reading Adobe PDF converted documents. This is useful for saving long documents and protecting such documents from unauthorised changes. Free trial Adobe PDF text converter software can be accessed from the Adobe Acrobat family website (Adobe Acrobat, [sa]), under "Create Adobe PDF Online" and then getting an Adobe ID.

Learners must acquire computer self-efficacy as early as possible so that they can handle mentoring tasks with confidence once the programme starts. Planners must therefore take this information into consideration in

making decisions about what type of computers to buy for the programme. It might be argued that programmes usually operate within limited resources and so training providers must make do with the available resources. This argument does not hold water here because computer software and hardware are mere basic resources without which online mentoring cannot even take off. It is therefore reasonable to argue that within the requirements of fiscal policy, the sponsors of the BCP programme were going to fund the computer resources adequately since they were crucial to the success of this programme had this been budgeted for. In this case, the training providers should have planned for this condition.

This study pays tribute to the foresight the author of the BCP tender proposal had for including the use of CD's, DVD's and other multimedia learning resources for this training. However, it is unfortunate that these resources were not developed and used on the programme. This study recommends the use of such resources as they support the need for using eclectic teaching methods, bringing variety to learning.

By learning online, students can get exposed to various Internet sources of literature which can be useful to them. So students must be aware of these Internet resources. They must further acquire Internet skills such as accessing and browsing websites so that they can become self-sufficient in Internet use before the beginning of the programme. Learners must also understand the language of e-mails so that they can tell if a message is sent or not, and consider options available to reconcile the information in cases where messages are not delivered. This is important because some learners might be dealing with the computer for the first time and so they need to get rid of the Internet fright the learners who are not so familiar with the Internet might sometimes experience. This can slow down the implementation of the programme if it is not taken care of at the right time.

Similarly, the Internet system must be reliable enough for learners to succeed in online mentoring. The findings from Chapter 3 show that at some point there were Internet problems at UNISA and the Department of Labour. This hampered progress.

From this summary of the findings about Hypothesis 4, it can be concluded that success would be guaranteed if the computers are suitable for writing the tasks. Other factors would be the ability and confidence that learners and mentors would display in the use of computers and their versatility in utilising Internet resources for the purposes of online learning. Learners would show knowledge of Internet surfing techniques, grammar, spelling, editing, and file saving functions. Mentors would show knowledge of the Word comment function and useful educational Internet search engines.

These findings support the views expressed in the research by Berge and Collins in Berge and Collins (1995); Moore and Kearsley (1996); Harasim (1996); Ferris and Hedgcock (1998); Matthews and LaRose (2000); Magagula (2005) that computer and Internet learner efficiency plays an important role in the success of online mentoring.

4.2.5 Knowledge of project management methodology

To add to this, the study recommends that practitioners on projects make use of expertise in project planning, management and evaluation. There are many good courses in project planning, management and evaluation. However, this study would like to recommend knowledge of one project management methodology recognised by most international organisations known as the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). This methodology would be useful as it covers issues of Project Proposal Analysis, Participatory Analysis, Problems Analysis, Objectives Analysis, Alternatives Analysis, Project Matrix, Budgeting and Project Evaluation (*The Logical Framework Approach*1999).

It is interesting to note that the author of the Tender Proposal had shown the awareness of the need for expertise in project management in the tender stating "The consortium brings an impressive team together through its partnership each with extensive experience in materials development, training, project management and assessment and mentoring" (*Tender Submission Form* p.1). However, the attached CV's of the experts in the Tender Submission Document do not indicate that any of the experts was qualified in project management, much as they had English writing expertise. It is therefore not an accident that skills of project management were not brought to bear on this project. On a project of this nature this condition should not have been ignored.

Ceteris paribus, this study asserts that these conditions would lead to the success of an online mentoring programme in the workplace if applied in a judicious manner.

4.3 Limitations of the study

The first limitation of this study is that the findings are based on a single case study. As I took part in this programme as a mentor, I was quite close to the data and so this study might be said to be subjective. Related to this limitation is the fact that my supervisor was one of the experts on this programme. To this end it might be argued that independent researchers would have revealed more negative aspects than this study has been able to do. Moreover, it must be stated that the poor return of the filled learner questionnaires in fact may have hidden

the implicit negative results about this programme. It can be argued that the learners who were able to respond were those who were positive and those who were extremely negative did not ever want to be reminded of this programme, and so they were not willing to co-operate in any way. It can be concluded from this reality that in fact the findings would have been more negative if those who were totally negative about the programme had responded to the questionnaire. Thus the current findings from the learner questionnaire might be said to be distorted, giving an impression of positive results. This limitation can be expected in a single case study involving a small sample. Therefore the results must be viewed in corroboration with the findings from the reports, the Minutes, the correspondence, the learner lists, the mentor questionnaire results and the learner and mentor interviews.

The other limitation is the fact that the BCP was a unique programme. It combined a variety of learning elements such as workplace-mentoring, online learning approaches, English writing-process, making commentary on the writing of the learners and assessing electronically generated portfolios. Each of these elements had its own challenges. The success of the programme therefore depended not only on how well each element was implemented but also on how well the elements interfaced with each other. This meant that the failure of one element led to the malfunctioning of the whole programme.

