

**A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO CURRICULUM INTERPRETATION:  
DECONSTRUCTION AS A LEARNING ACTIVITY**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

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I declare that

A HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH TO CURRICULUM INTERPRETATION:  
DECONSTRUCTION AS A LEARNING ACTIVITY

is my own work and that all the sources which I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Ms A E M J Boshoff

October 2007

# DEDICATION

**This dissertation is dedicated to:**

My beloved parents, Theo and Marthie Kriek

and

my granddaughters, Caitlin and Nicolet Boshoff

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and express deep appreciation to God, my Creator, for the wisdom, strength and good health during my travels on the road to knowledge and understanding. I also want to thank God for the well-being of my parents in order for them to share the fulfilment of a dream with me, and to rejoice in the glory of God.

Secondly, acknowledgement is due to the following people for guidance, inspiration, direction and encouragement during this research project:

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## ABSTRACT

The general view of educators at all levels of education as well as trainers in industry, that learners do not have the ability to use their knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives prompted the study. A very superficial study that was done in 2000, regarding the same problem, acted as the starting point for this study.

The main purpose of the study was to determine the reasons for the general perception by educators that learners do not use their embedded knowledge in an inter-curricular manner. It also aimed to determine the most effective facilitating styles and methods that would help the learners to develop the skills to learn with the main aim to achieve *learning that lasts* and not just *learning to pass*.

The use of deconstruction as a learning activity forms the biggest part of this qualitative action research project which was based on the main principles of the hermeneutic approach namely, communication followed by interpretation in order to reach understanding. The principles of narrative therapy were also used in the project.

The hermeneutic approach followed in this study also allows the reader to walk the road with the participants as a narrative, first person reporting style provides rich background information regarding all the participants of the study as well as the contexts in which the actions took place. The reader will also be able to feel the closeness that existed between the educator and the learners who were part of this study.

**KEYWORDS:**

Action research, constructivism, convenience sampling, deconstruction, embedded knowledge, frame of reference, hermeneutic, interviews, language proficiency, learning process, narrative therapy, psychological closeness, qualitative research, reconstruction self-efficacy, shyness, socio-economic and cultural influences on learning, "Thinking in a box".

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**STRANGE WORD and ACRONYMS:**

Eich	An expression used by black Africans in South Africa to display emotions such as astonishment, surprise, grievance, discouragement, dissatisfaction and scepticism.
FET College	College for Further Education and Training.
N4, N5 & N6	National Certificate on Level 4, 5 & 6.(First, second and third level after Grade 12)

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning to pass or “*learning that lasts*” ... two ideas that fit so easily in the same sentence. However, many educators, trainers, researchers, and scientists believe that these two kinds of learning don't belong to the same class and they also don't fit into the same classroom.

Although educators in the educational environment and trainers in industry all agree that learning that lasts should be the result of their efforts, in reality the contrary is probably true. When listening to the conversations of educators and trainers on all levels, from basic- to higher education, one regularly hears the complaint that the learners do not know how to apply/use the knowledge and skills, which were supposed to be seen as embedded knowledge, when entering a new or higher level of learning or working environment. Not only educators and trainers are complaining but managers in industry experience the same problem in the daily operations of the business with employees who have just completed their training or formal education.

In some of the study fields offered on N4 to N6<sup>1</sup> level at Colleges for Further Education and Training (referred to as FET Colleges), the contents of some of the educational offerings (referred to as subjects) overlap. In some instances, the same outcomes must be reached in one module of a certain subject, as in one of the modules of another subject on a different level of the course. For example, in the study field Business Management, the conducting of an employment interview must be experienced in Management Communication N4, in Entrepreneurship and Business Management N5 as well as in Sales Management N6. In other instances, the overlapping of outcomes appears on the same level, e.g. in the Human Resource Management course the learner must experience the forming of an organisational structure in both Management Communication N4 as well as Personnel Management N4.

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<sup>1</sup> Post Grade 12 (matric) levels.

In some instances, in the different modules of the same subject, corresponding outcomes must be reached. An example of this appears in the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N5. During the first week of the course, the learners have to identify the advantages of a participative management style. The motivational value of this management style is then highlighted. In the fifth week of the course, the motivational theory of Likert is discussed. This theory is based on the belief that the management style in an organisation is the most deciding factor regarding the motivation levels of the staff (Smit, 1999(a): 42). Even in this situation, where the learners experience the same situational problems, in a time span of about four weeks, they still don't make use of the knowledge and skills that they have already acquired in the earlier module.

At the beginning of each semester, a new frame of reference, also called a cognitive structure (Ausubel & Robinson, 1973:51), must be created by the learners or they must be reminded about the experience and skills acquired in previous learning sessions. The duration of the courses offered on N4 to N6 level is one semester. The repeating of previous experiences wastes precious time, which can rather be used to experience new problem situations.

My personal belief, which was created through experience, is that the educator must help the learners to build a cognitive bridge (scaffolding) between the different subjects and lead them to experience the usage of their existing frame of reference. This belief was confirmed when reading Woolfolk's (2007: 320) view on this. She states that "*years of research and experience show that students will master new knowledge, problem solving procedures and learning strategies, but usually they will not use them unless prompted or guided*". When I make the statement in the presence of other educators, that the educator must guide the learners in this knowledge transfer process, the general reaction is "easier said than done".

When someone close to us is gravely ill and his/her life might be at risk, we beg the doctor to do everything in his/her power to save the life of that person. Firstly, the doctor would treat the symptoms to make the illness a little more bearable to the sick person and then he/she will start treating the causes of the illness. Now I want to ask the questions: Isn't it the learner's life that is at risk when something creates a hindrance to his/her learning process and prevents him/her from living life to the

fullest? Should we only treat a physical barrier that prevents humankind from living life to the fullest?

Firstly, the meaning of the word life should be determined. I believe it means being alive but we all know that to just be alive and not be able to live life to its fullest has no meaning. Life or being alive without fulfilment is then actually a burden to us. In the educational environment, the educator is the 'doctor' that must save the life of the learner.

When the learners enter a post school learning institution, the symptoms as well as the origin of the learning problem might already be so large that it can be perceived as being close to impossible to cure the problem within the relative short time span that the learner spends in your presence as 'healing' educator. I still believe that it is the responsibility of the educator to do everything in his/her power to at least treat the symptoms and at the same time help the learner to understand how to cure the causes of the problem that prevents him/her from experiencing life's fulfilment.

In this study, I have tried to find the causes of the problem as well as ways to treat the symptoms, and hopefully, the learners will be able to cure the causes themselves when using the skills that they have acquired.

## **1.2 RATIONALE**

I have noticed that the learners are not able to answer questions of which the answers could be found by using knowledge obtained from a previous level of the course or another subject offered in the course.

My personal experience as educator and/or trainer lies in training in industry and in both the Further- and Higher Education fields. In all instances, I have experienced the same problem. The largest part of my experience comes from the classrooms of a FET College and therefore this study was conducted in that environment.

I have studied at the same college where I am currently employed as a lecturer. I have also lectured seven different subjects, across three study fields, on all three levels of the courses in a time span of nine years (18 semesters). Only one of these subjects wasn't included in my own studies. Therefore, I am well aware of the

learning content that overlaps in different subjects offered, as well as on different levels of the courses.

Currently the majority of national external summative examinations of FET Colleges are theoretical, written examinations and the memoranda are compiled strictly according to textbook contents. With the new courses that are being phased in at FET Colleges from 2007, this will change, as the summative assessment for all subjects will also include an external practical component and not only theoretical examinations. For this reason, it is extremely important for the learners to be able to use the theoretical knowledge which they acquire during the learning sessions in a practical way.

The findings from this research could be useful to:

- Lecturers and teachers on all levels from Basic Education and Training up to Higher Education level.
- Training personnel in industry.
- Authors of subject related publications.
- Curriculum development specialists.
- Most importantly, the learners themselves.

Another reason for actively engaging myself in this research field is clearly explained by Mestre (2001:2) when he states that:

*Despite the vast knowledge base that has been developed in the science of learning, there are also significant gaps in our knowledge base, especially in an arena I will refer to as "learning that lasts" for both students and teachers. I now mention three areas in which more research is needed and which have major ramifications for promoting "learning that lasts":*

*1) Knowledge transfer, that is, the flexible application of knowledge across life's different contexts and situations. At this point in time we know that transfer is very difficult to achieve, and very little is known about how one might structure teaching in ways that maximize, transfer.*

*2) Facilitating the acquisition of pedagogical content knowledge [....]*

*3) Assessment [....]*

*Setting research priorities to focus on these three areas would have a major impact on improving teachers' teaching and students' learning.*

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Through personal experience, the assumption can be made that learners do not make use of their existing frame of reference for problem solving in an interdisciplinary fashion.

This problem can be fragmented as follows:

- Precious time is wasted through the repeating of learning experiences and therefore these repeated experiences can be declared as counter-productive.
- Learners do not acquire the ability to recognise similarities in problem situations across the curriculum.
- If the learners do not develop the ability to identify similarities in situations that they experience in a short time span, they may never learn how to make use of their acquired skills and knowledge holistically in their lives. Learners seem to be unable to transfer knowledge/skills from one context to another context. There seems to be no knowledge integration.

### **1.4 OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH**

This research project was conducted in order to enable me, as an educator, to:

- Identify the reasons why the learners do not acquire the ability to transfer existing skills and knowledge (referred to as their existing frame of reference) across the curriculum, which in turn prevent them to be able to identify similarities in problem situations across the curriculum and to apply acquired knowledge elsewhere.
- Identify methods that can be used to develop the conceptual, reflective, and critical thinking skills of the learners.
- Determine whether a different approach followed by the educator, can enhance the learners' ability to apply their knowledge and skills across the curriculum and holistically in their lives. The new approach will be more inductive, where students are faced with problems and situations that require of them to apply their knowledge and skills that they have acquired in earlier modules and levels of the same subject, knowledge and skills from other subjects on all previous levels of the course, as well as knowledge acquired through life experiences.

- Assess the actions and methods in my own practice to determine which of my actions are the most effective in stimulating the learning process.

## 1.5 TIME SPAN

The official data collection period of this project ran over a period of 16 weeks during the first semester of 2006. However, information was collected in 2000 and since then I have been permanently engaging myself in an action research programme regarding this problem. For this reason not only information collected during the official research period was provided in the discussion of the findings, but also relevant information collected since 2000 as well as information and incidents that appeared in my daily interaction with all the learners during the second semester of 2006.

## 1.6 DIVISION OF THE CHAPTERS

The five chapters comprising this dissertation are briefly outlined in this section.

**Chapter One: Introductory orientation and statement of the problem.** This chapter includes an overview of the study, rationale, problem statement, objectives, and the time span of the study. Its purpose is to place the study in perspective and to familiarise the reader with its subject matter.

**Chapter Two: Literature review.** This chapter is divided into two parts. In part one, the metaphor 'thinking in boxes', hermeneutics, deconstruction, and constructivism will be discussed as points of departure of this study. The second part will contain a discussion of fields of study that were identified during the research process. This discussion includes the closeness/distance that exists between an educator and the learner, creativity and imagination.

**Chapter Three: Research strategy and methods.** This part will briefly indicate the difference between qualitative and quantitative enquiries. As this will mainly be a qualitative study done through action research, the methods, sampling, validity, and credibility of such a study will be discussed.

**Chapter Four: Research in action.** The reader will have the opportunity to 'travel the road' with the researcher by placing him-/herself in the shoes of the researcher. This will be made possible through rich, narrative descriptions of the actions and conversations that took place during the interaction between the learners who took part in this study and the researcher.

