

**Bloomin' Excellent**

**An action research investigation into enhancing students' essay writing skills in Level 2 English**

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## **Abstract**

In 2004, a significant number of Whakatane High School level 2 English students did not achieve the external achievement standards based on the analysis of text, and only a small percentage of students gained ‘merit’ or ‘excellence’ results. While these results were little different from the national averages published by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), they nevertheless left us feeling disappointed for our students. There seemed to be a significant, daunting leap of ability and knowledge about texts required to reach level 2. Our aim in carrying out this research was therefore to develop and implement strategies to improve the analysis of text at level 2 English.

The focus for this project was to improve students’ meta-cognitive skills through formative practices. We were interested in pursuing the integration and understanding of a structured order of thinking skills, such as that put forward by Benjamin Bloom in 1956, and revised in 2001 by Anderson and Krathwohl. This structure suggested that there are six levels within the cognitive domain. The six levels are: remembering, understanding, applying, analysing, evaluating and creating. We sought to teach techniques that developed the vocabulary, structure, and thinking processes of literary analysis, using resources such as Bloom’s taxonomy. We believed as well that it was important to reintroduce more fun, interactive and challenging lessons, such as those we were teaching to our junior students. We suspected that level 2 students’ engagement and interest levels were low.

Our research allowed us to develop lessons and activities that promoted high interest levels, complex thinking, vocabulary skills and writing structures. It involved surveying students in order to track positive changes in attitudes to English study, and the collection and analysis of data which suggested that our intervention had some positive learning, achievement and attitudinal outcomes.

## Introduction

Level 2 National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) English is a demanding course of study. It requires a level of commitment and depth of perception and ability that challenges many students who, in the previous year, had achieved satisfactorily at level 1. It is an exciting course to teach, because the opportunity to support the development and integration of perception and insight is rewarding. Through previous years though, we had discovered that these rewards were hard won. We fully acknowledge the need for the incorporation of the skills required for success at this level. There is no possibility of a level 1<sup>1/2</sup>.

Closely aligned to the demands presented to students at this level was a degree of passivity and non-engagement from them, and we found that a significant part of our research focussed on analysing and raising enjoyment and participation levels for students. We tried to build a series of intervention activities and responses that gave greater opportunities, motivations and reward for students to be active, involved and passionate learners.

The question we raised and discussed informally was: can we teach the skills of analysing text, crucial to level 2 success in the externally assessed papers, as somehow universal – applicable to each text studied, but deep-seated, so that students can fully integrate the practice of analysis into their reading process. There are, of course, concepts, skills and demands specific to each complex text. Our intention was not to ignore these, but instead to allow students to approach texts with questions and analytical potential already in place. Analyses of individual texts would be supported by an understanding of the *level* of questioning, thought, and structure required to achieve well. As students revisited the general thinking-type topics, they were asked to feed this into specific textual studies, employing the skills and expectations covered.

Initial exploration suggested that a framework of thinking skills could be a starting point for research, and the progression of skills demanded by the achievement criteria for text responses pointed us to Bloom's taxonomy. Level 1 requires students to "show understanding" through a "describe and explain" process. Level 2 asks for "analysis", and level 3, a "critical response" embedded in a formal structure. These fit clearly with Bloom's progression. It is sensible to see analysis inside this framework, so that preceding and consequential steps are obvious. The lines separating the criteria concepts are blurred and overlap in any case.

Underpinning the achievement standards' criteria is an expectation that students develop ideas, questions, and connections themselves; they are asked to respond in ways that are teacher-facilitated rather than teacher-created. It seems to be operating more fully within the spirit of the criteria to proceed in a way that allows students to ask deep questions and pursue pathways of understanding that are unique to them, and draw conclusions inspired by their own reading.

It was necessary to gather data concerning students' attitudes towards their English course. The existing perception that course demands were "too hard" and "academic", and therefore unavoidably dry and boring, seemed to us to be inhibitors to success. NCEA judgement statements consistently affirm that student "engagement" with texts studied is vital to achievement at 'merit' and 'excellence'. We came to an understanding that defining and encouraging engagement would be necessary to increase levels of achievement.

## Literature review

The purposes and methodologies associated with action research were the focus for our initial readings. Cardno's (2003) suggestion of a cyclic process involving issue identification, investigation and analysis, planning and action, and evaluation and reflection suited the needs of our students. Reading around the topic suggested variations, but all those read showed a focus on interaction with students to change approaches and understandings. We found that this fitted with our purpose. We have been hoping for an outcome that allowed us to use more interesting, co-operative practices for level 2, rather than continue to teach in traditional, more assessment-driven ways.

We used many sources of literature to guide us through our action research cycle. Firstly, the work of Capobianco, Horowitz, Cannuel-Browne and Trimarchi (2004) emphasised the importance of teaching in the spirit of inquiry and provided a clear, practical plan for action research. Next, the literature of Beverley Johnson (1993) provided a more rigorous and specific approach to planning action research. Sax and Fisher (2001) also cover the stages for undertaking an action research project, while also giving examples of essential questions that could be used within our research. Lastly, Berdnarz's (2002) work was an important source of literature for us, providing clear notes about the phases of action research to follow within our own research.

After gaining a solid grounding in the processes and practices of action research, our readings became more specifically focused on our area of interest. Chosen readings were based around teaching the skills of analysis, student-centred learning, and encouraging critical thinking skills. Of most importance to our literature review were readings surrounding Bloom's taxonomy. Michael Pohl (1956) outlines the changes in the taxonomy and provides associated questions for each level of the taxonomy. Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) provide a more recent update of Bloom's taxonomy and suggestions for questions to be used in today's classroom. Both these pieces of literature suggest the use of Bloom's taxonomy for encouraging higher order thinking skills. Bloom's taxonomy was a critical thinking skill that was promoted in many other pieces of literature. Allan and Bacon (2000) have created a resource that uses Bloom's taxonomy to give students clues as to what skills they need to be using for examination questions. This literature, reproduced in a website, gives information for students as to the wording of exam questions and the type of thinking required according to Bloom's Taxonomy. We believe the close analysis of NCEA questions and applying these words to the Bloom's taxonomy would help students realise the analytical thinking they needed for 'merit' and 'excellence' responses.

Another important piece of literature based on Bloom's taxonomy is Dalton and Smith's work (1986). This is a teaching resource that has created activities designed to meet each level of the higher order thinking skills. This website suggests activities such as designing court cases, interviewing characters and debating to allow students to engage with the texts at a higher level. Suggestions from this website were applied in the design of our critical thinking lessons to promote higher order thinking.

The literature of Brian Cambourne (1997) emphasises the importance of successful learning activities. Cambourne argues that activities need to be linked, relevant, have a clear purpose, require high degrees of social interaction and require more than one mode of learning. Cambourne's work suggests that only once students have engaged in successful learning activities can in-depth learning begin. Even though directed at primary teachers, Brian Cambourne's (1997) definitions of the qualities of successful learning activities encouraged us to think laterally. We have wanted to explore whether older, academically able students

would flourish in situations where high degrees of social interaction and cognitive collaboration were supported and a range of responses were acceptable. Although there is a degree to which this is obvious, the challenge for us will be whether these types of activity can engender exam success.

Formative practices described in Black and Wiliam's work (1998) have been the main focus of our teaching for this project, maintaining a high level of discussion with students about our purpose, choices and their reactions. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall and Wiliam (2002) have followed this literature with relevant ideas about how to empower students' own learning and create a positive classroom culture.

Our readings of curriculum material from the Ministry of Education have shown us that the English curriculum has been based on a progression of thinking skills. The skills and processes development suggested in English in the New Zealand Curriculum (EINZC) and reflected in National Qualification Framework levels, links readily to a system such as Bloom's taxonomy. The taxonomy, and its interpretation by educationalists like Pohl and Allen, has offered a concrete base for dealing with 'analysis', a nebulous concept for students.

An essential source of information in the beginnings of our research has been a workshop run by Peter Boyle in July of 2005 titled 'Analyse This'. Peter Boyle's workshop discussed the disappointing level 2 results for the response to text questions and how these results could be improved, through the teaching of the skills of analysis. Peter Boyle's research found that there were general weaknesses of level 2 exam responses in 2004. Students lacked:

- the skills to infer/ make connections/ evaluate
- knowledge of language techniques and intended effects
- the ability to connect language/ style to purpose
- skills to offer evaluative judgements on style

Therefore the focus of teaching at level 2 should be on encouraging personal responses and evaluations and discussing a wider understanding and appreciation of the writer's purpose.

Boyle provided a framework that could be used to help students make these connections and evaluations, in which the student describes, explains, infers, connects, evaluates and then judges. By following these steps in their discussions, students would be critically analysing and showing an appreciation of the significance of the text. Other suggestions made by Boyle to promote critical thinking included three level guides, spider diagrams, writing introductions as a class, and providing templates for writing paragraphs which focus students on analysis. We hope to use many of these suggestions within our lessons and to determine their success with our students.

Another excellent source of information, specifically related to critical thinking skills at level 2 was the 'A Text of Two Halves' workshop presented at the New Zealand Association of Teachers of English (NZATE) conference in July of 2005. This workshop also identified the disappointing level 2 English results in 2004, particularly in the response to text answers. The presenters suggested that many essay responses were giving a sophisticated plot summary of the text, rather than engaging with the text and critically analysing. This workshop then continued to provide activities and examples of ways in which students would critically examine the texts. Examination of other pieces of writing (particularly in newspapers and magazines) and discussions based around these examples can help students identify the difference between descriptions and analysis. The workshop also emphasised writing in steps: developing strong critical introductions, developing paragraphs, writing topic sentences and peer-writing of paragraphs. The suggestion was made that by taking smaller steps,

students could slowly come to produce essays that analyse. Emphasis was placed on the continual writing and discussion of this writing, until the point at which each student could recognise the vocabulary and content they need to use to analyse.

The Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website provides excellent resources for teaching critical thinking skills. One such resource is the TKI power point presentation “Student-Conversations that Promote Learning”. The notes emphasise the importance of moving away from closed questions that have a predetermined response in mind. It is found that these questions lead to the recall of facts and simple comprehension. However, open questions can encourage students to think beyond the literal and enable teachers to develop students’ understanding and promote critical thinking. Open questions also allow for a range of responses and therefore make progressive cognitive demands on the student. This resource also shows the importance of providing time to respond to questions and encouraging students to ask the questions. TKI also promoted the use of Bloom’s taxonomy to focus classroom discussions and thinking skills. This Ministry resource suggests Bloom’s taxonomy can be used to challenge, clarify, and prompt students to provide observations and reflections.

Dr. Catherine C. Linn’s (2002) work on critical thinking “Critical Thinking: A Source for Enjoyment”, is an important piece of literature based on the teaching of analytical thinking skills necessary for level 2 English. The focus of this piece of literature is the teaching and learning approaches and activities to engage students in a text and to think critically. Dr. Linn suggests that teachers must encourage individual learning and responses, and must never give ‘correct answers’ or provide responses for rote learning. Questions asked should be open-ended and interpretative. Linn also recommends moving students to look outside the text by investigating the historical, political and social significance of each. This emphasises the importance of never studying a text in isolation. Another focus of this literature was closely analysing the choices made by the author. This literature suggests we can prompt students to engage with texts by reading them aloud and discussing how the text impacts them emotionally. Class discussions should be based around the choices of the author – looking at language, images, structure, form and narration and the effects these have on the reader. With total engagement in the text (i.e., looking at the effects and significance of the texts), students can be stimulated to respond more critically to the texts.

The review of literature surrounding critical thinking skills played an important role in the focus of our research and the directions we wished to take. Each piece of literature focused on the problems many students face from having to move away from ‘describe and explain’ to the more cognitively demanding skills of ‘analyse’ and ‘evaluate’. These skills need to be taught, rather than assumed at level 2 in order for students to start using these skills in their response to text essays. This literature review therefore provided a basis of activities to include in our lessons to teach the skills of critical thinking. Following this literature review, we also decided to use Bloom’s taxonomy as a basis for most of our research as a way to promote higher order thinking skills within our students.

## **Methodology**

This section outlines the research questions, the sample, and data collection methods used to carry out the action research. In addition, the assessment for learning strategies implemented are discussed.

### **Research questions**

The driving question for this research was:

- Does a programme of analysing text, which relies on Bloom's taxonomy of thinking skills, enhance student critical processes and essay writing skills, so that they achieve success in NCEA level 2 papers 90377, 90378 and 90379?

The specific research questions were:

- Does a programme for analysing text which relies on Bloom's taxonomy of thinking skills improve students' essay writing skills?
- Does a programme of analysing text lead to greater enjoyment of English, that is, do students' opinion of and attitudes towards English improve?

### **Sample**

This research involved the three English classes being assessed for level 2 achievement standards at Whakatane High School in 2005. Altogether, 65 students were involved. The three teachers of these classes, Lauren Crowe, Rebecca Quin and Anna Blake worked together to plan and implement and assess all aspects of this research.

### **Data collection**

Students were asked to complete a survey at the beginning of the project, in term 2, which gauged their interest level, confidence, purpose, prospects and enjoyment in aspects of learning English. They were re-surveyed at the very end of that academic year. See Appendices 1 and 2 for copies of the questionnaires.

The first questionnaire, before the formative practices outlined below began, focussed on student perceptions of the skills needed to achieve the course, the value of the skills, of the course itself, and the students' estimates about their own potential to achieve at the end of the year.

In the first questionnaire, we were looking for these important indicators:

- understanding of the requirements of level 2 English
- confidence to achieve
- importance of success
- enjoyment
- existing strategies to support achievement
- willingness to try other strategies and assess their success
- purpose(s) in studying English
- difficult aspects of writing text analysis

In the second questionnaire, we asked a similar question set, but included an overall enjoyment rating for the course and asked students to indicate changes in attitude, confidence and skill with which they approached texts. We asked them to discuss any value they felt they had gained from the "Bloomin" activities, and how they believed this might impact on their NCEA results.

All three teachers held informal discussions regularly with students to gain feedback on how the lessons and activities were impacting on students' learning and engagement. Comments made by students were recorded as notes. Teachers also observed their own and one another's classes during the activities, and recorded their observations. These were shared and discussed among teachers.

External examination results were also important in indicating the success of the strategies implemented. Results were compared over years, classes and texts.

### **Assessment for learning strategies**

Working intensely together, the three teachers involved in this project planned a series of five broad activities, covering a varying number of lessons, which introduced Bloom's taxonomy and its application to level 2 analysis requirements. The lessons also covered structural and vocabulary development, the importance of creating an effective introduction, and the careful steps through which to bring the ideas embedded in texts into other contexts and generalised discussion. The motivation was to offer discursive, thought-provoking experiences for students, and to progress to dynamic opportunities to create high-level verbal and written responses. We believed that the kind of formative practices that we found effective in the junior school could translate into an NCEA environment. By increasing the potential to stimulate student responses, we hoped to support better success at NCEA level 2.

The activities fell into five broad categories, and there were between two and four possible sessions needed to teach each category. The lessons are included in full in the appendices of this report. The categories were:

**The introduction:** these lessons enabled students to recognise and then develop an essay introduction that signalled to readers that analysis skills were being employed. The lessons addressed the role of the topic chosen by the student, the vocabulary and structure of a good introduction, and ways to encourage the reader to continue reading.

**Bloom's taxonomy:** this section of activities allowed students to become familiar with Bloom's, and to determine which skills they could employ in their own writing that would reach the level 2 criteria. The students were taught how to self question, so that they could answer in a way that would demonstrate analysis skills.

**Analysis:** these lessons discuss and teach a structure and outcome for essay paragraphs that support analysis skills. They focus on implication, relevance and significance of what is read, and encourage the students to use evidence woven into their writing. These lessons also stimulate students to explore the language through which the implication and relevance are delivered to them.

**Comparison and discussion activities:** These activities are mostly oral and visual in nature, allowing students to develop strong ideas and opinions about the characters and situations they have met in the studied texts. They are intended to be enjoyable, and require a high level of engagement from students.

**Exam practicalities:** A section which dealt with the strategies necessary to analyse texts inside the confines of an examination room. The intentions were to offer an opportunity to create a mind map/brainstorm for each text, to examine how the features of the text interrelate with each other, and to offer strategies and techniques to aid revision for the text analysis essays.

These lessons were implemented over two weeks at first, and teachers kept notes and spent time in discussion together, and informally with students, through this time. The activities were revisited in other forms, and across the texts studied from the time of original teaching at the beginning of term 2 until students went on examination leave at the end of the teaching year. The lessons in themselves are not definitive or complete, but were an attempt to create diversity of approach and a focus on skill development.

### **Limitations**

We acknowledge that there are other factors which can influence achievement: text choices, class sizes, classroom dynamics, and prior knowledge can impact on success levels. Where relevant, these will be acknowledged as possible sources of influence on results, although their impact can be difficult to pinpoint.

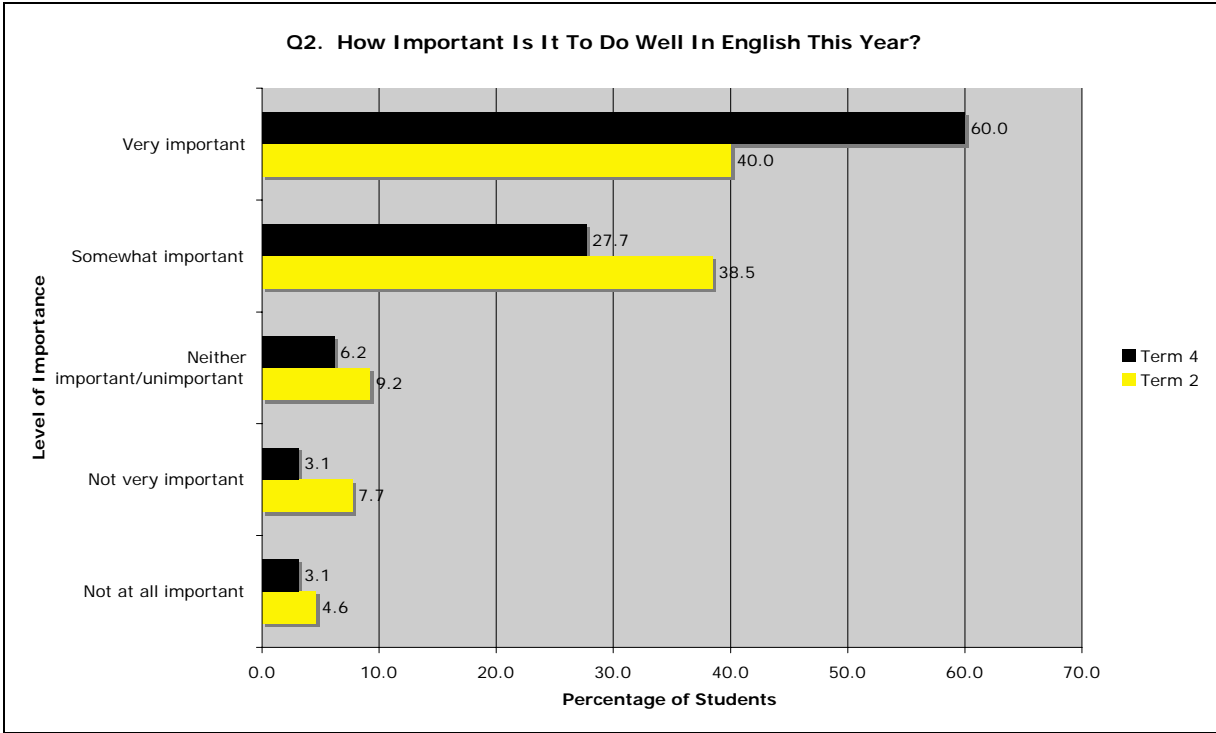
**Main findings**

Information from the two surveys is discussed here, as well as analysis of students’ achievement within this school’s historical context, and in comparison with national statistics from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA). An evaluation of the project’s impact on formative practices follows, and a discussion of possible next steps and further strategies to support success.