Business writing as commonly taught in tertiary settings is unlikely to be as beset with complications as the BCP because most universities have writing-centres to which students bring drafts of assignments. The system ensures that the student has achieved an adequate level of writing competence to cope with the task; the topic is likely to be self-explanatory; the student is likely to have the required motivation and time to complete the assignment; the task is self-contained instead of being a list of portfolio requirements. So although this study researched a case study with limited generalisation, because it was an unusually complex mentoring situation it is likely to provide more lessons than a more typical mentoring situation. In researching about the performance of these complex elements, this study has been able to unify these learning clusters.

4.3 Suggestions for further research

The database developed through this learning experience provides a fertile ground from which other researchers can grow topics of similar potential. One such a topic is error analysis given that the database materials contain actual interactions between mentors and learners. Such an analysis would inform material and syllabus design for

workplace communication mentoring online in South Africa. The benefits of error analysis may have been criticised in the past as being teacher centred as opposed to being learner centred (Rivers and Temperly, 1978:151) but the fact that the generated materials in this case study encompass learner and teacher activities should provide a unique opportunity to inform materials design for both learners and teachers. This is an opportunity for action research.

Researchers could also take interest in studies on e-mail communication in learning. By its very nature, communication using e-mails seems to be associated with casual writing in which issues of spellings, for instance, do not seem to matter so much. It would be interesting to learn from the data left behind from the case study to what extent the influence of e-mail communication played a role in the care taken by the mentors when communicating with their learners.

Because of the revelations made by this study that not all mentoring yields positive results, researchers are urged to take interest in the methods of mentoring used in various learning settings where English communication mentoring has been taking place, particularly in the English departments in South African Universities. Although mentoring at that level would take different forms, Universities would be especially interesting places because most of the senior faculty in South African English departments are white. As they begin to reach their retiring ages, they would be required to pass their precious knowledge on to the next generation which, in post-apartheid South Africa led by the call for Affirmative Action of Black Economic Empowerment, includes black faculty. It would be interesting to make follow-ups on those who have been mentored to see how they have benefited from this type of learning.

Another topic this study would like to encourage researchers to get interested in is the question of verbal communication in the workplace in South Africa. During the course of this study, it was noticed that the language of verbal communication largely depended on the race of the speakers. Whereas English was largely used in written documents, many black speakers tended to communicate to each other in the black African languages while whites tended to use Afrikaans. English was mainly used in interracial verbal communications. This subject was beyond the scope of this study and so it is hoped that researchers competent in some of the other ten South African languages would be able to conduct studies in this field.

Further research could be conducted about possibilities of individualising course content for teaching business writing in big organisations with diverse functions. The findings on this programme were that the courses

were too general to cater for all the learners' workplace section needs. Such a study could also explore possibilities of involving line managers in course design so as to ensure that the writing tasks are the real tasks in their particular sections and that the line managers are fully behind the course.

Other studies could also be conducted to establish the impact of the BCP training on the learners' performance at the Department of Labour. The BCP training seems to have just concentrated on ensuring that well prepared portfolios were presented without establishing the extent to which learners had improved in performing their workplace tasks. The learners were not tested to see if they could apply the acquired knowledge to a new situation. This study argues that the ultimate point of learning should be that learners have learnt from the process so that they are capable now of producing similar work on their own. Therefore this provides an opportunity for further study to investigate the ultimate impact.

In the main, this study challenges researchers to conduct studies in topics dealing with everyday life. The triumph of the study is that where many other studies have presented mentoring as an experience that normally gives positive results, this research is able to share findings from a failed programme in order to warn those who would like to engage in this type of training to pay attention to detail in planning, implementing and evaluating a mentoring programme. The silence in literature on the mentoring experiences which have failed can especially be appreciated because it is human nature to identify with success rather than failure.

The study has thus provided several 'research seeds' which other researchers can develop further as single topics or as clusters.

4.4 Implications for teaching English writing to L2 speakers

The findings about the teaching of English as a second language suggest that where online methods are used with classroom teaching, both mentors and trainers must work effectively to ensure that there is agreement between what is taught in class and online mentoring. The information from the case study shows that the emphasis was placed more on the effectiveness of the online mentor than the classroom trainer. Apart from the reports sent to the consortium by the trainers, there is no evidence of the samples of the actual work that was generated in class by the learners. In fact if the contact teaching had been effective, learners would have dealt with aspects of content and presentation of the writing tasks from the contact sessions. The mentors would have mostly dealt with the language and organisation problems as

the students developed their drafts.

The implication of the approach in which two or more teachers teach students is that this is a form of team teaching. All teaching participants must therefore have clearly stated accountabilities and be able to fill each other in about the challenges and progress of the learner. Because English is not their first language, learners of English as a second language depend on what they hear from the experts. Where experts differ therefore, the learners would be confused by the different messages.

In the same vein this study gives insights into the usefulness of the reporting procedures which have implications for managers of studies or heads of department. The results from this failed programme show a one-way method of communication in which mentors made reports to their supervisors who did not act upon the information in a timely manner although they received the copies instantly through the e-mails. This system can be compared to the records of work which teachers present to their heads of department in schools. In some schools, teachers present records of work after two weeks. In other schools records of work are handed in monthly. The implications are that if records are presented at long intervals, it would be too late to implement any suggestions from the supervisors. Consequently, records of work must be presented at short intervals and heads of department should use these records for teacher and learner development in language teaching because this is the purpose of these reporting procedures. From the interview of the mentor who reported that he was made aware of his language weaknesses only when the portfolios were assessed, it can be concluded that the reporting procedures were delayed and used as a punitive tool in this particular case. Unfortunately, this "Government Inspector" type of supervision has very little place in modern management of language teaching where teams strive to empower individual members because the failure of one member is the failure of the whole team.