**Chapter Five: Conclusions, recommendations and limitations.** The concluding chapter will indicate the results of the actions that were taken during the research process. It will also help to determine whether or not the objectives mentioned in chapter one have been achieved. Any limitations of this research as well as recommendations for future research will be noted.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter will be used to ensure that the actions taken during the research process will be focused on the main objectives of the study. The next chapter will provide an overview of the literature that was studied in the preparation phase as well as an overview of fields that were studied during the research process.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This part of the research project was not completed in full prior to the commencement of the process of collecting the data. The basic concepts of deconstruction, hermeneutics, and the meaning of the metaphor 'thinking in boxes' were originally studied. New areas for study developed as the research project progressed. This occurred as I did not want to allow my own preconceived ideas and prejudices to prevent me from recognizing quite unexpected factors during the collection of data.

In some instances a re-reading of the sources after the data was collected, created a better understanding of what was said by the authors. Statements that were previously seen as unimportant changed into important knowledge. I could use this knowledge to prove my own viewpoints and to increase the level of reliability and validity of the findings. This was possible as I could identify similarities between my own findings and those described by the authors of the various sources.

#### **2.2 DISCUSSION**

##### **PART 1: POINTS OF DEPARTURE**

##### **2.2.1 THE METAPHOR 'THINKING IN BOXES'**

The theme of a communication day for the learners at the college where I am employed was "Get out of your box". During this day everything was done in a "boxed-in" way displaying the process of freeing yourself from your limitations, which act as boxes in which we live. I have realised that it can also be said that the learners think in boxes when they can't use their knowledge inter-curricular or holistically in their lives.

Why should limitations be called boxes? The following are some of the definitions of a box that were printed on the lid of the box in which the refreshments were served on this communication day.

- *A separate compartment for any of various purposes, e.g. witnesses in a law court, horses in a stable and a commentator at a sporting event.*
- *An enclosure or receptacle for a special purpose, e.g. a moneybox.*
- *An enclosed area or space.*
- *A space or area of print on a page, enclosed by a border.*
- *The area occupied by the baseball batter or pitcher.*

Looking at these definitions, one can imagine the small space allowed for 'legal' movement and that can create a feeling of being limited. If a person feels restricted to express his/her own feelings, it can be referred to in ordinary language as a person "being boxed in." The post modernists refer to this feeling as being marginalised (Crouch, 2000; DeLashmutt and Braund, 2004).

Living in a world where the majority of human beings strive towards freedom of speech, freedom of association and freedom of religion, one wonders why human beings tend to 'think in boxes' and why they do not strive towards freedom of thinking. Slabbert (1997: 48) indicates that every situation that one encounter can add to your knowledge in either a positive way, or it can disillusion you and create a negative reaction (determinism). Heinz von Foerster (as cited by Petree, 2003) suggested that we call ourselves "human becomings" based on the fact that we change our behaviour due to external influences on our lives. These influences prevent us from being who we naturally are (human beings) and we adapt our behaviour to become what society wants us to be (human becomings). This can be related to the story of the monkeys that was narrated by Hruzek (2006, in von Oesch, accessed 05 January 2007). The monkeys in a cage behaved in a "boxed in" manner because of the treatment that they have received from the other monkeys in the cage. The first group of monkeys were sprayed with cold water when they attempted to reach for a banana. After a few days, one of the monkeys was replaced with a new monkey and the other monkeys attacked the new monkey, in order to stop him when he attempted to reach for the banana. Every time that another one of the original monkeys was replaced with a new one, it only took a few days before the newly added monkey also started to attack the newest monkey. All the monkeys that

were sprayed with water were replaced, and the monkeys in the cage were not aware of the original reason for the attacks when they want to reach for a banana, but the attacks on the newest members continued. The same behaviour can be detected in human beings. Von Oech's view on this is discussed in section 2.2.3.

The knowledge that is constructed in our minds through experience is regularly referred to as one's frame of reference. Korthagen (date unknown: 5) states that:

*They use the term Gestalts to refer to cohesive wholes of earlier experiences, role models, needs, values, feelings, images and routines which are - often unconsciously - evoked by concrete situations.*

Korthagen (date unknown: 9) goes on to say:

*Identity then often takes on the form of a Gestalt: an unconscious body of needs, images, feelings, values, role models, previous experiences and behavioral tendencies, which together create a sense of identity. This Gestalt influences the more outer levels of beliefs, competencies and behavior. The methods described (such as the 'life path' and story telling) help students to become aware of that Gestalt. This in turn leads to self-understanding.*

When I think of the term 'frame of reference' the meaning of the word reference is easy to define. To me it means something that already exists of which I have established what the truth of it is to me, and I can use those truths to construct or create new meaning to something that is unknown to me.

Thinking of what the word frame means to me, I visualise four images. The first image is that of the frame of a tent, over which the canvas is placed. Here the frame serves as a structure that is needed to be able to create something purpose- or useful. Without the canvas, the frame doesn't really serve any purpose. Secondly, I see a Jungle Gym® in the park on which the children climb to reach physical heights higher than what they are used to and that creates a challenge to them. The third image is that of the parts of the Mecano® set that we used to play with as children. We created our own structure (frame) with parts of the set and then we added other

parts to build something meaningful and workable e.g. a motorcar. The last image is that of a picture frame.

Thinking of these images the most obvious difference between them is the fact that the first three images all serve a usable purpose namely, the basis on which something useful can be built, something that creates a challenge and thirdly it allows space for creativity. The image of the picture frame is completely the opposite. It creates a specific border or boundary. Outside the border, there is nothing. Some people have the ability to imagine what they see outside the border (frame) but others stop seeing where the frame indicates the end of the picture. It can be said of the people who do not “see” what beyond the frame is, that they are ‘thinking in a box’.

The view of von Foerster as well as the view of Korthagen, as cited above, indicate that one’s perceptions of life and of oneself can also be determined by external factors. The following are only a few of the possible internal and external factors that can have an influence on one’s way of thinking and living: culture (Gallagher, 1997:131), religion, socio-economic situation (Gallagher, 1997: 141), parental involvement and strictness (Pierre Bourdieu as cited by Möller, et al, 2003: 87; Christenson & Havsy, 2001: 6-7), politics (Bloodworth, et al, 2001: 4-5; Steyn, et al, 2003: 134-147), self-concept and sense of belonging (Christenson & Havsy, 2001: 6-7; McCombs, 2001: 8-9; Schaps, et al, 2001: 20-21; Greenberg, 2001: 22-23), aptitudes and competence (Bloodworth, et al, 2001: 4-5; Schaps, et al, 2001: 20-21), actions of teachers (Bloodworth, et al, 2001: 4-5; McCombs, 2001: 8-9), peer pressure (Bloodworth, et al, 2001: 4-5; McCombs, 2001: 8-9), all power structures (Cohen, et al, 2002: 30), learner’s goal orientation and commitment (Elias **Error! Bookmark not defined.**, 2001: 16-17; Hawkins, et al, 2001: 18-19; Schaps, et al, 2001: 20-21), symbols such as language, graphics or gestures e.g. as used in advertising (Slabbert, 1997: 48; Möller, et al, 2003: 179) and positive and negative life experiences (reality itself) (Slabbert, 1997: 48). Factors like these can create the situation where people are not allowed to use their own thinking power and they “get stuck in a box”.

According to Higgs and Smith (2002:1), *“Our truth or truths are composed of certain ideas and assumptions. But more than this, the truth or truths we accept determine what our lives are and will be.”*

In 1944, which can be seen as during the first decade of postmodernism (e-Notes, 2004), Cole Porter wrote the all-time winning song, which was made popular by Bing Crosby, “Don’t Fence Me In”. If one looks at the words of the song it makes one wonder if this was not a cry of someone to be free of the limits that were created by life. Further, one wonders if the popularity of the song wasn’t because of the message carried by the lyrics and perhaps not because of the music score. Another example of this type of outcry at that stage, is the song by Frank Sinatra, “I did it my way”.

## **2.2.2 HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH**

### **2.2.2.1 Elements of hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation of meaning and sense in human actions and production (Danner, 1997: 4; Möller, et al, 2003: 110).

The main elements of hermeneutics are communication, interpretation, and understanding. The Greek word “hermes” arises from the Greek mythology and means to explain something clearly (Möller, et al, 2003:111). The concept explanation means that one party uses language (verbal or non-verbal) to describe something to another party in order for him/her to interpret and understand that which was described. This process is seen as communication.

Guba and Lincoln (1989: 143) refer to a person’s existing knowledge (cognitive framework) which was created through interpretation and understanding as constructs. They indicate that constructs are created by the self (a person) and that constructs are not part of the objective world that exists outside the person. A person creates constructs by systematically integrating available information in a way that makes sense to him-/herself. The characteristics of these constructs depend on the level of information and *“sophistication (in the sense of ability to appreciate/understand/apply the information)”* of the constructor.

Guba and Lincoln (ibid.) indicates further that a person creates new constructs after interaction with new information, contexts, settings, situations, and other individuals (not all of whom may agree), by using a process that is rooted in the previous experience, belief systems, values, fears, prejudices, hopes, disappointments and achievements of the constructor. This process of the constructor communicating with the world outside him-/herself to improve interpretation, comprehension and understanding, is referred to as the hermeneutic dialectic circle. (Figure 1)

### 2.2.2.2 Hermeneutic circle

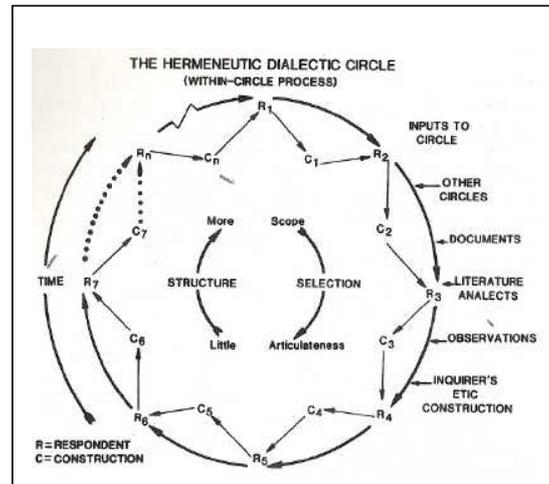


Figure 1. Hermeneutic Dialectic Circle (Guba & Lincoln, 1989: 152)

The hermeneutic circle is a dialectic process (ibid.: 149). It is hermeneutic as it is based on interpretation and it is dialectic as it compares different points of view in order to achieve a higher-level synthesis. The main purpose of this process is not to justify your own way of thinking or to identify the shortcomings in the other's way of thinking. The main aim is to reach a consensus and if that is not possible, it at least provides the participants with a wider range of information that can be used even at a later stage.

Guba and Lincoln (1989: 149 - 150) provide clear guidelines for conditions that should be created in order to ensure a successful dialectic process. These guidelines are similar to the characteristics that Möller, et al (2003: 110 - 117) indicate to be part of the hermeneutical approach. The similarities are indicated in Table 1.

<b>Guba and Lincoln</b>	<b>Möller, Higgs and Deacon</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All parties should have a minimal competence to communicate, as they should be able to formulate their viewpoints.</li> <li>▪ All parties should be committed to work from a position of integrity and not deliberately attempt to lie, deceive, mislead, hide information, or otherwise offer misconstructions.</li> <li>▪ No person should discriminate against other participants for any reason.</li> <li>▪ All parties should be willing to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Share power</li> <li>– Be open towards change if they find that the negotiations persuaded them to create new constructs</li> <li>– Reconsider their value structures</li> <li>– Be committed to spend the time and energy needed in the process.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication should be able to take place in order to create understanding as meanings are released during conversation.</li> <li>▪ A relationship of mutual trust should be present.</li> <li>▪ Participants should understand the concept of circumstance or being placed “in the shoes of the other party”</li> <li>▪ It creates an awareness of our own prejudices.</li> <li>▪ Differences should be brought to light through communication.</li> </ul>

**Table 1. Conditions for a successful hermeneutic dialectic process.**

**2.2.2.3 Reasons for hermeneutical approach**

Gallagher (In Danner, 2000: 141) believes it would be reasonable to claim that the main object of educational research is learning and the main objective is to learn about learning. He claims that all researchers in the educational field are interested in social and economic conditions, purely because these conditions impinge on the learning process. He further states that in educational research the object studied consists of everything connected with educational processes, with learning at the centre.