**Survey data**

Students were surveyed twice, in term 2 at the beginning of the project, and in term 4, on the last teaching day of the year. The second survey repeated earlier questions in order to establish shifts in attitude, confidence and knowledge, but also included questions asking students what they felt they had learned from the thinking-based lessons, whether the intervention had been successful, and any gaps in their learning they felt still remained.

As shown in graph 1, 78.5% of students acknowledged the importance of performing well in English studies in term 2 (87.7% by term 4). In this statistic was embedded a justification for our motivation in searching for change in our approaches to level 2 English, and a perception of the potential value of our intervention for our students.

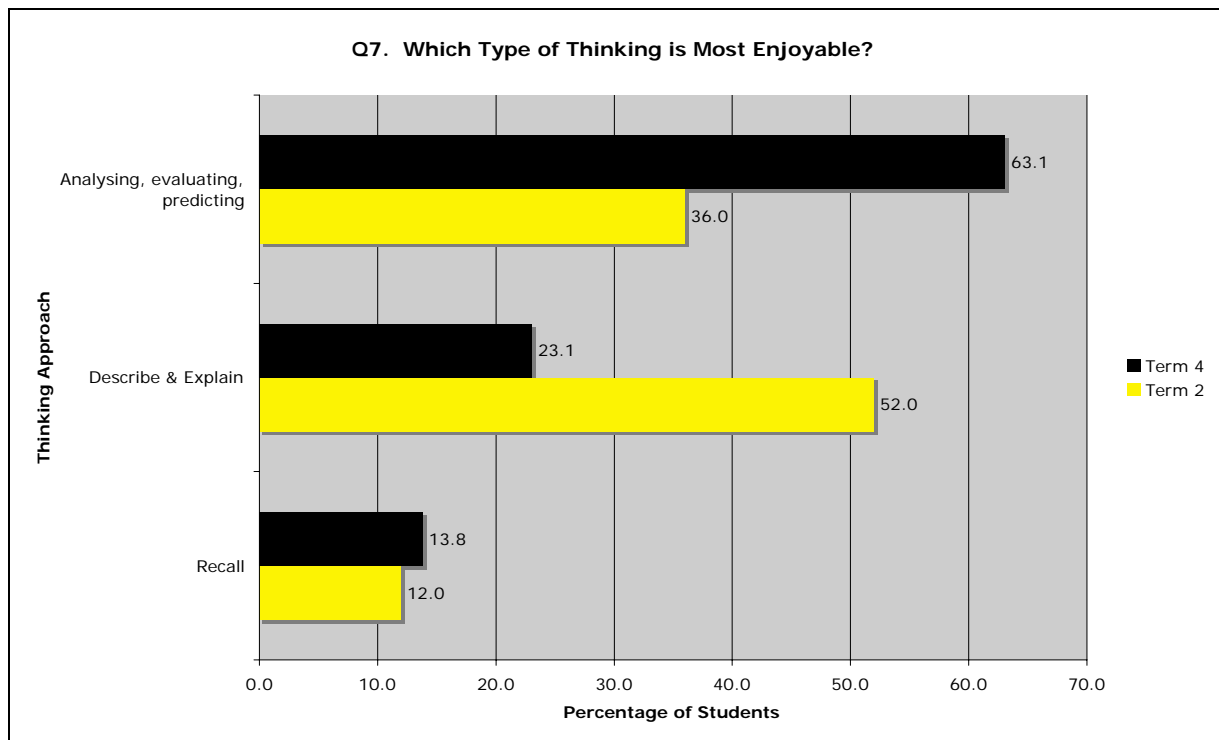


*Graph 1: the importance of English*

As the examinations drew closer, students acknowledged a stronger focus on the requirements of the level 2 course, and more saw a need to perform well (60% believed it was very important to perform well in English in term 4, compared with 40% in term 2). A similar proportion of students maintained their enjoyment of the course throughout the year (30.8% reported enjoying the course in term 4, compared with 33.8% in term 2).

Note taking diminished as a preferred tool to enhance learning (6.2% term 4, compared with 13.3% term 2), but learning by rote became a positive option for seven students (only two earlier in the year). Students continuously favoured classroom discussions and debates as learning tools (38.3% in term 2 and 35.4% in term 4). As shown in graph 2, the percentage of

students who found analysing, evaluating and making predictions about texts enjoyable rose by the end of the year.

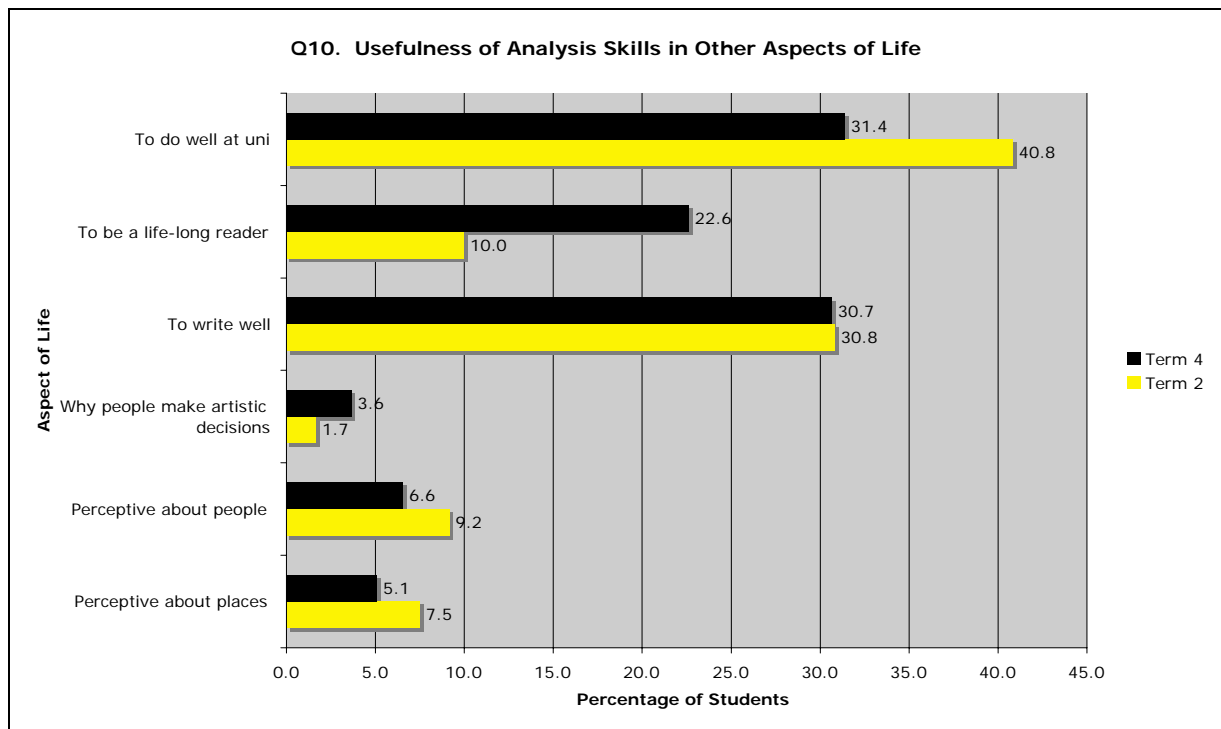


Graph 2: student survey data. Which type of thinking is most enjoyable?

Individual students also suggested rewriting essays to improve them, using internet sources, and one-to-one teacher support as effective tools for enhancing learning.

By term 4, more students were confident about their ability to succeed in the examination standards (67.7% in term 4, compared to 50.8% in term 2), although the numbers of students confident to use identified thinking verbs remained more or less constant throughout the year (18.8% in term 4, 17.5% in term 2).

An interesting question concerned students’ perceptions of a purpose in studying English. As shown in graph 3, by term 4, 22.6% of students indicated that developing the skills to make them “life-long readers” has been an outcome of studies in text analysis. There was no change in the proportion that saw writing well as an outcome, and fewer students in term 4 believed that the analysis skills they had integrated into their own practice would support them in tertiary studies.

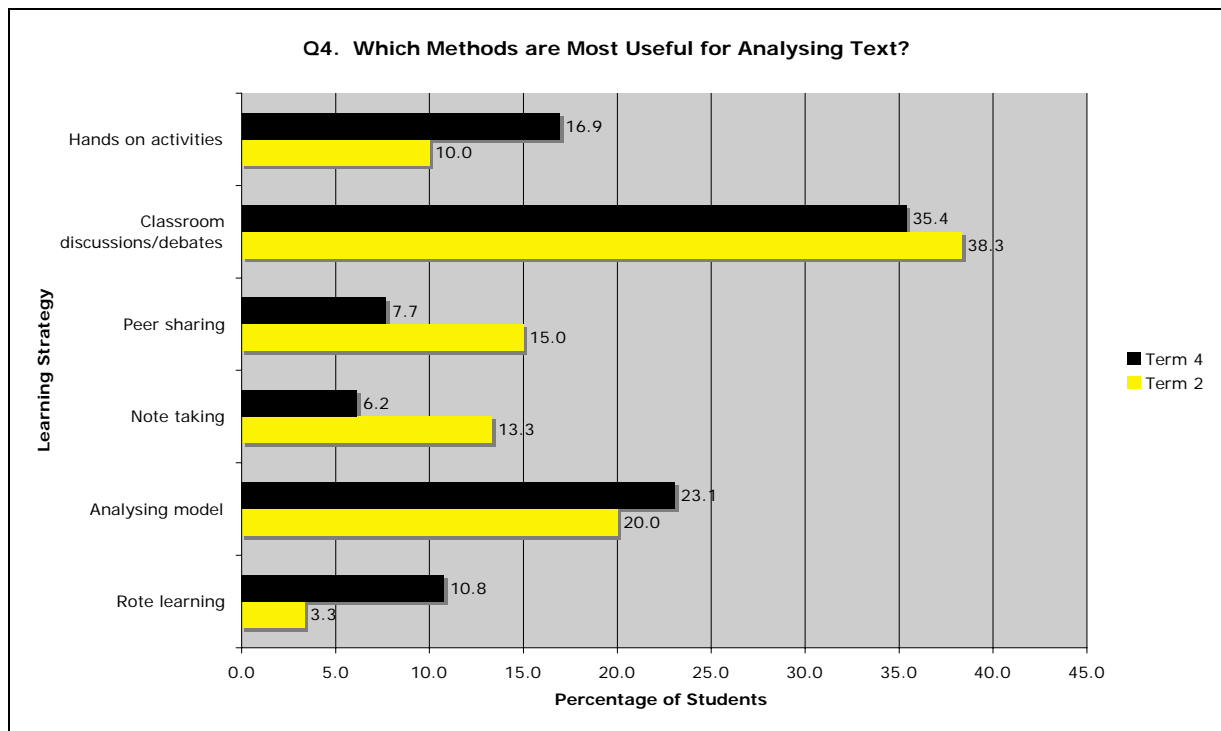


*Graph 3: students' perceptions of the usefulness of analysis skills*

Students became more confident about their expected achievement as the course drew to a close. A significant number of students were overconfident in their predictions of achievement. On average, five more students than predicted failed to achieve. Across three standards, an average number of eight more students predicted excellence than actually achieved it. It is important to discuss the reasons for, and implications, of this. Some points of interest for us are:

- students felt confident to achieve because they had engaged with the texts studied.
- surveys were completed before the intensive exam preparation time. Time organisation may have inhibited success.
- teachers may need to support students further in achieving the potential they see in themselves. This may be done through revision and further practice of targeted skills. Also of value may be shared and scaffolded writing, peer editing and extensive feedback and feedforward.

As illustrated in graph 4, by the end of the project, students felt that the hands-on practices employed to facilitate text analysis had been useful.

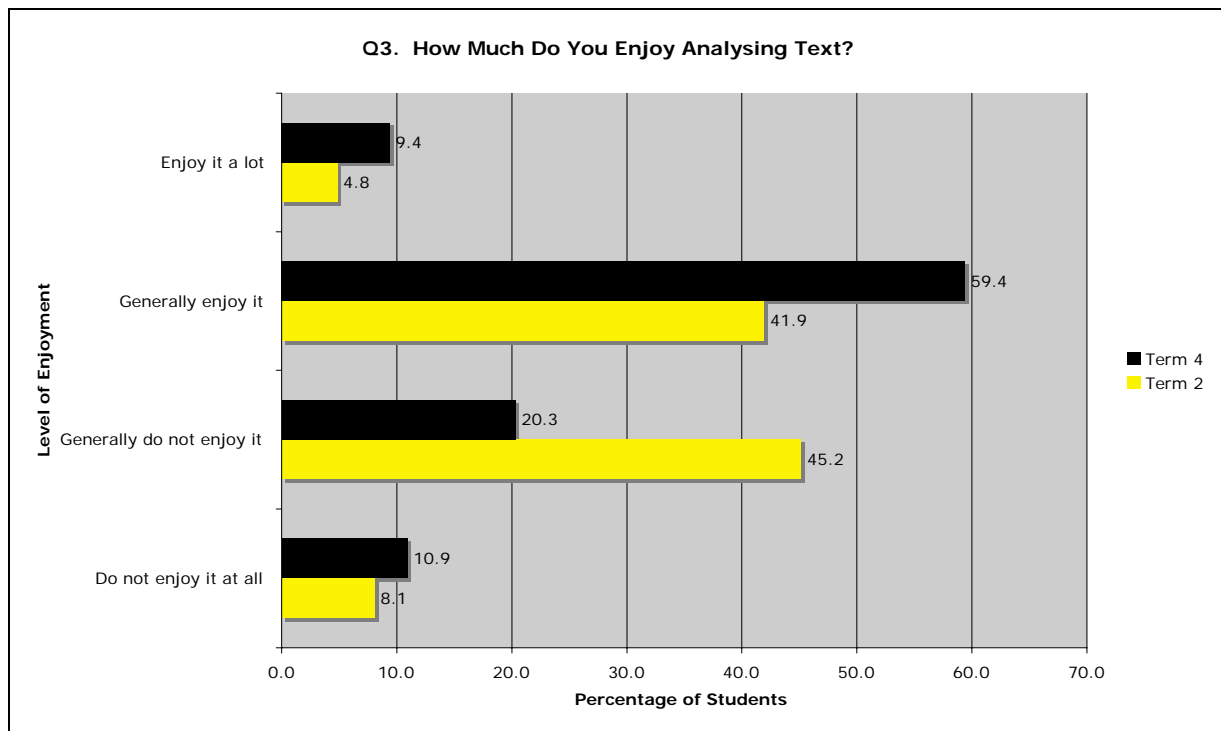


*Graph 4: methods most useful for analysing text*

As part of the final survey, many students noted that they had valued the experiences of the lessons offered. Studies were acknowledged by some as being deeper, easier, and more fun. Students believed that they could write better as a result of their studies, and could see writers’ and directors’ techniques more clearly. Some students suggested that the lessons had made little difference, and that they paid little attention anyway. In the final survey, more typical comments by students suggested that they valued:

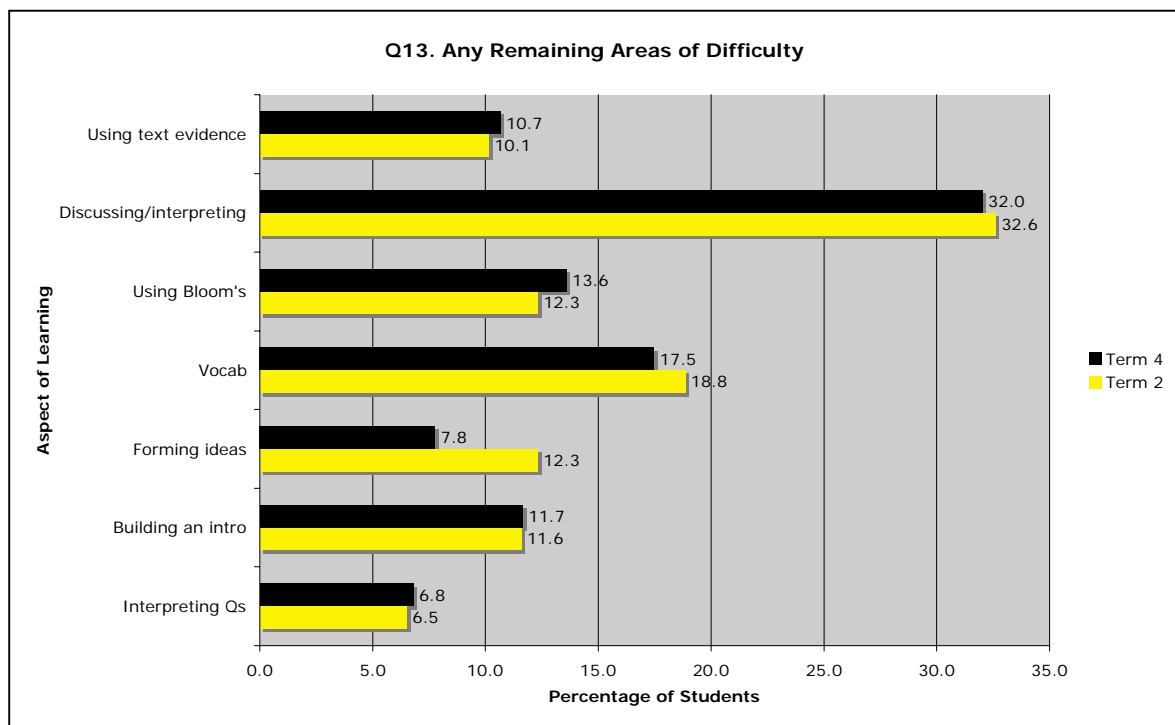
- “Bloom’s, because it gave me more knowledge about poetic devices.”*
- “How to link evidence and how to form an intro.”*
- “Group work and idea showing, also essay support.”*
- “Being given notes about the texts.”*
- “Forming ideas with my mates.”*

The percentage of students who enjoyed the process of analysing texts improved over the course of the year (graph 5). We believe this is significant because it indicates that despite the high pressure of looming exams, students were able to continue to engage with texts.



*Graph 5: enjoyment of analysing text*

At the end of the year's learning, students were asked what areas of the programme they continued to find difficult. Nearly a third (32%) of the students indicated that they remained concerned about their lack of ability to discuss and interpret ideas in texts, and 17.5% were still unsure of their vocabulary skills. These are the two most challenging and new areas of learning for students, and skills they were required to develop quickly at level 2. They underpin success at this level. Students here show their awareness of the challenging skills necessary to achieve, and they signal the need to continue working on these. The results are shown on graph 6:



*Graph 6: remaining areas of difficulty*

Overall, the questionnaire results reflect that the students were very receptive to new strategies and approaches to texts. It has become apparent that students particularly valued the class discussions and debates surrounding texts (38.3% found these strategies useful in term 2 and 35.4% remained interested in term 4).

### **Discussions with students in response to teaching**

All three teachers spent time in informal discussion with students throughout the two terms of the research. These conversations were generally held after a lesson, and involved the teacher asking for immediate, unplanned evaluative responses from various students. The purpose of recording these short responses was to support the brief, written comments on the surveys, targeting more spontaneous, task-specific feedback. Each teacher kept an informal log of responses. We have recorded a sample here.