The other observation is that with the coming of technology, language teaching has evolved substantially. Chances of achieving success using traditional methods of teaching English using book-bound materials are becoming slimmer and slimmer. Teachers are therefore challenged to become versatile users of multimedia and Internet resources. This can be quite challenging to teachers who are used to the old methods of language teaching. However, these are skills that no teacher can afford to ignore and still survive in this Computer Age. Similarly, it is even more challenging for adult learners of English to learn through computer mediated communication because using technology in learning is fairly

new in Africa. This is particularly true for the previously disadvantaged adult learners like the students who were involved in the BCP learning, although the South African adult learners might even respond better compared to other learners in government departments in sub-Saharan Africa because South Africa is more technologically advanced. The implication of this reality is that unless teachers are conscious of the opportunities and challenges of learning using cyber technology, their learners will not function properly.

The four hypotheses discussed in this study just prove that successful teachers are those who have extra knowledge and skill of collaborating with others; are open to learn from others while contributing what they have; do develop and nourish professional relationships with their learners; and work to motivate and not suppress their learners. The teacher must therefore be multi-talented and dynamic in applying technology to language learning. Above all, language teachers must be highly knowledgeable in their subject matter. This is particularly necessary in teaching adult learners because these learners come with prior knowledge to the classroom. They usually want to understand the reasons behind any new knowledge. They can pose challenges to the teacher.

As regards making comments on the learners' writing, the message is that teachers must keep their comments to the subject matter. They should communicate as clearly as possible. In computer mediated communication, teachers would find the Word comment task a reliable tool in sticking to the essential comments. The temptation for L1 teachers to pitch their language at a higher level while communicating with L2 learners is very high. These teachers should therefore always bring their language to the level of their learners.

The lesson is that the teacher carries the burden of delivering exciting lessons to the learner.

These are the general lessons to be learnt in teaching English writing to L2 speakers.

In 2004, the South African National Research Foundation confirmed that *Conditions for successful online mentoring* was the first and only registered study on their database on this subject in South Africa at the time. This being a beginning, it is hoped that more studies will be conducted to improve upon this attempt and that researchers will find this fund of knowledge a bankable document to use in solving related problems.

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6. APPENDICES

Appendix I

The Curriculum of the course

Introductory portfolio tasks

1. Submission
2. Letter of confirmation
3. Workshop programme
4. E-mail about the workshop
5. Workshop information fax
6. Analysis of an advertisement
7. Curriculum Vitae (CV)
8. Letter of application
9. Presentation
10. Deliver presentation (Submit assessment sheets from class activity)
11. Workplace task 1
12. Workplace task 2
13. Report on interaction with mentor

The Intermediate portfolio tasks were:

1. Project plan outline (based on brain-storm)
2. Summary
3. Survey questionnaire
4. Proposal
5. Notice of meeting
6. Agenda
7. Minutes and decisions
8. Action plan
9. Final report
10. Information pamphlet
11. Workplace task1
12. Workplace task 2
13. Report on interaction with mentor

The Advanced portfolio tasks were:

1. Writing a speech on behalf of a senior official
2. Parliamentary question 1
3. Parliamentary question 2
4. Parliamentary question 3
5. Parliamentary question 4
6. Summary

7. Workplace presentation
8. Delivery of workplace presentation
9. Brief and Report 1
10. Brief and Report 2
11. Journal
12. Workplace task 1
13. Workplace task 2
- Report on interaction with mentor

Appendix II

Programme of activities and timelines

MONTH	ACTIVITIES	DURATION	MAJOR MILESTONES
January 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial Meeting Mobilisation of learners Initial assessment of learners Ongoing-weekly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activities identified to be completed by the end of January 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder forum established Report formats have been finalised Learners have been mobilised Learners have been assessed Initial report submitted to the Project Managers: Department of Labour Training Programme has been finalised All necessary documentation has been received from the Department of Labour
February 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face-to-Face training – of first group of 30–40 learners of phase 1 Face-to-Face training of second group of 30–40 learners of phase 1 On going weekly/monthly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 days 5 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential mentors identified Phase 1 of Face-to Face training has taken place for between 60–80 learners Learners have received assignments for inclusion in Portfolio of Evidence Each group of 10 learners is provided with the name, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address of mentor Timetable of mentoring visits finalised with individual learners Plan of action drawn up taking cognisance of individual learner's time constraints and requirements for completion of phase 1 Initial general and learner specific reports submitted to the Department of Labour