*What hermeneutics claims, and what is verified and supported by cognitive psychology, is that learning itself is an interpretational process. This means that both the object studied by educational research and*

*educational research itself is unavoidable hermeneutical. This is why it is not simply a question of whether we can or should adopt a hermeneutical approach to educational inquiry. [...] educational research itself [...] is a hermeneutical***Error! Bookmark not defined.** *phenomenon (Gallagher, In Danner, 2000: 141).*

The main objective of this research programme was to understand how certain factors can prevent the learners to think freely and holistically. This understanding is necessary in order to determine how the negative influences can be eliminated or limited, to enable the learners to use their full capacity for learning. Möller, et al (2003: 112) cite Schleiermacher who claimed that hermeneutics is “*general teaching and the art of understanding*”.

Paulo Freire (2004: 13), referring to one of his learning sessions with the agrarians and worker class learners, also indicated that he needed to learn “[...] *something about their syntax and semantics, without which [he] could not have worked with them, or at any rate not effectively [...].*”

Freire (2004:16) later mentions a situation where he has spoken to an audience on a very sensitive issue and has received an unexpected reaction. In retrospections he states that his “*actual mistake was, first, in [his] use of [his] language, [his] syntax, without more effort to get close to the language and syntax of [his] audience; and second, in [his] all but oblivion of the hard reality of the large audience seated before [him].*”

The last part of Freire’s statement is a clear indication that educators sometimes forget to try and understand the ‘*hard reality of the large audience seated before [them]*’”. This can lead to the situation where the educator can criticise the learner from a very subjective point of view, without taking the learner’s social and economical situation into account.

I believe that it is important that the learners must understand why they need to be able to think holistically. It is also necessary for the learners to know why I deem it important to know and understand the influences on their thinking styles. I see the hermeneutical approach to be applicable to my situation as hermeneutics asks the

important question: 'What purpose does it serve?' (Möller, et al, 2003: 110). Cohen et al, (2002: 29) state that:

*Hermeneutics focuses on interaction and language; it seeks to understand situations through the eyes of the participants, echoing the verstehen approaches of Weber and premised on the view that reality is socially constructed. [.....] Hermeneutics involves the recapturing of the meanings of interacting [with] others, recovering, and reconstructing the intentions of the other actors in a situation.*

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I believe that cultural issues can have an influence on the thinking styles of the learners. Gallagher (1997: 131) states that the study of human and cultural expressions and institutions that involve the subjective experience of individual persons calls for a method different from that used for the study of natural science. He states that according to Dilthey, the aim of the study of human science is to “*understand* (‘*verstehen*’) *cultural expressions and their motivation rather than to explain* (‘*enklären*’) *the natural causes of such behaviour.*”

Subjectivity is seen as one of the most general pitfalls in research. According to Gadamar a hermeneutical approach creates a critical attitude towards reporting as it helps a researcher to understand and consider his/her own prejudices as one becomes aware of and takes into consideration one's own subjectivity (Möller, et al, 2003: 117).

### **2.2.3 DECONSTRUCTION**

Picasso once said, “Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction”. From an educational viewpoint, I would like to change the word “destruction” to deconstruction. Van Niekerk (date unknown (a)) states that:

*What is, must be rediscovered and new relationships established – that is the essence of deconstruction. It is not about formulating new theories – but a critical reading of existing theories and models in order to come to a new understanding.*

To me this means that the learner must be able to use his/her existing frame of reference (cognitive structure) in a new way and it is not necessary to completely break down all knowledge structures. This fits in with the viewpoint of Danner (in Söhnge & van Niekerk, date unknown: 10) that

*learning is not only adding something to our knowledge" (Danner 1995:242); it is a process of integrating new subject matter into the learner's world of sense and meaning. In other words, learning is a process that leads to understanding. We therefore need to have appropriate ways to describe what it is that we want students to learn (understand).*

Royle (2000:6) cites Derrida who states that deconstruction is the

*destabilization on the move in [...] things themselves; but it is not negative. Destabilization is required for 'progress' as well. And the 'de-' of deconstruction signifies not the demolishing of what is constructing itself, but rather what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist scheme.*

These words of Derrida confirms the viewpoint as indicated above that there must be movement within the knowledge structures of a person in order to stimulate mental progress without completely breaking down the knowledge structures which already exist. Any form of change is usually experienced as a destabilisation of our comfort zone. Through events in my life, I have experienced that however hard it may be, this instability is needed as it acts as motivator to reconstruct a new 'is'. This reconstruction is done by integrating that which used to be, with that which is newly discovered. In many instances one is amazed when looking at the dimensions of the new 'is', as personal knowledge has extended far beyond that which was expected and that which could ever be thought of. This can be seen as thinking outside the limits (box). Most of the time we create these limits ourselves to act as the borders of our comfort zones. This way of thinking is confirmed by Royle (ibid: 7) when he states that deconstruction is "a questioning of the 'is', a concern with what remains to be thought of [and] with what cannot be thought of within the present."

After reading and rethinking this part as discussed by Royle, I can for the first time understand why an educator at an institution where I have studied previously, always creates a destabilisation in the learners' comfort zones, by challenging them with tasks that at the first moment seem to the learner to be beyond all possible thinking. This stimulates and forces the learner to think beyond the borders.

The followers of the hermeneutical approach to research believe that the learner must be able to understand the reasons for his/her way of thinking in order to know what should change, how to change it, as well as the reason why it should change. In a publication called "*A Whack on the Side of the Head: How to Unlock Your Mind for Innovation*", Roger von Oech, founder and president of Creative Think, states that:

1. *We make rules based on reasons that make a lot of sense.*
2. *We follow these rules.*
3. *Time passes, and things change.*
4. *The original reason for the generation of these rules may no longer exist, but because the rules are still in place, we continue to follow them.*

I have experienced this viewpoint during a visit to Mthatha, in the Eastern Cape, in June 2005. I noticed that all the houses in the area had a large square on the outside wall that wasn't painted. My asking the local people what the purpose of this habit is, caused them all to frown because of the fact they themselves didn't know why they paint their houses in this way. The reaction that I received was plain and simple: "Everybody does it like that and it has always been done like that". To me it was ironic that the unpainted area represents a 'box' and the fact that they themselves don't know the purpose of this way of doing, indicates that they are 'thinking in boxes'. This acted as a wonderful real life example in the learning session that I lectured to these learners about critical rationalism, which entails the rethinking of and the identification of errors in our way of thinking. It was clear to me that these learners had to 'deconstruct' their boxes in order to reconstruct their way of thinking.

Van Niekerk & van Niekerk (1998:12) refer to the fact that in South Africa, many people are thinking along traditional lines and others are not yet ready to change old, obsolete conceptual frameworks/thought patterns. This situation was created by intra-national isolation, which created alienation and suspicion among ethnic groups

as well as a fragmented educational arena in South Africa. This caused the value systems among different ethnic groups to become politicised and schools have become the battlefield for the political struggle. They ask the question: “*How does one reverse this situation?*”

To answer this question I had to reflect on my own life experiences. I completed my schooling 21 years before the democratic changes of 1994 and therefore I am a learner from the old era’s school system. I was therefore also exposed and subjected to a system which was highly based on political beliefs. I also grew up in a family made up of members who do not easily change their minds and way of thinking. By nature I do not believe everything that I hear and I was regularly called “the rebel of the family” when I started asking questions and changed my viewpoint after hearing the ‘facts’ and critically reflected on them. Obviously these ‘facts’ were conveyed to me from a traditional white perspective. I have since developed the skill to rediscover and establish new relationships about “What is” (Van Niekerk, date unknown (a)). As most of my learners are black African learners I need to be willing to keep on changing my perceptions as I discover new truths, especially if I want my learners to learn this same skill.

Van Niekerk & van Niekerk (1998:15) say that it will require of a teacher to be thoroughly familiar with the experiential world of his/her students in order to be a successful part of the curriculum. For this reason, I had to listen to my learners in order to try and understand the range of their life experiences and the internal as well as the external influences on my learners’ thinking styles. Should my beliefs have been incorrect about the reasons why they are not willing to think outside ‘their boxes’ and are therefore not able to use their existing frames of reference in an inter-curricular as well as in a holistically way, I had to be open-minded and willing to “*rediscover and create new relationships*” in order to change my preconceived beliefs. I had to be willing to change in order to act as an example for the learners (Practice what you preach).

Van Niekerk & van Niekerk (1998:19 - 20) also state that the learners’ experience of reality depends to a large extent on the intervention of the teacher, as learners do not distinguish between a teacher and the subject that is taught. Their belief is in line with that of many authors, who through the years, indicated that the attitude that is

portrayed by the teacher towards a subject has an influence on the learners' attitude towards that subject.

Makosana (in van Niekerk & van Niekerk, 1998:12) provides a clear warning to teachers concerning their role as part of the curriculum. He states that:

*Teachers should be politically aware, but they must desist from exploiting the conflict theorists' philosophy of perceiving the school as literally the site of struggle. There is no denying the political role of schools. However, schools have the task of elevating individuals and communities socially, economically and politically. People should desist from attributing every problem to the "system". Instead, they should restore the dignity and honour of the teaching profession and rehabilitate the culture of teaching.*

According to my understanding of this statement, Makosana indicates that we should start to think freely, outside the limits that were created by the previous "system". Through using our right to freedom of thinking, we will be empowered to take up the responsibility and accountability which go hand in hand with using our freedom of choice. Once we learn to exercise freedom of choice, we will be able to stop blaming the "system" and do something positive towards change, which means breaking down or deconstructing our own thought restricting boxes. Morgan (2000: 46) agrees with this viewpoint when she says that deconstruction can lead to the challenging of 'taken for granted' ideas and it assists people to challenge and break away from their problems in order to be more connected with their own ideas, thoughts and lifestyles.

The main objective of this research was to find ways to help the learners to be able to identify the limitations in their thinking styles that prevent them from thinking freely and to find ways to change their thinking habits. Van Niekerk (date unknown (a); (b)) cites Genot by saying:

*Deconstruction is really about understanding why people think the way they do-: It uncovers the thinking which underlies our notions of reality (Genot 1996:30): What is acceptable and what is not, good and evil, us and them, sense and nonsense, rational and irrational, modern and postmodern, order and chaos, Apollo and Dionysus.*

Van Niekerk (date unknown (b)) also indicates that according to Genot (1996:23), deconstruction aims at describing the limits of understanding. Deconstructive technique analyses and tests the assumptions which support intellectual knowledge in order to expose and question the 'self-evident truths' they are based on.

Royle (2000: 6) explains completely another perspective of deconstruction as he refers to Beardsworth when he indicates that deconstruction has to do with the "*unforeseeable, the incalculable and indeed the impossible.*" My own perception of what the difference between these two viewpoints is, according to the explanation provided by the other authors, is that Beardsworth concentrates and is very clear about the objective of deconstruction, namely the exceeding beyond the borders or limits. Genot wants to think from inside the box in order to discover and describe the borders. No mention is made of passing these borders, although he indicates that the borders should be questioned. In real life, questioning does not always create a break away pass the borders. Questioning sometimes just makes one aware of the borders and one learns to live within the borders. Perhaps Genot expects of the reader to identify that which was not said but was implied, but which means more than that which is said. Garrick and Rhodes, (1998: accessed 15/11/2005) refer to this as the changing of text to allow the dominant term/idea to become marginal and the marginal term becomes dominant.