Early in the teaching, some students commented:

*“I don’t know. Why can’t we just do what we did last year? ... Learn it just before [the exam].”*

*“I’d rather just deal with the book.”*

*“It was good. I didn’t know all those words.”*

*“The intro skills are great. You feel like, once you’ve written an intro, you have planned your whole argument. It’s like formal writing.”*

*“When we joined Susie and Lindsey in the diagram, something made good sense. I saw how that writer had made a plan to do that.”*

*“I was sure I knew everything that had happened until we did that.”*

*“I’ll be kinda scared if I go in there not knowing what to write.”*

Later in the year, other students said:

*“It just seems like really hard work. Like, I don’t know, making a huge thing of it.”*

*“If I know what verb to use, that will help me write. When I go into the exam, I’ll know how to start my intro, and what questions to ask myself. Answering them is just writing.”*

*“If I have those notes ready, I will be ok with the questions. I can adapt them better and use the key words.”*

*“How will I use the evaluation? They don’t want to know what my opinion is. Don’t we need to be more neutral?”*

*-Yeah I don’t agree with that. There is right and wrong here. We need to know what is true.”*

*“I feel better about the exam analysis. I know that my idea will be accepted ... if I can argue it properly.”*

The attitudes in these comments, representative of the tone and nature of the conversations, is mixed, but leans towards acceptance of the techniques taught through the lessons. The students were asked to change an approach which had given them success in the past, and some were hesitant. They were, though, demonstrating a greater willingness to individualise approaches and outcomes, and to justify their statements.

Post-examination conversations, when teachers met the students as they left the exam rooms, were very dynamic and bubbly. Students’ initial reactions to the papers held grounds for optimism. We believe that this was, in large part, due to the realisation, by then held by the students, that they had been prepared to meet a range of possible topics in the exam, none of them predictable. Rather than being “ready with what I know”, most students had shown they were ready to think and adapt.

## NCEA results data

NZQA school results show a higher level of success in the number of students at Whakatane High School achieving externally assessed papers at level 2 in 2005 for English compared to national data for 2005, which gives an average of 45.9%. In 2005, an average 70.0% of our students who sat the papers passed. The outcome also compares very favourably with school data for 2004, which shows that 44.8% of students gained Achieved or above. All levels of performance demonstrated higher average percentages than both national averages and school results for 2004.

The number of students who sat each paper was on a par with the numbers of those who sat in 2004: an average of 47 in 2004, and 49 in 2005.

All levels of achievement in 2005 were higher than national averages, as shown in table 1. With reference to our formative work developing convincing and insightful analytical skills, the growth in levels of merit and excellence achievement seems particularly striking.

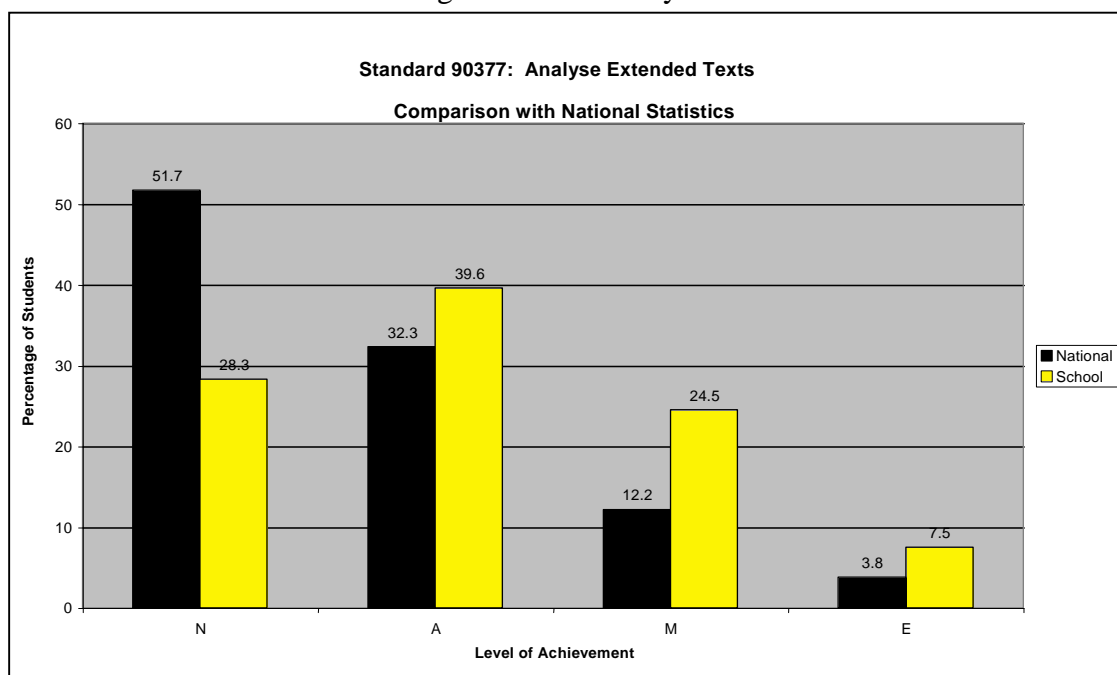
Across the three standards, 159 results were returned. The average percentages of students achieving each grade are:

	2004		2005	
	School (n=142)	National	School (n=159)	National
Not Achieved:	55.2%	60.5%	30.2%	54.1%
Achieved:	30.2%	28.9%	46.5%	32.5%
Merit:	12.6%	8.4%	18.2%	10.5%
Excellence:	2.1%	2.2%	5.0%	2.8%

*Table 1: average results for three level 2 English external assessments (90377, 90378 and 90379) in 2004 and 2005*

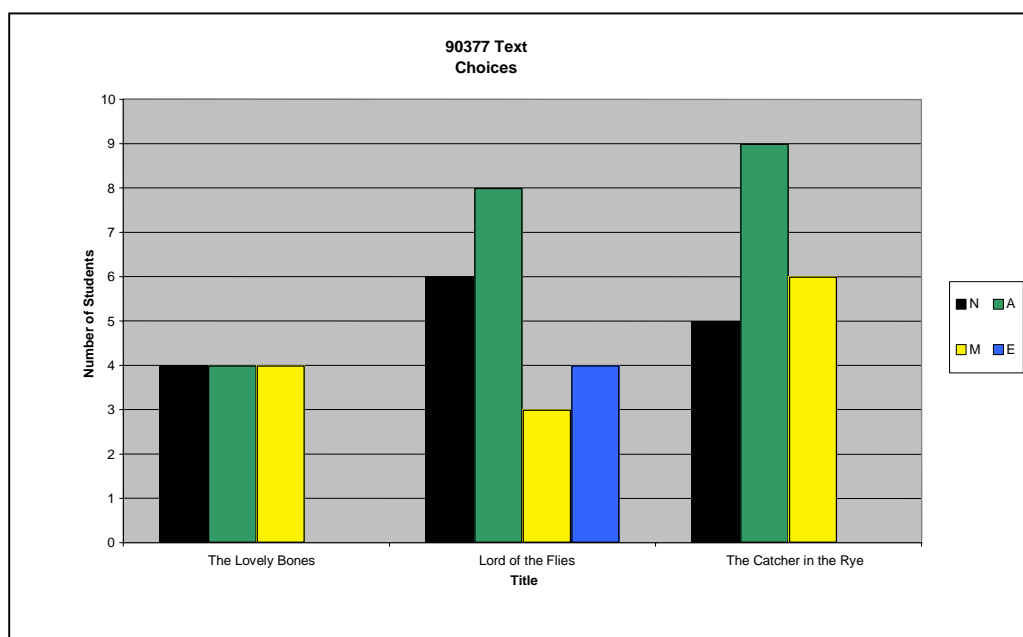
### Achievement standard 90377

In 2005, 28.3% of students failed to achieve this standard, compared with 51.7% nationally. In 2004, 43.8% of our students had failed to achieve (compared to 57% nationally). The 2005 merit and excellence results were double the national percentage rates. The standard results are an indicator to us that our teaching intervention may have been effective.



*Graph 7: 2005 statistics for 90377*

This paper requires students to analyse extended texts. The texts we used in our three classes were *The Lovely Bones* (2002) by Alice Sebold, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J.D. Salinger and *The Lord of the Flies* (1954) by William Golding. The text choices were interesting. Salinger and Golding studies are supported by material available in authoritative reading and interpretation, and this could give students an advantage in the analysis required by this NCEA paper. Those texts are “tried and true”. With *The Lovely Bones*, a much newer but equally thought-provoking text, students’ results indicate that the skills delivered by the Bloom’s lessons allowed them an opportunity to work as intensively and successfully as with the more recognised texts. *The Lord of the Flies* achieved four excellence marks. All texts gave a high proportion of merit grades, *The Lovely Bones* 33.33%, *The Lord of the Flies* 14.28% (and 19% Excellence), and *The Catcher in the Rye* 30%. Thus, the choice of texts may also have been a factor in achievement rates.