MONTH	ACTIVITIES	DURATION	MAJOR MILESTONES
March-April 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ individual mentoring visits over the period March–April up to 8 hrs per learner • Learners submit activities for assessment purposes • Learners receive feedback • Liaise with managers to determine efficacy of learning programme • Negotiations with relevant SETA and NSB05 for accreditation of learning programme • On-going weekly/monthly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to the end of April but plan of action individualised to meet learner and Departmental needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% of learners have completed Portfolio of Evidence • Plan of action put into place for learners who have not met all the outcomes in consultation with Project Managers and with Stakeholder forum • Portfolios of Evidence have been moderated • Final reports for phase one have been submitted • Learners receive UNISA Certificate of Competence • Negotiations with relevant bodies begun for learning programme accreditation purposes
May 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-Face training –of first group of 30–40 learners of phase 2 • Face-to-Face training –of second group of 30–40 learners of phase 2 • On-going weekly/monthly meetings • Negotiations with relevant SETA and NSB05 for accreditation of learning programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 days • 3 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential mentors monitored • Phase 2 of Face-to-Face training has taken place for between 60–80 learners • Learners have received assignments for inclusion in Portfolio of Evidence • Timetable of mentoring visits finalised with individual learners • Plan of action drawn up taking cognisance of individual learners time constraints and requirements for completion of phase 2 • General and learner specific reports submitted to the Department of Labour

MONTH	ACTIVITIES	DURATION	MAJOR MILESTONES
June-mid August 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ individual mentoring visits over the period June – mid August up 8 hrs per learner • Learners submit activities for assessment purposes via e-mail • Learners receive feedback via e-mail, telephonically or via fax • Liaise with managers for ongoing feedback • Ongoing negotiations with relevant SETA and NSB05 for accreditation of learning programme • On-going weekly/monthly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UP to the middle of August but plans of action individualised to meet learner and Department needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% of learners have completed Portfolio of Evidence • Plan of action put into place for learners who have not met all the outcomes in consultation with Project Managers and within Stakeholder forum • Portfolios of Evidence have been moderated • Final reports for phase two have been submitted • Learners receive UNISA Certificate of Competence • On-going negotiations with relevant bodies for learning programme accreditation purposes
Mid August 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-Face training –of first group of 30–40 learners of phase 3 • Face-to-Face training of second group of 30-40 learners of phase 3 • On-going weekly/monthly meetings • On-going negotiations with relevant accreditation bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 days • 3 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential mentors identified • Phase 3 of Face-to-Face training has taken place for between 60–80 learners • Learners have received assignments for inclusion in Portfolio of Evidence • Timetable of mentoring visits finalised with individual learners • Plan of action drawn up taking cognisance of individual learner's time constraints and requirements for completion of phase 3 • General and learner specific reports submitted to the Department of Labour

MONTH	ACTIVITIES	DURATION	MAJOR MILESTONES
Sept– Nov 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ individual mentoring visits over the period Sept – Nov up to 8 hrs per learner • Learner submit activities for assessment purposes • Learners receive feedback • Liaise with managers to determine efficacy of learning programme • Negotiations with relevant SETA and NSB05 for accreditation of learning programme • On-going weekly/monthly meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to the end of November but plan of action individualised to meet learner and Departmental needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of learners have completed Portfolio of Evidence • Plan of action put into place for learners who have not met all the outcomes in consultation with Project Managers and within Stakeholders forum • Portfolios of Evidence have been moderated • Final reports for phase three have been submitted • Learners receive UNISA Certificate of Competence • Negotiations with relevant bodies for learning programme accreditation purposes finalised
Jan– March 2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with mentors /Project managers and Stakeholder Forum re: training programme • Adaptation / final layout of training programme to meet requirement of Dept of Labour • Face-to-Face training of identified mentors • Recruitment of 5 potential learners per mentor • Mentoring mentors training and assessment practices • On-going weekly/monthly meetings • On-going negotiations with relevant accreditation bodies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 days • 4 days • 5 days • 10 days • Up to end of March 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors trained • Training Programme finalised • Training Programme laid out to Dept of Labour Specifications • Timetable of mentoring visits finalised • General and learner specific reports submitted to the Department of Labour • Submission of mentors assessment of learners' work to relevant SETA for assessor accreditation purposes

Appendix III

The First Mentor Guidelines

General outcomes for the assessment of BCP Tasks

Content

In terms of content, mentors were supposed to ensure that:

- all information necessary to the purpose was provided; nothing superfluous was included
- the content indicated the writer's understanding of the larger context to which the text related
- the information was presented in ways that anticipated the reader's needs
- the information was presented in ways that were both interesting and created (where required) an impact

Organization

Mentors were supposed to make sure that:

- the text conformed to the major conventions associated with the text type (business letter, proposal, speech)
- the overall structure of the text was coherent, logical and well sequenced
- the individual subsections of the text were internally coherent, marking their relationships to what had gone before and what was to follow
- paragraphs were structured around a single main point, which was reflected in a topic sentence
- sentences were well-structured, grammatical and related clearly to the sentences before and after them (eg through the sign-posting words to indicate the relationships between sentences)

Language

Mentors were required to ensure that:

- the language used served to express as clearly as possible the writer's purpose (e.g. to inform, to persuade, to complain)

- the language was fluent, and read well
- the language was relatively free of errors of spelling, punctuation, tense and concord

Presentation

In terms of presentation, mentors were required to ensure that:

- the presentation of the document was clear, attractive and reader-friendly
- the layout of the final document was complete and consistent in terms of the requirements of the text (eg page numbers, heading levels, numbering, table of contents, attachments)
- the document had been proof-read and was error-free
- different versions of the same document are identified, (where required), Departmental references were included

Learners could also use the outcomes to self-assess their subsequent draft – and to pinpoint areas where they still believed they needed help.