The view of Garrick and Rhodes, (1998: accessed 15/11/2005) that "*deconstruction seeks to uncover contradictory and historically conditioned assumptions within a discourse*", fits in with the view of Beardsworth. In both cases, it is indicated that deconstruction is aiming at breaking the borders and not only at identifying their limiting effects.

Beardsworth refers to Derrida (In Royle, 2000: 4) when he indicates that the term 'method' should not be used when referring to deconstruction. He mentions that a method is a pre-planned action which suggests a systematic and closed procedure that comes to an end. The use of the words strategy and analysis is preferred as it can be seen as ongoing or interminable.

Looking at this viewpoint of Beardsworth, I would like to use the term deconstructive 'processes' when referring to the actions taken during an action research project.

The action research itself is an ongoing process in which the “*unforeseeable, the incalculable and [sometimes] the impossible*” is identified or achieved. Continuous reflection creates a destabilisation of knowledge, which in turn motivates the action researcher to enter into another cycle. This is an ongoing, interminable process.

In section 2.1, I have mentioned a few aspects that can cause the learners to be limited in their thinking styles. If one look at the elements of deconstruction as stated by Van Niekerk (date unknown (a)), deconstruction can be used to eliminate or reduce these limitations. He identifies the following elements:

- *Deconstruction indicates a break with uniformity, unambiguity, monotony and similarity (eenvormigheid, eenduidigheid, eentonigheid, ooreenkomstigheid).*
- *Deconstruction questions all that we take for granted about language, experience and so-called natural systems of human communication. Deconstructionist criticism represents both an extension and a radical critique of structuralist thought.*
- *Deconstruction is [...] an attack on existing metaphysics and a denial of the possibility that one truth can be discovered.*
- *Deconstruction wants to indicate exactly how irrational rationality is (Van Niekerk, date unknown (b)).*
- *Deconstruction, according to Paul de Man points to a drive to demystify traditional concepts of philosophic truth requiring and rigorous thinking through of their textual and their epistemological consequences.*

Looking at the words of Trifonas (accessed 2005), I was even more convinced that it would be appropriate to use deconstruction as part of my action research. He states that:

*It upsets the surety of the "phenomemo-semio-logical" foundation of the institutional history of Western epistemology at the level of its theorizing about the value of the sign, reproducibility and representation, or what is the heart of the educational future of all philosophy and science as indicative of the empirical foundation of the*

*certainty of truth. For nothing can be taught or learned other than what is believed to be known and understood.*

Although Trifonas mentions this as a disadvantage of using deconstruction, it fits in completely with my objectives to help the learners to develop the skill of “freedom-of-thinking” by breaking down the borders. We are living in a dynamic world and it is commonly believed that we should be able to adapt to the changes. I believe that the changes in our environment also change the truth. Trifonas also states that:

*The "movement" of deconstruction is away from an obstinate stance of single-minded opposition ready to tear down the existing "System" and toward an economy of reflective matriculation within the structurality of the institution to working-out of the essential trials of its undecidability at the expense of the metaphysical grounding of its architectonics.*

After repeatedly reading this part and trying to interpret that which was said, my understanding of this is that deconstruction allows the thinker to move away from a thinking style that is single-minded and that causes the thinker to be stubborn and not accept another point of view. It also does not want to break down existing systems and styles of teaching and learning within the current learning structures, it just wants to move towards a critical way of thinking that allows every person to establish for him-/herself what he/she believes the truth is. This is because of the deconstructionists' beliefs that truth can change as “*What is, must be rediscovered and new relationships established*” (Van Niekerk, date unknown (a); Van Niekerk, date unknown (b)). The viewpoint of the deconstructionists is seen as being at the expense of the accepted theories of learning as it is completely against the common beliefs of how truth is constructed and what the real truth is. Because of the fact that Trifonas mentions this as a negative aspect of deconstruction, in my own mind this indicates that he does not believe that humans must have the ability to ‘break down the box’ and think freely. His way of thinking is completely against the postmodernistic as well as critical points of view. I personally believe that every person has the right to “freedom-of-thinking”.

After reading the work of many authors, I found clear similarities between the characteristics of hermeneutics and the characteristics of deconstruction. Therefore,

I perceive it to be appropriate to use hermeneutics and deconstruction in a combination as a basis for qualitative research.

Van Niekerk & van Niekerk (1998:19 - 20) indicate that a number of texts should be studied to allow the reader a clear understanding of what the truth is about the topic that is studied. This fits in with the characteristic of hermeneutics which entails improvement of understanding after every encounter with new knowledge through communication, whether through personal interaction with others or through reading that which authors have written.

The essence of Hermeneutics is about the understanding of the meaning of words and Van Niekerk (date unknown (b) indicates that deconstruction creates a sensitivity for the use of words and the inability of words to convey meaning clearly. He states that deconstruction makes one aware that people do not always mean what they say by using words and that what is left unsaid may speak louder than what is intended.

Ridderhof (2002: 84) also states that the deconstruction of text is in actual fact doing an analysis of the text, not to find the presumed central themes, but to find those themes that are marginalised and left unsaid. He indicates that academic deconstructionists even go further to declare these marginal and unspoken themes to be in fact the text's central meanings. As mentioned before, Garrick and Rhodes, (1998: accessed 15/11/2005) refer to this as the changing of text to allow the dominant term/idea to become marginal and the marginal term becomes dominant. Morgan (2000: 5 – 10) agrees with Garrick and Rhodes, (1998: accessed 15/11/2005) by explaining that humans live their lives as different stories. Some stories are dominant and others can be seen as *alternative* (marginal) stories of our lives. These stories are explained as being "*events that are linked in sequence across time according to a plot*". Morgan indicates that humans are interpretative beings and all events are interpreted in the context (plot) in which it happens. She indicates that the events that are emphasised by the environment around us, e.g. comments made by others, community views and our own life experiences, become the dominant stories. She states that the dominant story of a person's life will not only affect the person in the present but it will also have an effect on the future actions of the person.

Morgan explains that a person experiences positive as well as negative events relating to a specific idea/story. The person then creates his/her own dominant story by focusing on either the positive or the negative events. For example, a learner fails fifty percent of his/her tests and passes the other fifty percent. The learner might have a negative self-concept and/or the teachers and parents never mention the tests that were passed, and therefore in this negative context (plot) the learner chooses to remember only the tests that were failed. The negative side of the story then becomes the dominant story for this learner and the learner sees him-/herself as a poor performer. The positive events then become the alternative (marginal) story. The negative self-concept of this learner is then enhanced and the learner might decide not to study for the next test as he/she 'knows' (based on his/her dominant story) that the result will be a fail mark again.

According to Ridderhof (2002: 84), the deconstruction of text destroys the distinction between central and marginal meanings, thus for a deconstructionist there are merely different meanings, based on own perspective and priority. Ridderhof also indicates that the text can refer to anything that can be intellectually analyzed - a book, a film, even an activity.

Ridderhof (ibid.: 84) indicates that deconstruction of text happens in three steps: Firstly, the central and most obvious ideas are recognised. These are usually repeated and a discussion follows after it has been mentioned. Secondly, the marginalised and unsaid elements must be recognized. The marginalised facts are usually mentioned as an after-thought or in order to motivate something that is part of the primary elements. The unsaid text can be divided into four divisions namely that what is not said because it is not important, that which goes without saying (logic), that which is better not said and that which was never thought of. The last step is where all three elements are viewed together in order to see which synthesis can be created. These three steps are closely linked to the steps followed in the hermeneutical circle.

Looking at what was said about deconstruction, I fully agree with Beardsworth who indicated that deconstruction is an interminable process. Therefore, I feel that one should not talk of deconstruction as a single action but it should be seen and

discussed as the main process which includes the different activities of the learning process. My understanding of what deconstruction is, is illustrated in figure 2.

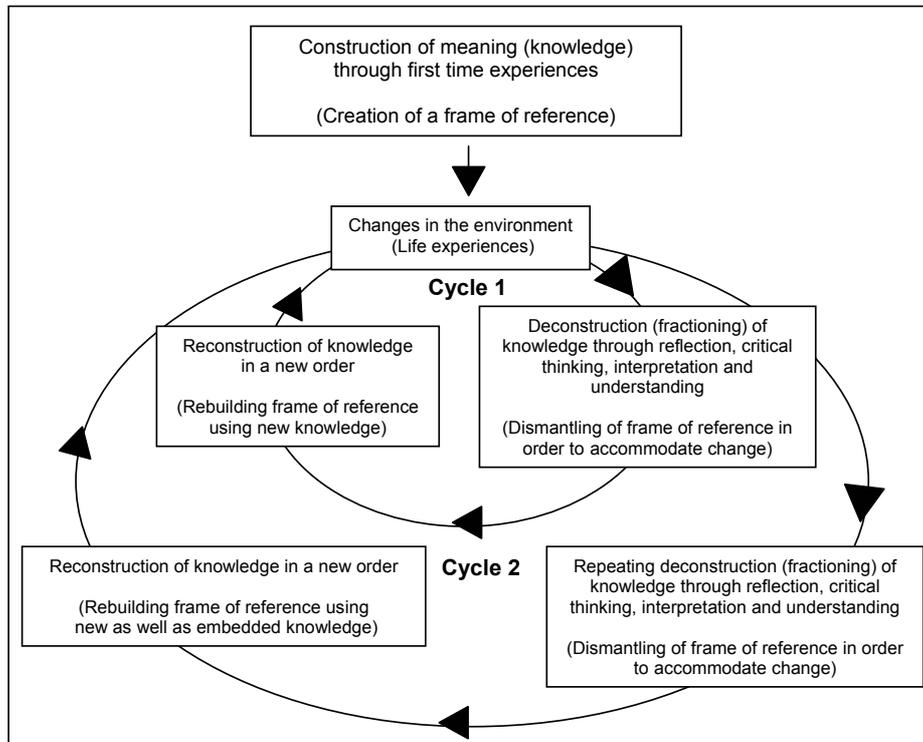


Figure 2. The process of deconstruction.

To me the process of deconstruction means that one starts to create a frame of reference when you experience something for the first time. If there is a change in the environment, one deconstructs the frame, rearranges the knowledge in another order, and reconstructs the frame according to the new meaning of what truth is according to one's own perceptions. This deconstruction and reconstruction process is an ongoing process, which is activated every time that something in the environment changes.

## 2.2.4 CONSTRUCTIVISM

Because of the fact that the deconstruction process, as discussed by many authors, includes the construction of new knowledge, it would be a logic step to study the theory of constructivism. The literature review clearly indicates a general accepted theory that the learners come to class with already formed ideas and ways of thinking about a range of phenomena. This embedded knowledge is deconstructed to accommodate the new knowledge which is added during the learning session and the reconstructed frame of knowledge includes the new knowledge.

Gravett (2001: 18) confirms this when saying that, "*you incorporate new information in your existing knowledge structures [...] or you alter your existing knowledge structures in the light of the new information*". This sounded to me to be the exact same process that is discussed by authors, calling it the deconstruction process. For this reason, I have then tried to find the difference and/or correlation between constructivism and deconstructivism.

When studying the discussion by Yarger, et al (1998: accessed 03/12/2006) on the theoretical basis of constructivism, the elements of the deconstruction process are clearly visible. They indicate that an internal personal representation of knowledge is constructed by the learners. The new knowledge is constructed by the learner who is striving to build a meaningful personal representation of an experience. The degree to which learners integrate new knowledge with their existing knowledge base, has an influence on the richness of the new constructs and also on the way that the learners use/apply the new knowledge in new situations. "*This integration demands the restructuring and change of existing knowledge.*" They also indicate that the learning setting becomes the context of the newly constructed knowledge and therefore it has an influence on the way the learner can apply the newly created knowledge in new situations.