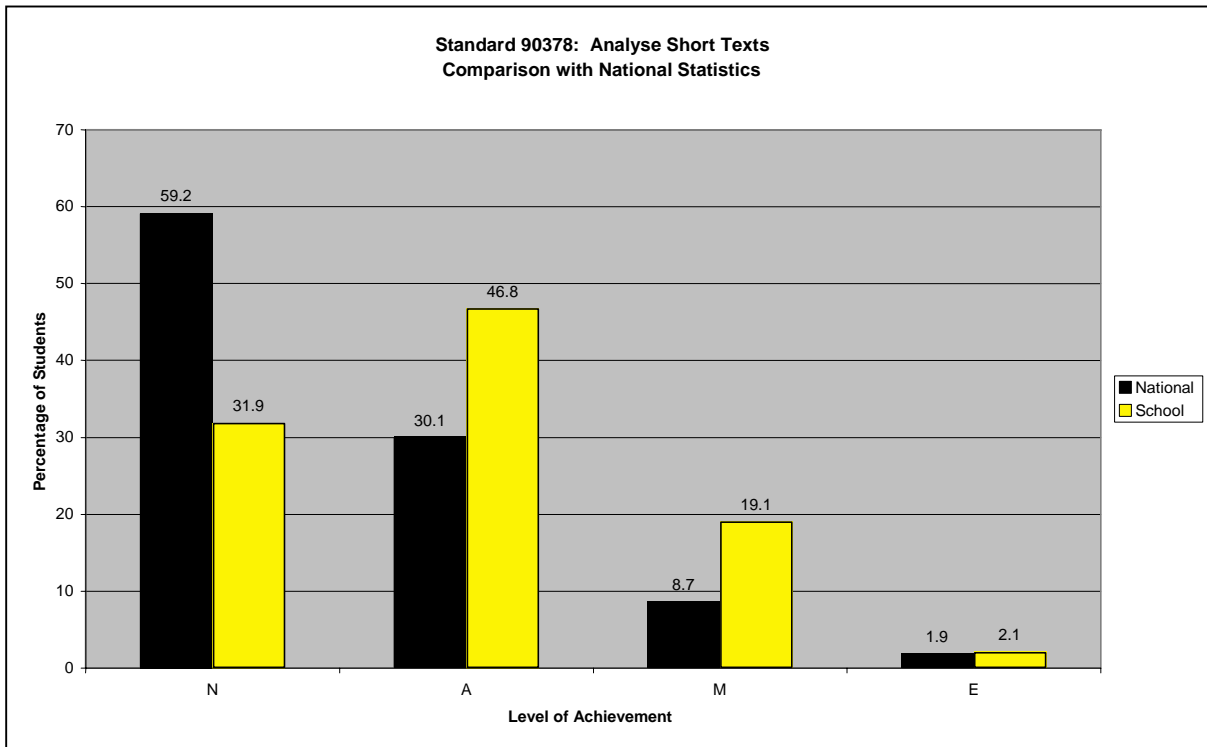


Graph 8: Comparison of Extended Texts

### **Achievement standard 90378**

Students are required to analyse two or more short texts within one essay. All classes studied poetry, specifically the authors J.K. Baxter and Sylvia Plath, and one class undertook a study of sonnets and the sonnet form. This last topic gained the standard’s only excellence grade, and the deliberate, obvious attention to poetic form embedded in this topic may have contributed to this.

This standard was achieved by 69.9% of the students. Nine merit grades (19.1%) were gained. This is a very different result from 2004, when half that percentage of students gained merit. Nationally, there was a shift from 6.4% of students gaining merit in 2004, to 8.7% gaining merit in 2005. While not statistically significant, this school statistic is meaningful for us, because poetry is hard to teach. This choice of genre was deliberate though, because poetry demands language discussion, an aspect of text that can be ignored or treated superficially in short story and other short text forms. However, students often feel little connection with poetry, which they meet seldom in their personal lives, except in song form. Discussions with students and among the three teachers suggested that poetry studies were quite lively and motivating through the lessons offered. We feel confident that strong student engagement with the texts, through very interactive tasks, contributed to their success in this standard.

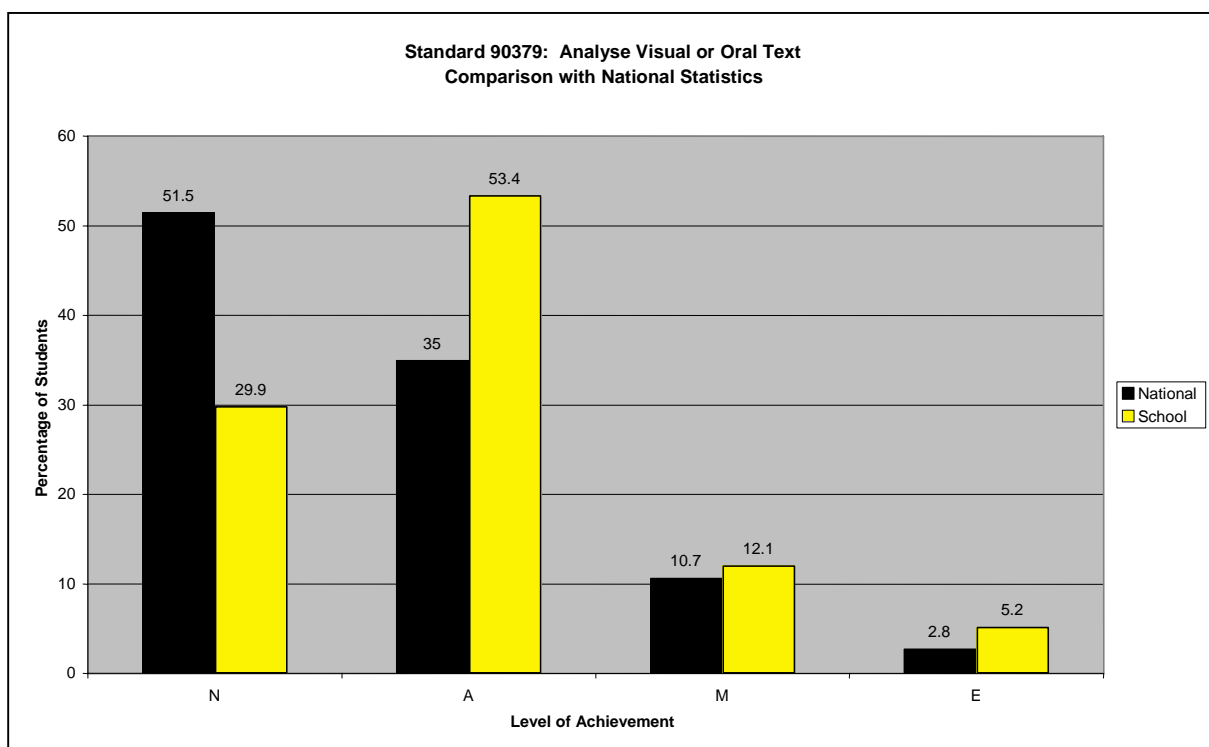


*Graph 9: 2005 statistics for 90378*

***Achievement standard 90379***

Achievement standard 90379 involved the study of visual or oral text. Only two texts were used, Halstrom’s *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* and *A Beautiful Mind*, directed by Ron Howard.

This paper showed huge improvement from 2004 statistics, as 70.7% of student achieved, compared with only 29.3% in 2004. All pass grades doubled the achievement of the previous year, a result that was not reflected nationally (41.4% of students nationally passed the standard in 2004, and 48.5% in 2005).



*Graph 10: 2005 statistics for 90379*

Halstrom's film gained three excellence grades. Halstrom's intense use of symbol and symbolic codes of film-making may give students a critical viewpoint from which to analyse more perceptively.

Teachers worked intensively on this standard, using a full range of activities and several practice opportunities for students. In discussion, students suggested that the lessons on writing introductions and essay structure were very helpful in preparing for this standard. Other students acknowledged in discussion that they found the technical aspects of film most difficult to analyse because the director's intentions for many techniques seemed vague and unconnected to them. Our formative work with these students lead them to employ specific analytical skills of inference, connection and speculation to effectively analyse director's decisions.

The results gained in 2005 for this standard demonstrate most clearly that a formative strategy targeting thinking levels and associated skills, encouraging the pursuit of individuals' areas of strength and interest, can be effective at level 2.

## Discussion

The specific research questions of this project asked whether a programme for analysing text, which relies on Bloom's taxonomy, could be effective in raising enjoyment and achievement levels in English. Analysis of the results of externally assessed achievement standards indicates that many students were positively influenced by the teaching of these skills in an environment that allowed students to engage in some very collaborative and inclusive activities. NCEA results for all three targeted standards improved substantially on the previous year's results (school and national) and on the national result averages for 2005.

The results of the surveys completed by students have shown that, in general, their attitudes and confidence about analysing text at level 2 were improved by involvement in the activities based on high order thinking skills. Students became more confident to analyse text independently. Informal discussion with students since the examination has suggested that many were far more ready to respond to the specific topics set out in the papers, rather than use rote learned material.

Discussion among the teachers involved, combined with the results of student surveys in terms 2 and 4, have revealed important outcomes; teacher and student enjoyment of the process was high, and teachers and students felt a high degree of clarity and purpose. Greyness surrounding the requirements of the three papers targeted has dissipated, and teachers feel sure about repeating and enhancing the process in 2006.

Each student has a different skill set, different learning experiences and priorities. Each brings existing knowledge and understandings to build analysis of texts. "Bloomin' Excellent" has been an attempt to value and utilise these individual attributes by validating student responses to texts. This was undertaken, ironically, by offering learning activities which could be applied to *any deep text*, so that teachers refrained from delivering packages of received wisdom about texts, but instead supported students to pursue and refine their own ideas with sufficient intensity and insight to achieve well. Many students entered the examination sure in their knowledge of texts, quotations, thematic content and their ability to construct a valid, consistent, analytical argument based on their personal understandings.

### **Further research recommended**

The researchers believe that it would be beneficial to revisit the learning activities developed, and make changes and refinements. During lesson evaluation, it became evident that more investigation and practice time could have been helpful in the Bloom's taxonomy activities. Student surveys indicated that discussing and interpreting material remained a concern for 32% of them.

The positive achievement results lead us now to look for a wider application of the formative processes used. It would be very interesting to pursue these ideas in two directions; firstly across other levels of English study both to level 1, and to level 3 and Scholarship, by continuing to develop understanding of Bloom's Taxonomy at the appropriate categories, and by developing activities and structures to suit. Secondly, the concept of analysis used in English has a relationship with that of some social sciences, and it may be valuable to pursue this research in media studies and history. The scale of development of the concepts involved here would rely on the support from the wider school community, and possibly clusters of schools. Ongoing research would be vital to monitor outcomes for teachers and students.

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## Appendix 1: Student Questionnaire Level 2 Term 2 2005

1. Please rate your overall enjoyment of English at NCEA Level 2.

Do not enjoy it at all	
Generally do not enjoy it	
Generally enjoy it	
Enjoy it a lot	

2. How important is it for you to do well in English this year?

Not at all important	
Not very important	
Neither important/unimportant	
Somewhat important	
Very important	

3. Please rate your enjoyment in terms of analysing text.

Do not enjoy it at all	
Generally do not enjoy it	
Generally enjoy it	
Enjoy it a lot	

4. How confident do you currently feel about your text analysis essays in the end of year exam?

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

5. Rate the following methods (1 to 6) to show which you find to be the most useful for studying text (1=most useful, 6=least useful):

Rote learning responses/essays	
Teacher-provided model essays	
Note taking	
Peer sharing/ teaching of ideas	
Classroom discussions/ debates	
Hands-on activities, e.g. reading aloud, role-play, set-drawing	

6. Are there any other methods not mentioned above that you find useful for studying text?

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7. How confident do you currently feel about tackling and analysing a new text by yourself?