Mentors' activities

Mentors were required to:

- keep and submit a record of the time they spent on mentoring activities
- fill in an Activity Description sheet once a month which was required in order to allow UNISA to claim for the time that mentors spent on the project
- return the Activity Description sheet to the UNISA expert, Peter Southey, and send copies to the archive addresses too by the 5th of the following month at the latest
- keep a detailed record of all mentoring and capture it fortnightly in a Group Assessment Activity Report (GAAR) and send this to the two archives, DOL@unisa.ac.za and SACHED@icon.co.za, and to the assessors, Jenr@icon.co.za for Advanced, to southpg@unisa.ac.za for Intermediate and to liz@savannagame.co.za for Introductory activities
- summarise information in an Activity Report and submit it to Jenny, (jenr@icon.co.za) at the end of the month for collation and invoicing

The GAAR was a management tool to track the progress of learners through the programme.

Learners' activities

When learners sent through a draft to their mentors, they were always required to send copies to DOL@unisa.ac.za and to SACHED@icon.co.za.

Learners were also required to identify in the subject line of their e-mail, the task(s) they were sending through, e.g. 'Letter of confirmation draft 2 and workshop programme draft 1'.

In their documents, the learners were required to provide the following information *at the top of the document*:

- their name
- the name of the task
- the draft number (e.g. Draft 1, Draft 3, Final draft)
- the date
- the initials of the person to have worked on the document last

When the document came back with comments, learners were requested to:

- save it under its new draft number
- copy the mentored draft and paste it above itself at the top of the document
- re-name the top draft and work on it, leaving the original in place below so that the latest draft would carry the whole history of revision
- phone their mentors and ask for more explanation if learners did not understand the correction
- type the name of the file as the footer at the bottom of the document – and number the pages

When mentors and learners agreed that the task fulfilled the assessment criteria for the task, the learners were supposed to print out the full history of the document, from draft 1 to the final draft (with all the comments from the mentor) for filing in the portfolio. For each portfolio submission, learners were required to choose two workplace tasks of their own to submit.

The Second Guidelines

Mentors were requested to:

- use workplace visits to gain an insight into demands of the

learner's work environment and to deal with issues related to the learner's writing and/or presentation skills

- use the opportunity to help the participant schedule her/his work in order to create a regular flow of work between the mentor and the learner
- use the first meeting to find out what reading the learner's job required, and to deal with any anxieties that the learner might express
- use the visits to sort out any practical/logistical problems which might have arisen (e.g. problems with e-mails or not returning calls)
- return portfolios in a face-to-face meeting with the learner, especially if some tasks were still not regarded as competently done

On-line mentors were also requested to be pro-active with checking at least once a week whether their learners had:

- sent drafts of their work through
- received feedback from the mentors on their drafts

At the same time, online mentors needed to:

- encourage DoL participants *to be equally pro-active in terms of checking* whether the tutor had received work and/or returned work, which they may not have received
 - keep a tally of all the e-mails and/or calls to show that they made follow ups
 - aim at returning work within 48 hours of receiving it
 - call or email the learner to explain and reschedule the return of drafts if, for any reason, the mentor could not fulfil the promise made to return the work
 - be friendly and professional at all times in their e-mails and feedback
 - make feedback explicit and not too cryptic to be of real use
 - take the lead where a learner had submitted no work whatsoever by visiting the learner at the workplace; sending the learners copies of the calendars and asking them to indicate by return of mail when they planned to submit the tasks and an invitation for the learner to call, and if the learner did not respond to any of these attempts, mentors were required to call themselves
 - remind participants regularly of Portfolio of Evidence deadlines
 - make their own good mentoring approaches available to other online mentors—and use what other mentors had done
- use the outcomes to direct learners to aspects of the task to be achieved

Appendix IV

Merit exemplar

The following sample was recommended as a merit exemplar of an application letter at the Introductory level.

PO Box 49956
Hercules
0030

20 October 2003

The Senior Executive Manager
Human Resources Management
Private Bag X117
Pretoria
0001

Dear Mr S Maratoba

Position as Senior Administrative Clerk

As an experienced professional in the Administration Office Services, I am applying for the position of Practitioner, as advertised on the internal Department of Labour website on 13 October 2003. I have 12 years of relevant experience working as a Senior Administrative Clerk. I also have extensive knowledge regarding SETA roles and responsibilities and deal with them on a daily basis. I am also familiar with the key performance areas listed in the advert.

Providing quality administration and public service is a major focus of my present position with Skills Development Levies and I would like to put my administration experience to work for you.

A few years ago I set myself a personal goal to expand my knowledge by attending different courses. This helped me to be more productive in the administrative and office environment. I am proud of my achievements.

Utilising my skills at Seta administrative support would be a great opportunity for me to take on a new challenge while fulfilling my commitment as administrative practitioner.

Yours faithfully

Jamien van Tonder

Ms J van Tonder

CV attached.