Terhart (2003: 31) states that "*learning is an independently-performed activity that is strongly embedded in situations*" (contexts). He also states that knowledge, contents, and abilities are constructed by the learner and that it is not being acquired or 'absorbed'. This construction process is always based on an already existing knowledge structure and it can never start if there is no existing knowledge structure on which it can build. Any interpretation of new information is based on the learner's personal existing knowledge and/or experience.

Terhart (2003: 27 – 30) describes different theoretical contexts of constructivism as follows: According to the epistemology of *radical constructivism*, nothing is discovered that we know of. It is generated by human beings and humans can understand their reality only in the form in which it has been constructed by themselves. This does not mean that the existence of the reality of objects existing outside us is being denied. It claims that humans understand reality only in the form in which it has been personally constructed.

The *neurobiology of cognition* is used by the radical constructivists to prove their epistemological views. The neurobiological perspective proves that the human sense organs are not vessels to “*transport*” the outer world into the brain. It claims that the outer world provides only a few pieces of information, which can also be incomplete and/or distorted, about the environment. This information is only used by the brain to construct a world of experience.

Hambrock-Johannes (2006: 7) explains the views of Von Glasersfeld, who is recognised as a radical constructivist. She states that Glasersfeld indicates that learners adapt the new information in an attempt to make it more viable. She cites Glasersfeld in saying that, “*the most viable model is constructed and utilized until new information is encountered and a discrepancy is encountered*”. Truth or reality is then reconstructed in order to create a new viable model. This pragmatic view is also mentioned by Botella (1993: accessed 03 December 2006).

Many authors provide to the term ‘*bildung*’ in brackets when talking about constructivism. Thomson (2001: 255) cites Heidegger when explaining the term ‘*bildung*’.

*What ‘Bildung’ expresses is twofold: First, Bildung means forming [Bilden] in the sense of impressing a character that unfolds. But at the same time this ‘forming’ [‘Bilden’] ‘forms’ [‘bildet’] (or impresses a character) by antecedently taking its measure from some measure-giving vision, which for that reason is called the preconception [Vor-bild].*

This idea of using preconception also proves that some form or level of knowledge should exist in order to use as a basis on which new knowledge is build.

After studying many views as expressed by Conceição-Runlee and Daley (1998: accessed 31 August 2003), Botella (1993: accessed 03 December 2006), DeLashmutt and Braund (2001: accessed 03 December 2006), Slabbert (1997: 41 - 56), Woolfolk (2007: 344 – 346), Möller, et al (2003: 36 – 37) and the views of Ewald Terhart, Horst Siebert and Kersten Reich, as discussed by Hambrock-Johannes (2006: 21 - 45), and reflecting on what is said about constructivism, I believe that it should not be discussed as a theory on its own, but it should always be explained and discussed as only an integral part of the learning process. The main reason for this understanding is the fact that the core characteristic of the constructivist theory is the belief that existing (embedded) knowledge is changed by adding the new knowledge after a change in the environment was experienced and that no truth can be constructed from a zero knowledge base. This is also the core idea of deconstruction.

Looking at the publishing dates of the different sources which were studied and the dates referred to in these different sources, it became clear that the constructivist theory is well-established and that it will not easily change. Terhart (2003: 42) states that constructivism doesn't have any new ideas to add to education.

In some instances, the importance of the social environment in which the learning takes place is also highlighted and then the term social constructivism is used. *"Social Constructivist paradigm views the context in which the learning occurs as central to the learning itself"* (McMahon, 1997: accessed 31 August 2006).

McMahon (1997: accessed 31 August 2006) states that theorists such as Vygotsky pioneered the social constructivist paradigm. He further states that these theorists *"argue for the importance of culture and context in forming understanding. Learning is not a purely internal process, nor is it a passive shaping of behaviours. Vygotsky favoured a concept of learning as a social construct which is mediated by language via social discourse"*. McMahon further refers to Vygotsky when saying that when speech and practical activity are used together, the purely human forms of practical and abstract intelligence occur. Language and communication then become inseparable from the learning process.

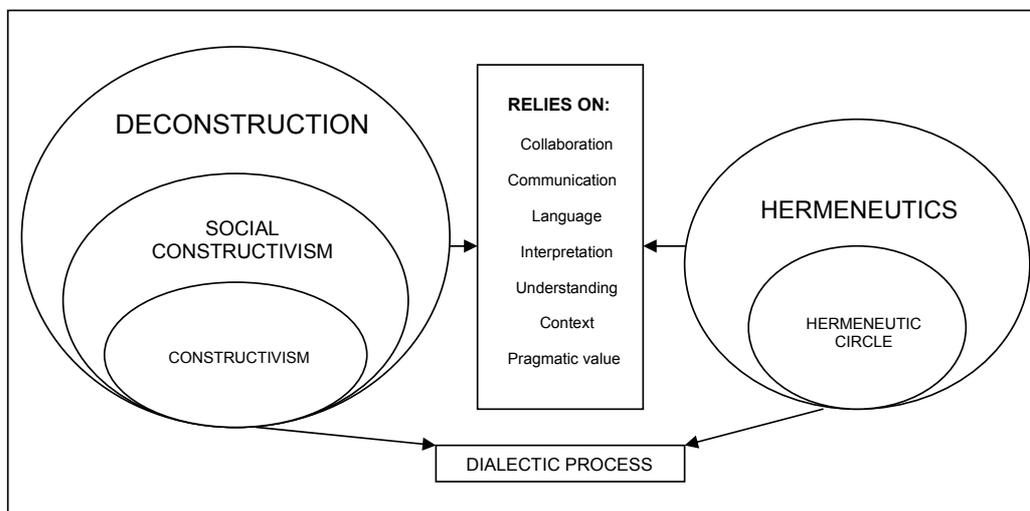
De Bono (2007: accessed 07 October 2007) refer to the social constructivistic learning process as "*parallel thinking*", which entails that all parties are thinking in parallel in the same direction in a co-operative and co-ordinated manner. He indicates that although the thinking direction itself can be changed in order to give a full scan of the situation, each thinker is thinking in parallel with all the other thinkers, at every moment of the co-operative thinking process. Not all parties have to agree on the matters under discussion. "*Statements or thoughts which are indeed contradictory are not argued out but laid down in parallel. In the final stage, the way forward is 'designed' from the parallel thought that have been laid out.*"

Another key concept that is referred to in the discussions of social constructivism is collaboration. McMahon (1997: accessed 31 August 2006) refers to Resnick (1988, as cited by Brown et al, 1989) when stating that, "*throughout most of their lives people learn and work collaboratively, not individually*". Vygotsky also indicates the importance of collaboration in the process of constructing knowledge when defining the 'Zone of Proximal Development'. He defined it as "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited by McMahon, 1997: accessed 31 August 2006).

Collaborative learning allows learners to share views and strategies which in turn allow the learner to develop multiple perspectives. The construction of new knowledge can be enhanced by the flexibility that was provided by these multiple perspectives (Yarger, et al, 1998: accessed 03/12/2006). The importance of collaboration is also supported by Gravett and Geysler (2004: 173), Gravett (2001: 38), Woolfolk (2007: 48), and Jacobsen, Eggen and Kauchak (2002: 5; 19; 144).

The importance of language, communication, and collaboration as part of the learning process is widely discussed in the foregoing sections regarding hermeneutics and the deconstruction process. This correlation clearly indicates that social constructivism and therefore also constructivism, is an inseparable part of the deconstruction process.

After studying many sources and many hours of reflecting on my own learning experiences as well as discussions with peers, the only difference between 'constructivism' and 'social constructivism' that I could identify, lies in the focus points of the theorists. In my mind, these two concepts are exactly one and the same thing. After collaboration with peers, I have personally constructed the conclusion that some theorists prefer to focus on the process where the new knowledge becomes integrated with the embedded knowledge and then it is called 'constructivism'. Other theorists have a more holistic view. They describe the process of knowledge integration and at the same time acknowledge and describe the undeniable influence of the environment on the constructions that are created by humans. When referring to this holistic view the term 'social constructivism' is then used. Figure 3 illustrates my understanding of the inclusion of social constructivism and constructivism as part of the deconstruction process and the correlation thereof with the hermeneutic principles.



**Figure 3. The inclusion of constructivism and social constructivism in the deconstruction process and the correlation thereof with the hermeneutic principles.**

With deconstruction as my main focus point for this project in mind, I understood deconstruction to be the principle process which includes social constructivism and constructivism. I thought of social constructivism to be the process of collecting information from the environment around you, e.g. the socially accepted truths and the viewpoints of others, either supporting or rejecting the social truths, regarding a certain phenomenon. Constructivism would then be the process where you decide

what your viewpoint and beliefs are after considering the information received from the environment around you as well as that which you already know.

I still couldn't come to peace with the idea that the same process carries different names. The term 'bildung' came to mind and I have applied the process which I understand to be deconstruction to make sense in my confusion. 'Bildung' sounds close to 'building' which relates to the construction industry. When constructing a building it means to create something new by using new materials. To deconstruct a building, is breaking it down after it was found not to be up to standard anymore or when it doesn't carry any pragmatic value anymore. To reconstruct the same building, you use new material as well as some of the existing structure which is still strong enough and which falls within the building construction laws. In other words, these are three different processes. All three processes involve or influence the structure of the building.

In trying to visualise these perceptions in relation to learning, figure 4 was created. Four main steps can be identified:

- Step 1: Different types, forms and sizes of influences from the environment, which may or may not be related to one another, are experienced at different times or in different situations (contexts) during one's life. These influences create *discrepancies* in a person's existing frame of knowledge and force a person to review his/her existing knowledge structure.
- Step 2: The review process causes the person to fractionize the existing knowledge frame through critical questioning and analysis. During this **deconstruction** process, the existing knowledge is evaluated and decisions about the validity and pragmatic value thereof are taken. Knowledge that is found to be invalid in relation with the situation or phenomenon at hand is rejected.
- Step 3: The validity and pragmatic value of the new information are determined. Information that was received through collaboration with peers and other (social) sources in the environment as well as personal experiences and existing knowledge are used. Socially collected information can for example include the generally accepted view of community and/or the results of empiric research studies. In a dialectic process (hermeneutic

circle) interpretation of the new information and the **construction** of new meaning (understanding) takes place. De Bono (2007: accessed 07 October 2007) refers to this thinking process as lateral thinking which is *“concerned with the perception part of thinking. This is where we organise the external world into the pieces we can then ‘process’.* This happens when *“there is a need to escape from a local optimum in order to move towards a more global optimum.”* This process continues until no further understanding of the situation or phenomenon is experienced. These new constructions are then called knowledge.

Step 4: The old and new knowledge are integrated and the **reconstruction** of the knowledge frame takes place. The reconstructed frame is different from the one that existed before deconstruction took place, in order to fill the gaps that were left by the rejection of invalid knowledge and to accommodate the newly constructed knowledge.