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

8. Rate in order (1 to 3) to indicate which type of thinking you enjoy most (with 1 being your favourite and 3 being your least favourite).

Recall e.g. dates, names, facts	
Low level thinking e.g. describe and explain	
High level thinking e.g. analysing, evaluating, predicting	

9. Rate how confident you feel using high order thinking to discuss and write about texts (e.g. analysing, evaluating, predicting etc.)

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

10. To what degree do you think that an ability to analyse texts will help you in your life outside of school?

Will not help at all	
Will not help very much	
Will be somewhat helpful	
Will be very helpful	

11. If you thought analysing text would help in your life outside of school, please tick the boxes where you feel that your understanding of texts may help you:

To be perceptive about places	
To be perceptive about people	
See why people make artistic decisions	
To write well	
To be a life-long reader	
To do well at University/tertiary study	
Other ( <i>please specify</i> )	

12. Based on your current performance, estimate your end of year external assessments results for the text analysis essays;

Short text	
Visual text	
Extended text	

13. Briefly explain in the space provided, your opinion about rote learned responses to essay questions. Do you like them? Why/ why not. Do you find rote learned responses useful, or do you prefer developing your own responses?

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14. Are there any parts of text analysis that you find especially difficult?

Interpreting questions	
Introduction	
Forming ideas	
Vocabulary	
Giving examples from the text	
Discussing implications / interpreting	
Other: (please specify)	

15. Do you have any other comments to make on analysis of text?

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***Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey***

**Appendix 2: Student questionnaire level 2 term 4 2005**

1. Please rate your overall enjoyment of English at NCEA Level 2.

Do not enjoy it at all	
Generally do not enjoy it	
Generally enjoy it	
Enjoy it a lot	

2. How important is it for you to do well in English this year?

Not at all important	
Not very important	
Neither important/unimportant	
Somewhat important	
Very important	

3. Please rate your enjoyment in terms of analysing text.

Do not enjoy it at all	
Generally do not enjoy it	
Generally enjoy it	
Enjoy it a lot	

4. Rate the following methods to show which you find to be the most useful for studying text (1=most useful, 6=least useful). Use each number only once:

Rote learning teacher-provided responses/essays	
Analysing teacher-provided model whole class essays	
Note taking	
Peer sharing/ teaching of ideas	

Classroom discussions/ debates	
Hands-on activities, e.g. reading aloud, role-play, set-drawing	

5. Are there any other methods not mentioned above that you find useful for studying text?

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6. How confident do you currently feel about tackling and analysing a new text by yourself?

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

7. Rate in order (1 to 3) to indicate which type of thinking you enjoy most (with 1 being your favourite and 3 being your least favourite).

Recall e.g. dates, names, facts	
Low level thinking e.g. describe and explain	
High level thinking e.g. analysing, evaluating, predicting	

8. Rate how confident you now feel using high order thinking to discuss and write about texts (e.g. analysing, evaluating, predicting etc).

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

9. To what degree do you think that an ability to analyse texts will help you in your life outside of school?

Will not help at all	
Will not help very much	
Will be somewhat helpful	
Will be very helpful	

10. If you thought analysing text would help in your life outside of school, please tick the boxes where you feel that your understanding of texts may help you:

To be perceptive about places	
To be perceptive about people	
See why people make artistic decisions	
To write well	
To be a life-long reader	
To do well at University/tertiary study	
Other ( <i>please specify</i> )	

11. Based on your practice exam performance in Term 3 and your current study plan, estimate your end of year external assessments results for the text analysis essays;

Short text	
Visual text	
Extended text	

12. How important is it for you to write about ideas **you** have developed in the essay questions? These may have been worked through with a group or a teacher, but are essentially your own.

Not at all important	
Not very important	
Neither important/unimportant	
Somewhat important	
Very important	

13. Are there any parts of text analysis that you still find especially difficult?

Interpreting questions	
Building an introduction	
Forming ideas	
Vocabulary	
Using Blooms	
Discussing implications / interpreting / linking	
Using text evidence	
Other: (please specify)	

14. What were the key things you learnt about analysing text from taking part in this project?

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15. How confident do you currently feel about your text analysis essays in the NCEA exam?

Not at all confident	
Not very confident	
Somewhat confident	
Very confident	

16. What aspects of the process did you find most valuable?

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17. Will your approach to analysing text in the NCEA exam be different from the practice exams? If so, how will it differ?

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18. Has taking part in the project altered you attitude to analysing text/English? If so, how?

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*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey*

## Appendix 3 – Lessons plans

### **Bloomin’ Excellent: A Unit to Support High Achievement at NCEA Level 2, In Examination Questions Involving Analysis**

#### **Achievement Objectives**

- **Transactional Writing Level 7-8**

**Write clear, coherent explanations and reports. Debate a proposition or point of view. Structure well researched material effectively in appropriate styles for different audiences – in a range of authentic contexts.**

- **Thinking Critically Level 7-8**

**Interpret and evaluate written texts – identifying and discussing their language and literary qualities and relating them to personal, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

#### *1*

#### *Introducing the Intro*

#### **Learning Objectives**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- be able to think about, and write topic sentences to create interest & appeal to their writing.
- be able to deconstruct analysis of text topics & questions. They will breakdown the topic & establish an understanding of learning areas inside the text. (i.e what information they need to process)
- implement the aim & purpose into their writing, & entwine the question back into their answer. (learning to avoid monotonous structure).
- brainstorm (consider, reflect, assume, construct) ideas in relation to their topic/text & implement these when crafting their writing.

#### Task 1:

Crushing the Question (weaving the answers into the intro)

- Students split up into pairs or groups of three and choose a question for which they will write a shared introduction.
- Here is a question similar to what you may find in the exam:  
***Analyse visual / oral techniques used to establish a strong first impression of character(s) OR setting OR purpose AND how this first impression was important to the text as a whole.***
- Firstly, rewrite the question in the planning box, make choices and include your own text. Do this so that you are clear about your own purpose:  
***Analyse visual techniques used to establish a strong first impression of Cinderella AND how this first impression was important to Cinderella as a whole.***
- Students deconstruct the question – looking at what examples they would use from texts and what purpose these examples could serve in relation to the question.

## Task 2

### Capturing Creativity

- Choose a topic to work on alone. Write the topic they have chosen, so that they have made choices (signalled by OR in the topic) and inserted their own text.
- Write an essay introduction. Allow students to do this independently, it will be the basis for improvement.
- Look for similarity of patterns for example the classic; " *In this essay I will...* "Discuss the interest level with the class. Does it capture the reader's attention? How well does it encapsulate the topic?
- Introduce concept of grabbing the reader with a bold, opinionated sentence or question.
  - History has shown us that the mentally ill are isolated and despised by their communities.
  - Without belief in the goodness of people, it is hard to keep faith with the world.
  - Holden Caulfield is trapped in the wrong century.
  - How can families ever reconcile the violent death of a love one?

## Task 3

(Example introductions provided to students)

Here is a introduction to this topic written at Level 2.

*In the film Cinderella directed by Fredrico Fellini , Cinderella is an important character. We have a strong first impression of her through the use of high angle camera shots and direct lighting, so that she represents an idea of beauty and someone who is loved and protected. This is important because her circumstances change dramatically later in the text.*

Discuss in your group:

- Does this introduction grab you at the start?
- Is it interesting to read?
- Does it reveal the writers "take" on the topic?
- How could it be improved?

Now answer the questions above to assess this version:

*It is a strong person who can retain their compassion in the face of intolerable cruelty. Frederico Fellini's Cinderella is first seen in light and love. She is deliberately visually depicted as both absorbing and giving off warmth, using strong lighting and high angle shots. When her life is thrown into confusion, contrasting techniques add truth to dramatically changes circumstances. However, viewers are offered continuity of character through voice over techniques and dialogue, and original perceptions about strength of character hold true.*

Discuss with the class the Cinderella story with reference to the topic stated here:

- Record any key verbs and descriptors the students use in their discussion
- Look for different and interesting angles of approach, drawing out student's statements with responses like:
  - "so you're saying that ..."
  - "how is this different from ..."
  - "do you believe that? Is that true in your life?"

Students work in groups to prepare their own introduction to Cinderella. They may need to write their middle bit first, to help them refine a strong generalised or conclusive statement with which to open.

#### Task 4

##### Conduct an Interview

Copy the intro **you have written** double-spaced onto a separate sheet of paper

Swap with the person next to you

Take turns being the interviewer

Ask the writer and record replies below intro as bullet points:

- What is your topic? Explain what you believe is the best way to approach the topic.
- What do you believe are ideas that will help address this topic
- What conclusions have you drawn in response to the topic?
- Now return to the introduction. Read it back to the writer.
- Discuss together whether the introduction written connects with the discussion you have just had.
- Help your partner rewrite the introduction, so that it points towards the discussion outcomes.

Now swap roles...

## 2

### *Bloom's Taxonomy*

To encourage students to use the principles of Bloom's Taxonomy to help them analyse in their essay writing.

#### **Learning Objectives**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- Understand the categories of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy and be able to identify a learning activity or question that would require skills from each of the different learning levels.
- Be able to identify which level of the taxonomy students are using in their own essay writing and be able to identify skills they need to apply to move up to the next level of the taxonomy.
- Re-write a paragraph of their writing, so they are beginning to analyse and move higher in thinking levels on the Bloom's taxonomy.
- Discuss ideas and features that would allow students to begin deeply analysing in response to text questions.

#### **Resources:**

- Bloom's Taxonomy handout – one for each student.
- Analysis vocabulary table – one for each student.
- Students need to be reminded the night before to bring in a response to text essay they have written earlier in the year.