Appendix V

FINAL REPORT ON THE EVALUATION OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME (BCP)



Labour Market Skills Development Programme

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR



1. SUMMARY OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

Project No. SA/97/73200/008	Project Title (eg. Information Systems for Strategic Planning).	Labour Market Skills Development Programme
Name of Consultant	Ms Rachel Morake	
Person months input	Approximately 3 months	
Time schedule/s	Start date: Initially 14 June 2004 Revised date: September 2004	End date: 27 August 2004 End date: 26 November 2004
Total Budget	R 35 000.00	
Funded from the Budget Line or Activity		
Terms of Reference No.	ToR P1/EU/DoL/WP4/ST0	
Author of report	Name: Ms Rachel Morake	Signature
		Date: 26 November 2004
Approved by the Project Manager /	Name	Signature

Team Leader of Project No.		
		Date

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ESDS branch, through its LMSDP sanctioned the provision of a business communication skills development course for its staff as part one of the many capacity building exercises and a continuation of the bettering of skills for those designated members of the Department of Labour (DoL) needing development.

The tender submission to provide the training initially consisted of a three party consortium; SACHED/UNISA/WITS. Because of the conflict arising from the inability to find and harmonise strategies for the way forward for the consortium, the WITS team withdrew in the early stages of the project thereby leaving the SACHED/UNISA consortium to continue the provision of the Business Communication Programme to an estimated 60 to 80 learners. Also, some members belonging to the initial UNISA team who had very good potential to be part of the project delivery became discouraged and could therefore not join the team. The programme is divided into three phases that culminate in three unit standards which are accreditable by UNISA. The initial and most important objective of the programme would be to train at least 80% of the learners in a full unit standard. The majority of the learners were to be black and over half of the learners were to be women as required by the Employment Equity legislation. The target number of trainees could not be reached because of reasons beyond the actual project planning.

The programme ran as from 2003 with a minimum of 46 learners and continued into 2004. During the course of the programme, a high drop out of learners ensued as a result of conflict in the integration of programme objectives and terms of reference conceptualisation and the training and mentoring approaches which were obviously the cornerstone of the success of the project. This necessitated intervention by the LMSDP unit of the DoL and later evaluation of the project to assess the impact of the programme.

The evaluation then set out to assess the conceptualisation, design, implementation and management of outcomes for the BCP course. The evaluation's logical framework followed the link between the team work

within the consortium, the approach to training in the work-based context and the support of learners by both the service provider and employer.

The findings of the evaluation are therefore based on the Skills Development principles which seek to consider the extent to which the positive effects and best practice learned from the programme continue after the provider has left (sustainability), the degree to which the programme is justified in relation to the needs of the beneficiaries and the policy environment in the work place (relevance), the intended and unintended purposes of the programme (impact), the extent to which the programme purposes have been achieved or not achieved as a result of the dissemination of the course (effectiveness) and the cost effectiveness of transforming the means into results (efficiency).

The finding of the evaluation is that to a greater extent and despite the use of good learning materials that were geared towards training in the work place, the programme failed to reach its intended objectives due to a major conflict regarding the programme conceptualisation and implementation plan in respect of tutor and mentoring performance. To a lesser extent, the work environment contributed to demotivation of the learners to succeed in attaining the full unit standard credit due to lack of support in certain sub-departments. The evaluation therefore concludes that even though the programme was relevant to the needs of the learners in the main, it was not delivered satisfactorily to meet the full needs set out initially.

3. INTRODUCTION

The labour market presents employers and employees with a myriad of diverse social environments. It is within these varied environments, that critical communication in its varied forms becomes imperative. The crucial objective of the BCP was to be the development of work-based communication skills in these socially rich contexts. The efficiency with which economic progress is realised and social interaction is enhanced is measured by the way people express their needs and exhibit the skills of acquiring those needs. The role of language in expressing these axioms cannot be emphasized more because if we need to compete with other counterparts locally, nationally and globally, the need to level with them becomes even more apparent. The efforts by the ESDS to realise this important development aspect are immensely appreciated given the background to the continuing lack of good communication skills across the board i.e. skills in computer assisted communication (e-learning) media communication and the old age traditional communication through the written and spoken word. BCP would have served a good course to present a programme to effectively overcome some or more of these shortcomings as set out in the terms of reference for this project.

4. BACKGROUND

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the BCP in its current form and to find out the reasons for the high drop out rate among the staff who, have elected to undergo training in the communication skills development. The majority of staff had indicated the need for the training in their Professional Development Plans (PDP). In other instances staff members were recommended as needing training in this area by their immediate supervisors.

The project terms of reference and objectives were to choose an appropriate method to find the reasons for the high drop out rate. A strategy to involve all stakeholders in the evaluation was of prime importance. I elected to interview as many people as possible in order to gather the maximum information needed to conclude the reasons for part failure of the project and also trace the good practice that came out of the programme. The major objective for the project though, was to trace the correlation between the training strategy, materials used and because of the high drop out rate, to investigate the extent to which the programme was successful or not successful. The results of the evaluation would be used for decision making to continue or expand or even phase down the project. The evaluation would also provide lessons learnt from the dissemination of the BCP project and recommend benchmarks for further policy making regarding on the job training and other interventions for development.