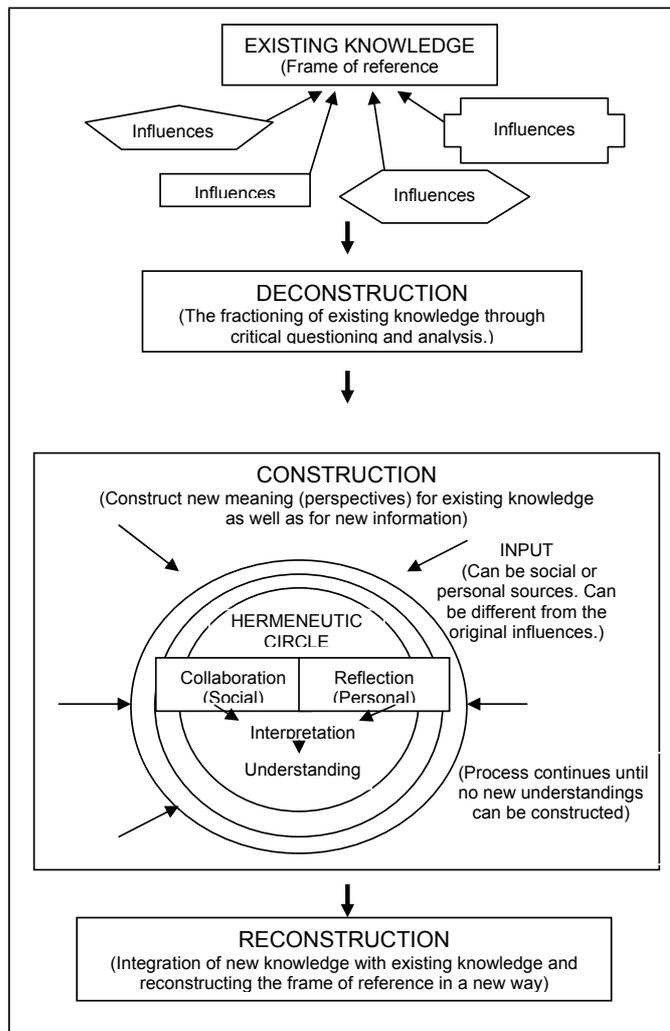


Figure 4. Structivism.

Looking at the improvement or creation of knowledge in this way, it became even more evident to me that it is not correct to view constructivism and deconstructivism as two different main metatheories. Both are only a step with equal importance in the process of creating a new structure of knowledge (frame of reference). Both steps must be present to reach the reconstruction stage. For this reason, it makes more sense to me to refer to the overall process or metatheory as **structivism**.

Yarger, et al (1998: accessed 03/12/2006) make a statement about collaborative learning that can be seen as crucial for the objectives of this research project. They state that:

*A major goal of constructivist learning is learning to learn, or metacognition, which prepares the learner for life-long learning. Thus, much of the teacher's efforts are directed toward developing skills and strategies for learning. Collaborative learning within a complex learning environment provides rich and varied opportunities for the developing and sharing of learning skills.*

The main objective of this research project is to identify methods that can be used to develop the conceptualising, reflective, and critical thinking skills of the learners that will allow them to develop the ability to use existing skills and knowledge across the curriculum as well as holistically in their lives. Therefore, it can be said that I want them to *'learn to learn'*.

Another reason for the inclusion of social constructivist learning in this project is the fact that the sample group consists of only black African learners. The idea of collaboration is an integral part of the African moral concept of 'Ubuntu'. Ubuntu translates to *a person depends on others just as much as others depend on him/her*. Möller, et al (2003:215) clearly explains it by saying, *"Ubuntu's crucial feature, therefore, is its recognition that the human self only exists and develops in intersubjective relations with other persons"*. This can be directly related to the idea of collaborative learning.

Whether called constructivism, deconstructivism or as I prefer structivism, the importance of this way of learning cannot be emphasized enough. Only true personal understanding of a situation or phenomenon will allow a person to use the knowledge in a holistic or inter-curricular manner. Slabbert (1997: 95) refers to Mandler and Nakamara (1987) who said that developing the individual's full potential requires conscious participation by the individual. For this reason learner centered learning sessions should be created where the learner can have the opportunity to solve his/her own life problems, in order to keep them consciously involved at all times.

## **PART 2: FIELDS OF STUDY IDENTIFIED DURING THE DATA COLLECTION PERIOD**

### **2.2.5 PSYCHIC CLOSENESS OR DISTANCE**

In the preparation stage of this research project, I have tried to find the aspects in the classroom environment about which the most controversies exist. After having casual discussions with colleagues, I soon realised that the aspect creating the most controversy in my working environment is the psychic closeness or distance that should be maintained between the educator and the learner. This created the need to investigate the distances, proximities, and psychic dynamics that occur between the educator and the learner.

Clear indications were found that self-concept and the sense of belonging (Christenson & Havsy, 2001: 6-7; McCombs, 2001: 8-9; Schaps, et al, 2001: 20-21; Greenberg, 2001: 22-23) are very important in the learning environment and through personal experience I believe that the actions of the educator can have an important influence on this aspect. This was confirmed by Bloodworth, et al, (2001: 4-5) by saying that research studies have shown that *“social skills and prosocial and empathic behaviour relate positively to academic outcomes”*. McCombs (2001:8-9) agreed with this by stating that *“feeling cared for and safe, experiencing positive peer and adult relationships, having high self-efficacy and being able to engage in effective social problem solving”* have positive academic effects.

Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992: 216) indicated that the issue of closeness or distance is one of the biggest concerns of educators. He stated that a teacher with many years of experience told him that her biggest concern in her first year of teaching was not content in the classroom, but she was uncertain of how to react when one of the female learners met her in the bathroom. She was so uncertain, that she practiced scenarios to ensure that the proper distance was maintained and that her identity as teacher would not dissolve. Taubman believes that when teachers ask how close they should be to students they are not only asking "Who am I in relation to these students or this student?" and "Who are these students in relation to me?"

They are also asking questions about what they want from students and what students want from them. These are questions of identity and intention.

When reading the work of Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992: 216 – 233) for the first time, the term “*psychic closeness*” as used by Taubman made me to stop reading in order to determine the true meaning of the word “*psychic*”. My first thought was that the term “psychological” should have been used instead of the term “*psychic*”.

I used the thesaurus function of the Microsoft Office Word® programme to determine the difference between the words psychic and psychological. Table 2 shows the search results of the words that I deemed to be the most appropriate in this context.

<b>Psychic:</b>	Supernatural, spiritual, extrasensory, telepathic, intuitive, clairvoyant
Intuitive:	Instinctive, spontaneous, innate.
Instinctive:	Natural, unconscious
Spontaneous:	Inherent, natural, unprompted, unplanned
Innate:	Natural, inborn, inherent, intrinsic
Intrinsic:	Fundamental, real, genuine
Genuine:	Sincere
<b>Psychological:</b>	Mental, emotional, psychosomatic
Mental:	Cerebral, mind, rational, intellectual
Emotional:	Touching, poignant, affecting, moving
Cerebral:	Intellectual, brainy, clever, logical, analytical
Rational:	Based on reason, sensible, realistic, judicious
Logical:	Commonsensical, coherent, valid
Realistic:	Level-headed, matter-of-fact

**Table 2. The meanings of the terms psychic and psychological.**

After analysing the list of words, one can say that the term psychic closeness refers to a natural, unexplainable link between the spirits or inner beings of the educator and the learner. This link or relationship develops spontaneously and unconsciously. When analysing the list of words regarding psychological closeness, one can deduce that it refers to the relationship that exists between humans who are on the same intellectual level and who reason and think alike regarding matters that can be

validated by using conscious and logical reasoning. With this new understanding of the true meaning of the two terms, the work of Taubman made more sense to me during the re-reading of it.

Taubman (ibid. 1992:216-217) indicated that when one discuss the psychic closeness/distance between educator and learner, issues of identity and intention as they play themselves out in the realms of the unconscious and conscious and within the learning environment, should be addressed.

Looking at identity, Taubman (ibid.1992:217-223) explained how a new teacher, acting on advice of his mother who has been a teacher for many years acted in front of a mirror to create the correct posture and facial expressions to be worn in class. I use the word worn, as behaviour that has to be rehearsed in advance is not natural and in this case, this new teacher wanted to act as a duplicate of his mother as he believed that she would be a good example to follow, as she is a successful teacher. This indicates to me that he is not sure about his own identity and needs to create an image that will be acceptable for those around him. I believe he will not know what to answer if he would ask himself "Who am I?"

Möller, et al (2003:164 -165) indicate that images are created around us all the time, especially by the media through advertising, portraying the lives of well-known personalities or having television programmes creating idols and we identify with these images. We regularly ask, "Who am I in relation to these images?" If we don't experience a positive correlation, we see ourselves as unacceptable to the environment around us.

This is the point where we start rehearsing behaviour because we want to act according to the grand narrative of acceptable educator behaviour. Nias (2002: 62) refers to a teacher who said that to share something about yourself with the learners is to be whole. In my mind, 'to be whole' means, you are strong and won't 'fall apart' easily. You don't have to concentrate on 'keeping yourself together'. As soon as we stop behaving in our own natural manner, we have to be very careful not to loose our masks (images) that we are 'wearing', and through that, expose our true selves. We then run the risk of being unable to concentrate on the main objective of being an educator, namely the creation of a natural learning environment.

Nias (ibid) further refers to another teacher who said that if you really want to educate children you've got to share something of yourself as a person with them. This sharing of something of yourself indicates openness towards them. Yet another teacher referred to by Nias stated that the way in which the learners speak to you can be an indicator of your closeness with the learners. This teacher refers to the situation when one of your learners meets you later, when working after he/she has left school. The learner who wasn't close to you would address you in a formal manner, e.g. "Aren't you Mr. Jones?" The learner who had a close relationship with you would react spontaneously with an informal greeting, something like "Alright Sir?" Looking at the different viewpoints as expressed by my colleagues, some of them would experience this informal greeting as a sign of disrespect.

Discussing intention, Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992: 217-223) indicates that there are mainly two discourses. The first is the desire of the educator to be seen as the master with all the knowledge which the learner doesn't possess. This creates alienation between the educator and the learner. He describes a situation where the educator was shocked and shattered because his learners who appeared to have mastered the views he presented didn't agree with his views. Taubman states that:

*By setting himself up as the master – the one who knows – and against the students, by retreating from subjectivity and allowing his knowledge to tyrannize his students' fantasies, Olsen had estranged himself in the ego edifice of teacher-as-master and had become a fortress.*

Paulo Freire (2004: 36 - 38) narrates a situation which he experienced during one of his lectures to an agrarian audience, where the members of the audience communicated freely with him and were actively involved in the learning session. For no apparent reason the conversation was suddenly followed by a disconcerting silence. One of the audience members broke the silence by saying "Excuse us, sir ...excuse us for talking. You're the one who should have been talking, sir. You know things, sir. We don't."

Freire then was a perfect example of an educator who does not allow his knowledge to become a “fortress”. He played a question-and-answer game in which the audience could ask him any question they would like to and he could ask them any question. He asked them ten questions about philosophic terms and obviously, they couldn’t answer them. They asked him ten questions about agricultural terms which he couldn’t answer. This made the score even and he has proven that they do know something and that nobody knows everything and therefore they do have the right to speak.

Freire (2004:36) commented on this experience as follows:

*What would have been meaningless would have been for me to “fill” the silence of the group of peasants with my words, thus reinforcing the ideology that they have just enunciated. What I had to do was to begin with the acceptance of something said in the discourse of the peasants and make a problem of it for them, and thereby bring them once more in dialogue.*

After reading this narration and reflecting on it, I am sure that Freire knew the answers to some, if not all, of the questions that were posed to him. I know the answers to some of the questions through general knowledge and Freire regularly had close contact with the agrarian communities. Looking hermeneutically at his personality displayed throughout this source, he definitely would know the answers to the questions. The following statement of Freire makes me even surer of my belief.

*[ ... ] for the progressive educator, there is no other route than to seize the educands’ “moment” and begin with there “here” and “now” – but as a stepping-stone to getting beyond, critically, their naïveté. It will do no harm to repeat that a respect for the peasants’ ingenuousness, without ironical smiles or malicious questions, does not mean that the educator must accommodate to their level of reading of the world.*

This provides even stronger evidence that educators should not try and confirm their own identities by 'hiding' behind their knowledge and through that create a distance between themselves and the learners.