#### Task 1

Understand Bloom's Taxonomy and how it can help students with their essay writing.

- Hand out revised copies of the Bloom's Taxonomy for students to keep. Explain/ remind students what the Bloom's Taxonomy is, and how it shows the different levels of critical thinking. Read through the categories with students, answering any questions.
- For each level of Blooms, students give ideas of activities or questions that require that level of thinking for a text of study.
- As a class, decide which level of Bloom's (and therefore what level of thinking/ analysis) would be required for achieved, merit and excellence at NCEA Level Two.

## Task 2

Practice with Blooms: Rewrite a topic sentence to match each of the Bloom's Taxonomy levels.

- Give the students the following sentence:  
Cinderella loses stature, love and safety when her father dies, because she is treated like a servant.

Students need to re-write this sentence on coloured paper to meet each of the different Bloom's Taxonomy levels (using NCEA instructional words).

1. Illustrate
2. Show and outline
3. Explain, describe, show
4. Analyse, discuss, explain
5. Analyse and form judgements
6. Analyse (by generalisation and connection – moving beyond the text and forming connections with outside ideas).

Once finished, sentences are shared with and stuck on large charts.

## Task 3

Students identify what level of critical thinking/ analysis they are using within their essays.

- Students choose a response to text essay they have written earlier in the year. Students randomly choose five sentences from their essay and highlight them. Using Bloom's Taxonomy, students then make a decision about what level of Blooms they are using in each sentence.
  - In pairs, students report to a partner what level of Blooms they think they were writing at, answering the following:
  - What are the main reading and writing skills you are using in your essay (taken from Bloom's chart).
  - What level of Bloom's do you think you are working at within your essay?
  - What do you need to do to begin working at the next level of Blooms/ in what ways could you improve your writing to meet the next level of Blooms?

## Task 4

Re-write a paragraph, using analysis vocabulary.

- Give out chart of analysis vocabulary and discuss with students how this type of vocabulary can lead to analysis answers.
- Using the same essay as in activity two, students choose a paragraph they think was particularly poor, or written at a lower order thinking level. Students spend approximately 15 minutes re-writing their paragraph, trying to use higher order thinking skills from the Bloom's chart. Students also need to use at least five words from the vocabulary chart (to encourage analysis in their writing). Students tick off the five words as they write their paragraph. Paragraphs are handed in to teacher for feedback.

**FORGET SEXY, THIS IS ANALYSIS**

Purpose: to discuss and teach a structure and outcome for essay paragraphs that supports analysis skills.

**Learning Outcomes:**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- implement a strategy to construct internal paragraphs by modifying existing SEXY structure
- learn to construct strong topic sentences
- focus on analysis skills

Statement

Explanation

eXample

Y why is this important

Explanation is not a helpful strategy at Level 2. It encourages plot-based discussion, and the Level 1 skills of paraphrasing and summarising. The traditional paragraph structure of SEXY limits students' ability to analyse coherently, by allowing them to dwell in explanation and quote dumping. So, rather than completely disregard a well learned technique, this lesson will attempt to salvage the first aspect and radically modify the rest.

A topic sentence can be a sound way into an idea. It allows you to state the idea or opinion you will justify (for your own benefit, as well as the reader's) and provides a mini-plan of what you will discuss.

Task 1:

Practise constructing a topic sentence

- Read this paragraph:
 

*Cinderella is left alone in the big house, while her stepmother and sisters go off dancing. She cries bitterly, and it says in the story that "her tears fall like snowflakes into the quickly cooling ashes." This uses a simile, and is effective because her tears are compared to snow, which is freezing. Cinderella is cold in two ways; because the fire is out, and because she has been left in the cold, without family love.*
- Define the topic - the main push - the interesting idea, in this paragraph. Use Blooms taxonomy to help you use HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skills)
- Brainstorm words which refine the main idea you see. Do you need a Thesaurus? Focus on words from a formal register – a trick is to look at prefixes: de- con- dis- re- etc.
- In discussion still, formulate a sentence which is analytical, uses strong words, to pursue the important thing the writer is trying to say. This will be the topic sentence.

Task 2:

- Now try with this paragraph, completing the same activities:
 

*Sonnet LX written by William Shakespeare reduces our lives down to two short sentences.*  
*Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,*  
*So do our minutes hasten to their end;*

*We start out small like the calm sea, then as we get older we get bigger like a wave about to crash, then finally we can not ward off our fate, death, the wave crashes into the shore, just like the first wave another wave collides into the shore and so on and so forth, a cycle that will never end.*

You have made a sentence that will drive all the writing you do in the paragraph, but what will that writing involve? Explanation will not fulfil the Level 2 criteria.

### Task 3

Return to the Cinderella paragraph:

- Using the topic sentence you have written, discuss:
  - Implications (the “so what?”)
  - Relevance (“why important to other characters/events?”)
  - Significance (“how does this connect to other parts of the story, or to ideas outside the text?”)
- Now rewrite the paragraph, weaving quotations and to say for you what the original writer has “explained” about the text. You do not need to discuss the plot.

## 4

### ***SOME OF THESE THINGS ARE NOT LIKE THE OTHERS ...***

Ok, so in order to fully draw out idea ideas and emotions from texts, a helpful strategy is to compare and contrast across the texts studied through the year. An obvious, big connection does not have to be present, just a vehicle for connection/disconnection.

### **Learning Objectives**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- Forge connections between texts
- Articulate ideas in debates
- Use text evidence to support or contradict opinions
- Use analysis skills of speculation, justification, and substantiation.

### Task 1

Venn Diagram

- Working in groups, students identify a characteristic of an important character in the extended text they have studied. (eg Susie Salmon is desperate to experience life fully)
- Find examples from the text to support the claim.
- In the film you have studied, decide which character comes closest to embodying that same characteristic.
- Draw a Venn diagram on a large sheet of paper, with the shared quality and other qualities shared in the middle
- Discuss ways in which the characters differ, and record these on the outsides. Can you directly contrast the outlying characteristics?

### Task 2

Snap Debates

- Teacher provides a strong, arguable statement that compares or contrasts texts, (eg Jack Salmon is just a sad, angry man, but the storyteller in Ozymandias is clinically depressed )

- Teams take a side and have 5 minutes to prepare justifications to support/challenge the moot.
- Turns delivering ideas, and rebutting.
- Teacher allocates marks 1-3 for each point made, dependent on sophistication of idea.
- Let it become heated, it allows students to buy in

### Task 3

#### Down the Pub

- Choose a character from any text you have studied this year. For poetry you could be the protagonist, or the teller.
- Imagine you are that character, and have just walked into a pub or café. There you meet another character from a different text.
- Strike up a conversation. Keep in character. Use detail and ideas from the text.
- Now, allow another pair of “characters” to share a table with you. Introduce one another, and continue the conversation. Allow for argument, agreement, personal revelation and debate.

## 5

### *Lesson Topic: Exam Practicalities*

**Aim of lesson:** To discuss approaches to exam study and revision and provide strategies and techniques for approaching response to text exam preparation.

#### **Learning Objectives**

As a result of this lesson, students will:

- Have an opportunity to create a mind map/ brainstorm for each text, to examine how the features of the text interrelate with each other.
- Be provided with strategies and techniques to aid revision for the response to text essays.

### Task 1

Create a mind map for one text of study to provide a strategy for revision.

Create a mind map for one text of study (novel, film or two poems). Brainstorm ideas and notes under the headings to show how each feature of the text relates to the main theme/idea of the text.

(Example of set out is attached).

### Task 2

Approaching exam questions.

Give students the 2004 Level 2 questions for one of the response to text essays. Explain to students how to rewrite the question, to make the question specific to the text of study. Give an example on the board.

E.g. 2004 question – Describe important symbols in the texts you have studied AND analyse how the symbols helped develop important ideas.

Specifically written for text of study – Describe the Nazi symbols in Sylvia Plath’s ‘Daddy’ and ‘Lady Lazarus’ and analyse how these symbols helped develop important ideas of repression and victimisation in Plath’s poetry.

Using the 2004 questions, students re-write 3-4 questions to make them specific for the text of study. (Could try 1-2 questions for each of the three texts if this is more useful).

### Task 3

Discuss exam revision strategies and different approaches to exam preparation.

Class discussion: what are the advantages/ disadvantages to rote learning essays?

Ideas/ discussions about other ways to revise:

- Trying several essay questions: write an introduction to the question, then writing topic sentences or bullet points for the paragraphs.
- Learning key ideas e.g. theme is portrayed through symbols and character developments in Lord of the Flies. Using these key ideas to create an essay in the exam.
- Learning key sentences, points.
- Anagrams to remember key points.

Students share with the class strategies that work well for them.

## Appendix 4 - Bloom's Taxonomy Verbs

Thinking Skill	Writing and Reading Tasks	NCEA Instructions
Create	Compose, Construct, Create, Design, Develop, Integrate, Organize, Plan, Propose, Generate, Link abstract and concrete ideas, Draw parallels,	Analyse (by generalisation and connection)
Evaluate	Appraise, Argue, Assess, Choose, Conclude, Critic, Decide, Evaluate, Judge, Justify, Predict, Prioritize, Prove, Rank, Rate, Select, Speculate, Advocate, Substantiate, Connect	Analyse (by forming judgements)
Analyse	Analyse, Characterise, Classify, Compare, Contrast, Debate, Differentiate, Discriminate, Distinguish, Examine, Outline, Relate, Separate, Break down components, See implications, Infer,	Analyse Discuss Explain
Apply	Apply, Change, Choose, Compute, Dramatize, Interview, Prepare, Produce, Generalize, Select, Show, Transfer, Use, Compare, Use in other contexts	Explain Describe Show
Understand	Conclude, Demonstrate, Discuss, Identify, Illustrate, Interpret, Paraphrase, Predict, Report, Restate, Review, Summarize, Tell	Show Outline
Remember	Recognise, Define, Describe, Draw, Find, Identify, Label, List, Match, Name, Quote, Recall, Recite, Sequence, Tell, Write	Illustrate