5. OBJECTIVE AND RESULTS

Overall Objective of the Project

In the main, this project set out as its objective, to evaluate the reasons for the high dropout rate of staff in the ESDS branch of the DoL, who took the BCP. It also assessed the conceptualisation, design, implementation and management of training and learning through appraising the effectiveness and efficiency of the training approach in line with the requirements of work-based communication competencies. These specific objectives formed the basis for the provision of the communication skills as set out in the service contract between the DoL and the SACHED/UNISA consortium, the success of which was based on specific indicators. The National Skills Development Strategy sets out specific targets to meet the needs of the majority of people in the labour market in terms of effective relevant work oriented skills development. This evaluation therefore looked at whether the BCP, in its entirety, met this all important axiom.

Direct Results

- 41 learners were interviewed
- 2 project leaders were interviewed
- 2 BMU project managers and the PMU project 1 leader were interviewed
- mentors and trainers were interviewed
- telephonic interviews were conducted with learners (2 who are not at head office) and stakeholders who could not have contact sessions with project evaluator
- Documents supporting the running of the programme were reviewed to provide the background to the evaluation project.

6. SCOPE OF WORK

This project was restricted to investigating the four key concerns, which are:

- The high drop out rate of learners from the BCP course
- The appropriateness of the training approach used
- The strategies employed in the mentoring process
- The benefit of the course to its beneficiaries in terms of their world of work

The interim report has outlined and made conclusions regarding the appropriateness of the training programme, the structure and plan for the training and mentoring process and the impact of the course in terms of benefits for the DoL staff.

Project Findings

Initially the BCP project set out to recruit 60 – 80 learners who had indicated in their Professional Development Plans (PDPs) that they needed training in communication skills. This target has proven a bit on the ambitious side in that it could not be met because of other internal issues beyond the reach of the LMSDP unit. According to the document analysis undertaken, the 2003 cohort had 46 learners registered to take the course. Of this total number, 14 learners dropped out prior to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) assessment, 1 learner dropped out prior to training and 3 dropped out during training. In 2004, a total of 12 learners dropped out impacting negatively on the participation rate and thereby necessitating intervention from the DoL. An estimated 30 learners dropped out of the BCP training over two years.

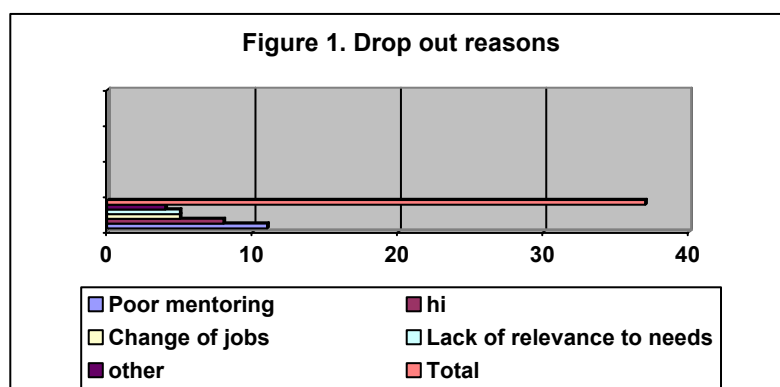
The reasons for discontinuing the participation in the BCP advanced by learners range from lack of time to do their assignments and their job responsibilities or too much work; the high demand of course requirements; change of jobs or responsibilities; lack of relevance to the immediate job responsibilities; pregnancy; ill health; change of tutors and/or mentors; the need for higher level training and poor mentoring or coaching. The strongest reaction associated with the high drop out rate was attributed to lack of meaningful support from mentors and constant conflict of what assessment standards and requirements are between the tutors and mentors. As part of project management, and monitoring, and especially where the project lists support/mentoring as an important approach to maximise the success of learning, mentors should assess and evaluate their protégés at constant intervals and write reports on the learning progress. This enhances participation and ownership of the programme where learners feel they have a meaning contribution to make to their own development.

There exists a strong sentiment even among learners who have completed their chosen unit standards that they have been tempted to discontinue their training because they found the general guidance from their tutors and mentors especially, not too helpful if and when it did indeed happen. For these learners, self motivation played a bigger role towards the successful completion of their work and in other instances, their group or team work played a role as well.

This, in my view caused most learners to lag behind their assignments resulting in them not meeting the deadline for submission so that they can be assessed properly. The major cause of this was also that mentors did not provide adequate follow up to check the progress of learners in terms of their tasks and work-based improvement. As already stated in the interim report, there was no standard agreed upon style and structure of what to look for in the learners tasks and how to jointly coach them on what and how to improve the standard of their work. The task assessment and grading seemed to concentrate only on grammar and neglected critical broad communication outcomes like effective expression, working in a team, organising and managing oneself, collecting, analysing, organising and evaluating information, identifying and solving problems etc. even though some of these broad principles form part of the unit standard the learners took, they were not used as points for assessing the outcomes. All the interviewed trainers and assessors agree that this is proving a major challenge in terms of the successful mentoring plan.

The interim report has shown other possible reasons for the lack of active participation by learners. This report expands on them further and

shows a graphic representation of the main reasons for the drop out rate in the BCP course.



Some learners had more than one reason for dropping out of the BCP course.

7. METHODOLOGY AND REPORTING

Methodology

The major method used to gather information for this project was semi-structured interviews. This method allowed me to probe and seek clarification of issues pertinent to the project's objectives other than relying on the set questions only. An extensive document analysis was also done to gather the background against which the evaluation was to be based. Before these two major processes were undertaken, a meeting to set and clarify terms of reference for the project was held with the project managers. A preliminary report stating interim results has been submitted and a debriefing session was held with project managers to conclude the evaluation process.