The second discourse that should be studied when looking at the intention of the educator is the educator's need to be accepted by the learners and to be part of the learners. Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992:219) said:

*I am suggesting that initially the new teacher with his or her fragile identity is still in the realm of the imaginary and transfers onto the students the unconscious relationships that constitute that identity. Thus we see new teachers working hard at being liked or changing their students into a particular ideal. It is in the eyes of the students that such a teacher looks for affirmation. Or, conversely, it is in the eyes of the students that the teacher looks for a reflection of himself or herself as the original Other in whose gaze that teacher came into being. It is not unusual at this level for new teachers to talk about being friends with their students, about taking care of them, or about saving them in some vague way. Boundaries between teacher and student are diffuse. And it is in this register of the imaginary that one can hear the unarticulated unconscious fears, desires, and needs that constitute the new identity of the teacher.*

Taubman makes it clear that the possibility exists that an educator can become too familiar with the learners in order to be popular. If I compare this possibility with the management style of a previous employer of mine (which was outside the educational environment), I can see the warning signs. Employees did as they liked and the manager didn't have the power to control the employees and discipline became a problem. Tardiness, high absenteeism, low productivity, and a decrease in motivation to excel were clearly visible. I believe these symptoms could also appear in the classroom if the educator manages the class in a way to be popular and not to be fair.

Although the above discussion is about the new teacher, the teacher with a low self-esteem can stay in this phase of trying to look good in the eyes of the learners.

Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992:229) said:

*[ ... ]the ego is the enemy. As Catherine Clement puts it, "At the conclusion of therapy what will have disappeared is the armor of the Ego, the fortress, the glass cage of narcissistic illusions" (1983, p. 146).*

*What is supposed to emerge is an "I" free of all dependency on the Other, of nonrelation to the Other in whose gaze the ego is formed. What is repudiated is the Other when an identityless "I" emerges.*

*But to act in the world is to project oneself into the future to assume an identity, to be finally political. Otherwise we become a shifting and shiftless "I" that is indeed a slave of the unconscious. I would suggest then that not only is the Other repudiated but also the very real world of connections and passions that demands we assume an identity.*

This clearly indicates to me that the educator must also be willing to 'get out of the box' that was created by the images constructed by others and become willing to share a part of him/herself with the learners.

Eskell.Blokland (Date unknown) describes the interview with Cabangile, who studied psychology and had a difficult childhood herself. Looking at the content of the remarks and responses in the interview the assumption can be made that Cabangile herself was a client of the clinic where she is currently employed. The following are extracts from this interview to show how important it is to all people to be accepted unconditionally. The text is quoted as it appeared during the interview in order to ensure that the feelings that were expressed will not be lost due to a narration in the third person.

Speaking about one of her clients Cabangile said

*During the day he's staying with us. He's found a family, obviously.*

She continues by saying:

*We feel like it's our home, [the clinic where she is involved] because we connect our spirit with their own [the counsellors]. They understand us. The family I'm talking about is the family who*

*understands you even if you've got mental problems - they don't judge you, they accept you the way you are. That's your family.*

*[...] the family I'm talking about is not about one person. You have to share with other people, your struggle. They have to tell you your problem and it must be give and take.*

This is the conversation that followed this last comment of Cabangile:

Eskell-Blokland: *Is that what counselling is to you? You must give and take?*

Cabangile: *Yes, you must tell a little about yourself [as a counsellor] even if you don't get deep.*

Eskell-Blokland: *Why is that?*

Cabangile: *No, I believe myself, I've been betrayed so many times...when I was staying at home. I was giving, only giving. And people were using that information to destroy me.*

At the end of the interview Cabangile said:

*We must try to teach people that the family is not the family you were born with - you must create a family for yourself. Ja, and the family you are not related to, you are not their relatives, it is the best. I can tell you. Some other people they've got love - the love that you don't get from your family. They are like that. They know the struggle, they understand and they are willing to help other people. They are willing to give other people a chance. So those people are the people you must associate with and make them to be your family.*

After reading this statement of Cabangile, I have realised that it is very important that we should create a “*family*” for the learners in our classes. When a person is between family members, he/she feels more relaxed and feels free to experiment with new ways of doing things and creating new ideas. A person is naturally more willing to take risks and make mistakes in the presence of family members than in the presence of strangers. The level of the closeness that exists between the family

members also has an influence on the level of the willingness of a person to attempt bigger challenges that necessitate the use of creative thinking. This can be related to the generally accepted belief that family members accept a person unconditionally and that acceptance are not influenced by the number of mistakes that one makes in life.

### **2.2.6 CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION**

Looking at these two terms it will seem obvious that a learner must be able to use creative thinking as creativity is needed in the process of constructing new knowledge. It is also believed that creativity can create one of the most competitive advantages of a person, as he/she will be a leader through the creation of innovative solutions for problems. De Bono (2007: accessed 07 October 2007) confirms this statement by saying that *“creativity and innovation lead to increased productivity and profit. Today, better quality and better service are essential, but they are not enough. Creativity and innovation are the only engines that will drive lasting, global success.”*

When it comes to imagination one might at a first glance think it is unnecessary to use imagination in the learning process. The learners who are a part of this project have to be able to use their imagination to place themselves in another milieu when answering case study questions in the open book tests. These tests form seventy five percent of the assessment in the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management on N4 to N6 level.

When trying to find a definition for the term creativity, two approaches in explaining the term could be found. The first is the general view that creativity is the ability to make something or to create something from nothing (*“die vermoë om iets te maak, voort te bring of te skep.”*) (Labuschagne & Eksteen, 1993: 407). Woolfolk (2007: 306) refers to Berk when stating that *“creativity is the ability to produce work that is original, but still appropriate and useful.”* She (ibid: 307) refers to Plucker when she adds the idea that the something new is useful in a particular culture or situation.

The second approach refers to creativity as the ability to create valuable alternative solutions for problems. Van der Horst & McDonald (1997: 220) indicates that it concerns finding alternatives to fulfil the need to *“go beyond the known, the obvious and the satisfactory.”* Slabbert (1997: 141) cites other authors who also refer to

creativity as part of problem solving. He refers to Heene (1980) when saying that “*a creative product is an aid that one finds and experiences as new and valuable when solving a problem.*”

Slabbert (1997: 140 – 176) widely discusses creativity as an inherent part of metalearning. He also refers to personality traits that creative people have. The most important of these characteristics in regard to this study is the idea that creative people have “*a preference for the new and the unconventional, without disregarding reality*”. De Bono (2007, accessed 7 October 2007) makes a similar statement by saying that “*you can analyse the past but you have to design the future*”. This indicates that one has to look at the past to learn from one’s experiences in order to take decisions and actions in the future.

Slabbert (1997: 157 – 161) provides a list of blocks to creativity. One of the personal blocks that he identifies is that of a lack of self-confidence. This fits closely with the problem of shyness which is experienced by some of the learners who participated in this project. Other personal blocks are a tendency to conform, a need for the familiar/habit bound thinking and emotional “numbness”, to name only a few.

One misconception regarding creativity is the idea that people who are creative in one area should also be creative in other areas. Woolfolk (2007: 306) states that psychologists agree that people are creative in particular areas and that there is no such thing as “*all-purpose creativity*”. An example of this idea is the fact that a person may be creative in an artistic manner but does not have a well-developed ability to solve mechanical, mathematical or even emotional problems. It also became clear through perusing these sources that a person can learn the skill of creativeness and the misconception that a person must be born with the skill of creativeness was proved to be wrong. De Bono (2007, accessed 7 October 2007) confirms this viewpoint by stating that creative thinking “*is not a talent but a skill that can be learned*”.

Woolfolk (2007: 309) provides ideas that can be used to stimulate creativity in the classroom. The educator should accept and encourage divergent thinking, tolerate dissent, encourage learners to trust their own judgment, emphasise that everyone is

capable of creativity in some form, and that time, space and materials should be provided to support creative projects.

Slabbert (1997: 157) refers to a personal block to creativity that closely relates to the concept imagination. He states that:

*A tendency to conform promotes a tendency to comparison and limits access to areas of imagination. This inclination also relates to seeing what you expect to see and results in a failure to utilize all sensory inputs.*

So what then is imagination? It can be described as the creation of a picture in your mind of what you will see when looking at yourself through the eyes of others. Woolfolk (2007: 26) refers to images as remembering the physical attributes and spatial structures of information. This then confirms the fact that imagination is built on existing knowledge that is retrieved from a person's memory. The term image refers to the visualization of a certain situation or object. She also states that images are useful in making practical decisions. This viewpoint then links imagination to the perspective that regards creativity as a part of decision-making.

## **2.3 CLOSURE**

Reflecting on what was said by the different authors who were referred to in especially the second part of this chapter, it became evident that the actions and feelings of human beings can be influenced by both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors in their living environment. The remarks made by Cabangile during her interview with Eskell-Blokland confirmed that the openness that exists in the relationship between the educator and the learner can have a significant influence on the learners' willingness to actively take part in the learning process. In an open relationship the learners are more willing to display and communicate their own viewpoints without the fear of being humiliated if their viewpoints are not in line with what is expected based on curriculum content or the perceptions of the educator and their peers.

In order for the educator to understand the feelings and fears of the learners, he/she must be able to place him/herself in the shoes of the learners. This becomes possible when open communication exists between the educator and the learners. This openness can be created when the educator is empathic and a relationship based on mutual trust is established. This viewpoint is rooted in the principles of the hermeneutic approach towards human relations.

In order for the learners to truly understand the learning content, the educator must guide the learners through the process of deconstructing the information received during the learning sessions, analysing the information by using existing knowledge and then reconstructing the knowledge by integrating the newly acquired knowledge into the existing frame of reference.

The next chapter will indicate some differences between qualitative and quantitative inquiries. Different approaches, strategies and tools will be discussed in order to motivate the appropriateness of those that were used in this study. The relation between the different approaches, strategies and tools and the principles as discussed in this chapter will be indicated clearly.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS**

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Seeing that the different strategies and methods that can be used in educational research is such a wide field for discussion, this chapter will provide just a very brief overview regarding the differences between qualitative and quantitative inquiries. This will be followed by a discussion of the strategies and methods that were used in this research project. Action research, different interviewing techniques, case studies and observation as methods for data collection will be discussed. A motivation for the sampling technique that was used will also be provided.

### 3.2 QUALITATIVE OR QUANTITATIVE INQUIRY

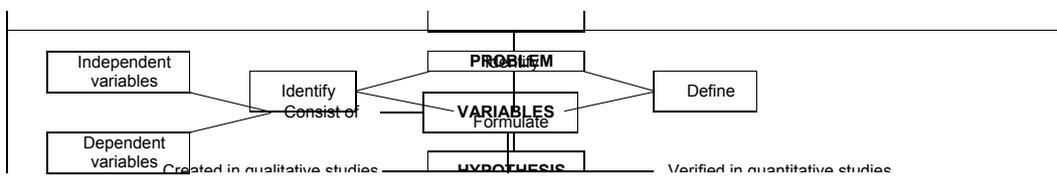
Research methods are commonly divided into two categories, namely qualitative inquiry and quantitative inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 10; 2003: 13).