The possible limitations associated with the methodology used for this evaluation could be attributed to the fact that no rigorous project monitoring tool/plan was available for review and for use to judge the successes and apparent lack thereof, of the different stages of the programme against the set terms of reference. Also, while interviews are an excellent way to elicit emotion-filled data, because evaluations are usually viewed as policing oriented or whip cracking activities, sometimes respondents get inhibited to disclose or express information honestly because of the face to face contact with the evaluator. Hence the balance brought by document analysis served as a validity enhancing tool as well.

8. RESOURCES

Requirements.

Team members

The evaluation project was done by the sole independent provider, Ms R Morake. I report to the project advisor, Ms Rosemary Lugg and the project manager, Ms Lorraine Kekana who are in the Branch Management Unit of the LMSDP.

9. TIMING

The project was originally sanctioned to begin on 14th June 2004 and end on the 27th August 2004. However, it had to be halted pending approval from the EU office. The project resumed in September and the new time frame was set for the project to conclude on the 26th November 2004 as per the revised proposal. The following table outlines the time taken for the different activities involved in the project.

Activity	Time spent
1. Meetings with BMU	1.5 days
2. Document analysis/study	2 days
3. Preparation of interview instruments	1 day
4. Fieldwork/ conducting interviews	8 days
5. Analysis of data	2 days
6. Report writing (interim)	1 day
(Draft final)	2 days
Total activities' summary (6)	Total days spent (17.5)

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1 BCP learner manual

10.2 English Empowerment/Language Usage learner activity and practice booklets

10.3 DoL/EU service provision contract/tender document

10.4 Other documents including; project planning, project monitoring and intervention, feedback meetings, on line mentoring activities and assessment guides

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PROJECT REVIEW

The quality and success of this project was ensured and enhanced by the constant check and follow up by the Branch Management Unit project advisor and manager. This was done through emails and telephone, to find out if there are any logistical problems or otherwise in the execution of the planned project activities. To this end, with the exception of the postponement of two interview sessions planned at the DoL site, a situation that could not be helped (DoL staff to be interviewed

were re-scheduled for training resulting in a clash), and rescheduling with other BCP stakeholders (trainers/tutors and mentors) outside of the DoL, the timing of the planned activities were reasonably met.

12. CONCLUSION

The total achievements of this project are attributed first and foremost to the co-operation I received from the stakeholders and the support provided by the BMU section of the ESDS branch.

As the interim report has clearly indicated, the provision of the BCP as an important part of achieving the National Skills Development and Human Resource Development Strategies had to stand the test of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness in providing the much needed communicative skills for the ESDS staff. The approach to the provision of the BCP course has therefore been measured against the success indicators stated in the service provision contract which are;

- 80% of learners are assessed as competent against the full complement of unit standards by the end of the project
- at least 85% of learners assessed as competent are black
- at least 54% of learners assessed as competent are female
- high quality materials are available within the department of Labour to help sustain communication skills development
- at least ten people have been trained as mentors in communication skills
- a model for the development of communication skills training will have been piloted and evaluated by the project

In order to bring as close as possible to success, the synergy between the project objectives and its indicators as part of the quality management system, the consortium needed to place a high priority on their internal processes wherein they would look at their procedures for maximising success in learning i.e. mentoring plan, the use of learning support resources like manuals and extra study material, the importance of style of learning and training (face –to – face training vis-à-vis distance learning) and integration of theory and work-based practice. These are vital principles and requirements that affect providers and have been set by SAQA for Education and Training Providers. A suggested grid such as the following would help structure the project operations and avoid finger pointing where it is not necessary. This idea of planning seems to have surfaced only as part of the intervention the DoL provided to try and reconcile the consortium.

Quality Indicator	Evidence	Action Plan	Who is Responsible	By when

This is only an example and by following a model of approaching a training programme like this, it becomes easier to monitor the project progress and follow those critical cross-field outcomes that are so vital for assessing learners that need to be part of any assessment tool.

In the main, the evaluation of the BCP project found that these success indicators have not been met since the majority of learners designated for training dropped out of the programme. The offering of the BCP has proven almost impossible because of difficulties relating to lack of co-operation and commitment within the consortium. This has exacerbated the risk of having the trainees complete the full complement of the BC Programme unit standards thereby increasing the dropout or lessening the participation rate for the programme.

The analysis of the evaluation project already stated in the interim report and re-stated in this report (see point 5 above) attest to this fact. The consortium/project leadership therefore has not succeeded in fulfilling the requisite training needs as set out by the Department of Labour. The department of Labour has the institutional capacity to sustain the work-based training as a life long process if the BCP project can manage to train the mentors as initially planned.

A rigorous pilot project is needed to set out and design an effective work-based communication skills development programme. The pilot should use the experiences and findings from the present BCP project, which in principle should have been a good flagship for the DoL, to benchmark best practice. To re-iterate, the type of programme needed should incorporate the basic principles with which development goals are aligned in policy measures of government, those of training for transformative development. There needs to be change and positive impact when time and resources are expended in the name of development of any kind, lest we find ourselves caught napping when the race ends.

Ends