#### 3.2.1 What is the difference?

Smit (2001: 65) provides clear distinctions between the characteristics of qualitative and quantitative inquiries. It can be summarized as follows:

QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inductive in approach</li> <li>• Generates hypotheses</li> <li>• Naturalistic design and in-depth studies of a few cases</li> <li>• Based on naturalistic-phenomenological philosophy</li> <li>• Seeks illuminations and under-standing Decisions about data collection strategies are made during the study</li> <li>• Researcher becomes immersed in the research project as instrument</li> <li>• Context important – human actions are strongly influenced by the settings in which they occur.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deductive and predictive in approach</li> <li>• Tests hypotheses</li> <li>• Experimental designs and statistical correlations with large samples</li> <li>• Based on positivist tradition</li> <li>• Seeks casual determination, prediction and generalisation of findings</li> <li>• Research methods and processes are set in steps that guide the researcher</li> <li>• Researcher remains detached</li> <li>• Context-bound generalisations are generated</li> </ul>

**Table 3. Distinctions between qualitative and quantitative inquiries.**



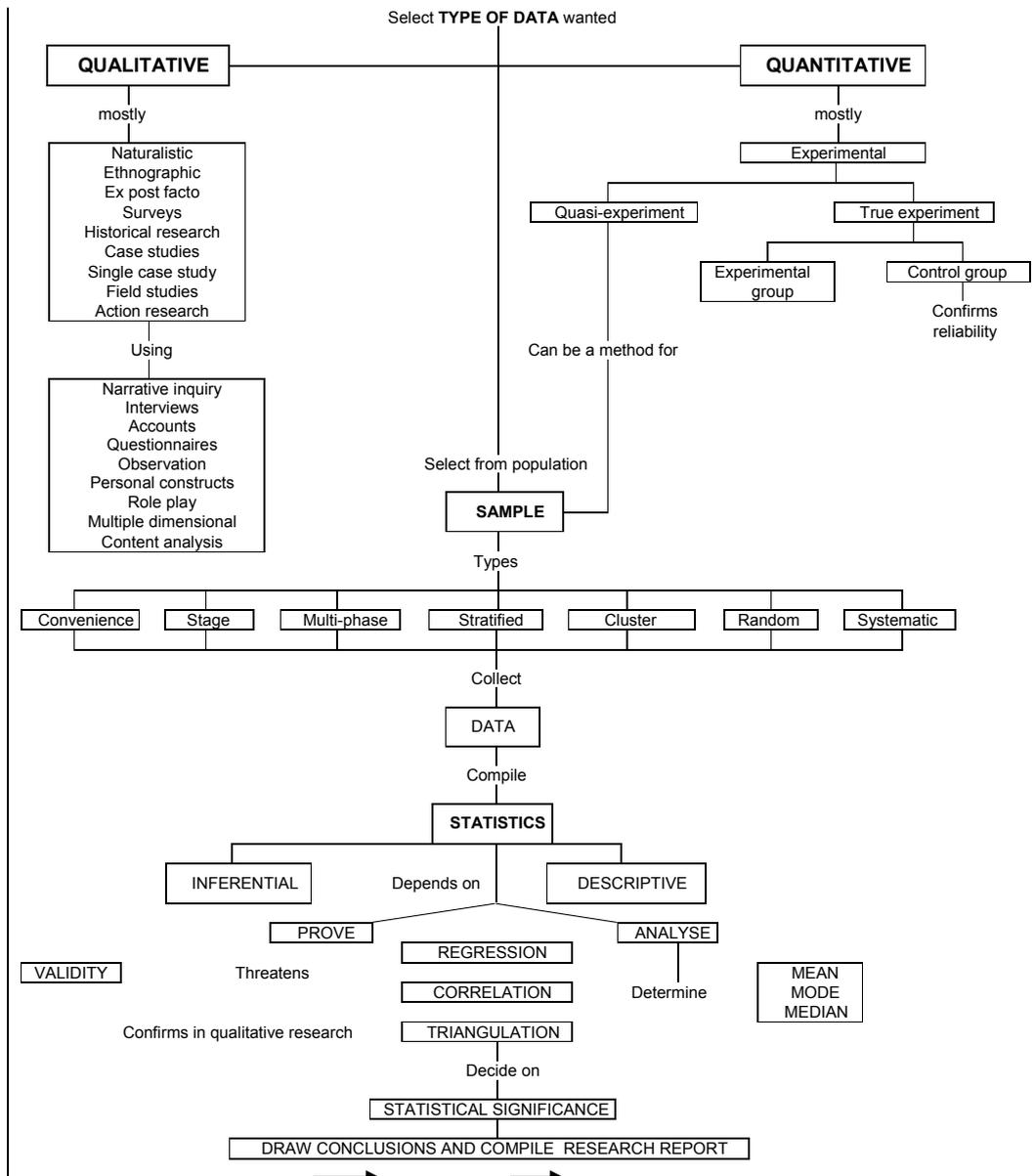


Figure 5. The process of research in education (Boshoff, 2004(a):2)

Figure 5 indicates the process of research in education as well as the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research.

Following the long debates regarding the nature of qualitative and quantitative inquiries, as well as the characteristics of a hermeneutical approach, and looking at the characteristics of the different educational metatheories as summarised by Möller

(2005, Table 4), it becomes clear that a research project in education, based on hermeneutical foundations, will be conducted by using a mainly qualitative approach.

	LOGICAL EMPIRICISM	PHENOMENOLOGY	HERMENEUTICS
<b>Philosophical ideas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Logical ideas are meaningful ideas</li> <li>- The only true ideas can be defined and tested by experience</li> </ul>	Humanity and the world not to be separated.	Discover truth through <b>communication and interpretation (understanding)</b>
<b>What is science?</b>	Science is systematic exploration of experience through the senses and interpretation by the mind	It is the interpretation of the world through experience and logical interpretation	<b>It is the interpretation of language in broader perspective (auditory, sensory, emotional, visual) in context with social order and time</b>
<b>What is education?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A practice of scientific research</li> <li>- Child guidance towards intellectual &amp; physical adulthood</li> <li>- Emphasis on experience &amp; logical interpretation</li> </ul>	The development in relation to the world	A lifelong experience discovering the world and learners own uniqueness through <b>communication and interpretation</b>
<b>Research Methods Applied</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative e.g.</li> <li>- Experiments (Tests)</li> <li>- Observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative as well as quantitative</li> <li>- Use of radical thinking to prevent subjectivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative:</li> <li>- Story telling</li> <li>- Interview</li> </ul>
<b>Influence on Education</b>	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research programmes in education according to Logical demands</li> <li>- Research Reports must be objective and depict reality hence the development of quantitative research</li> <li>- Programmed education</li> <li>- Learners are marginalised</li> </ul> <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dehumanise people – see them as objects</li> <li>- Classification leads to discrimination</li> </ul>	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To guide learners towards critical thinking skills, objectivity and to discover essentialities</li> <li>- Learners are seen as human-beings with feelings and emotions</li> </ul> <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Language difficult</li> <li>- Fractionise reality into small units</li> <li>- Uncritical against the ruling class</li> </ul>	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Depart from the known to guide learners to discover the unknown</li> <li>- Teaching approaches influence objectives e.g. make learners to understand and discourage memorisation in teaching.</li> <li>- The classroom become a place of communication, interpretation and understanding</li> <li>- Enhances a democratic atmosphere</li> <li>- Creates mutual respect between learner and educator</li> </ul> <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Very subjective</li> <li>- Can lead to excessive talking</li> <li>- Possibility of difficult interpretation</li> </ul>

**Table 4. Summary of metatheories. Adapted from Möller (2005)**

### 3.3 THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 35) indicates that an interactive qualitative inquiry

*“is an in-depth study using face-to-face techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings. The researcher interprets phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative researchers*

*build a complex, holistic picture with detailed descriptions of informants' perspectives."*

### **3.3.1 Ontological and epistemological foundations**

As qualitative research is mostly interpretive, things are studied in their natural settings and the meanings that people have about that which is researched, should also be taken into consideration.

The ontological position of qualitative research acknowledges the fact that there are different ways of making sense of the world. Therefore, it is characterised by the assumption that the researcher, and the participants, construct the reality that they see from their point of view (Smit, 2001: 67). For this reason, Guba and Lincoln (1989: 223) indicate that the readers must be able to see how the researcher and the participants make sense of the research subject. They suggest that this can happen through a report that provides rich descriptions of the experiences in the situation, in order for the readers to make their own sense of the situation. In short, it can then be said that truth is socially constructed when using qualitative methods.

Smit (ibid.) refer to Guba and Lincoln (1989) when she says that the epistemological foundations of qualitative research are based on values and value judgements and not on facts. Guba and Lincoln (In Smit, ibid.: 71) indicates that events are understood through a mental process of interpretation which is influenced by interaction with social context. Schwandt (2003: 299) agrees with this viewpoint and says that the interpretivist epistemologies can be characterized as hermeneutic because they emphasize that one must grasp the situation in which human actions make (or acquire) meaning in order to say one has an understanding of the particular action. This understanding of the situation causes that, in order for the inquirer to understand the part (acts, sentence, saying), the inquirer should understand the whole (e.g. background, intensions, context, language game) of the research matter.

This understanding can be developed by using the notion of the hermeneutic circle as a method or procedure.

### **3.3.2 The researcher**

The fact that qualitative research is of an interpretive nature, it requires of the researcher to be a part of the research at all times. The researcher can be seen as the research instrument, as the data is mostly collected through the interpretations and understandings constructed by the researcher. For this reason, the personal characteristics of the person involved in a qualitative research project can have a big influence on the results and quality of the project. These characteristics are widely discussed but the following are highlighted to be the most important: people skills such as tolerance, sensitivity, empathy, good listening skills, patience, trustworthiness, genuineness, and sound communication skills (Smit, 2001: 72 – 73). Guba and Lincoln (In Cohen, et al, 2002: 140) provide the following general characteristics: adaptability, responsiveness, ability to see the whole picture, ability to explore, to analyze, clarify and summarize. Jancsick (2003: 57) indicates that the researcher must also be very observant.

In 2000, I underwent the Hermann Brain Dominance test<sup>2</sup> and the summary (Figure 6) that was provided clearly indicates that I have many of the skills and characteristics that are needed to be a successful qualitative action researcher. Table 5 indicates how the characteristics that were identified to be part of my personality fit into the principles that were followed in this hermeneutic based action research project. It also indicates how other skills that were identified by various authors as being necessary for effective action research were used.

<b>Characteristics and skills identified through Hermann testing</b>	<b>Characteristics and skills identified by authors</b>	<b>How were these characteristics used?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Tolerance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The respondents were allowed to set the pace in the research process which prevents stress.</li> <li>• Different viewpoints were accepted unconditionally with the aim to exclude prejudice.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interpersonal skills (continued)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitivity</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Trustworthiness</li> <li>• Genuineness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher was sensitive to the feelings of the respondents and knows how to handle situations in order to prevent embarrassment for the participants.</li> <li>• The researcher could “place herself in the shoes” of the respondents.</li> <li>• It allowed for a relationship based on mutual trust where the respondents were</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> © 1988 Hermann International

Characteristics and skills identified through Hermann testing	Characteristics and skills identified by authors	How were these characteristics used?
		willing to share sensitive personal information with the researcher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talker</li> <li>• Expressing</li> <li>• Writing</li> <li>• Detailed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sound communication skills</li>   <li>• Good listening skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It ensured the success of rich narrative reporting which allows the reader to walk the road with the participants.</li> <li>• It ensured clearly stated questions during interviews and learning sessions.</li>   <li>• Spontaneous interviews were used for a large part of the project and interviewing requires that the interviewer has good listening skills.</li> <li>• Narrative therapy (tell me your story) that formed a large part of this project relies mainly on good listening skills for its success.</li> <li>• It forms the base for the skill of 'reading between the lines' which is one of the main elements of the hermeneutical approach followed in this project.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptualising</li> <li>• Detailed</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Creativeness</li> <li>• Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to explore</li> <li>• Analyze</li> <li>• Responsiveness</li> <li>• Adaptability</li> <li>• Clarify</li> <li>• Summarize.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These fit in with the process of action research which entails the defining of a problem, the creation of a possible solution and the implementation of the proposed solution, followed by reflection and changed action if needed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesizer</li> <li>• Spatial</li> <li>• Simultaneous</li> <li>• Integration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to see the whole picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabled the researcher to understand how the respondents' personal situation could have an influence on their behaviour in the learning environment.</li> <li>• As the researcher has the ability to identify similarities in the situations at hand and those experienced before, she could lead the respondents through the process of creating a holistic view by using the Socratic way of questioning.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation was used as a hermeneutic approach also relies heavily on non-verbal communication.</li> </ul>

**Table 5. Correlations between the personal characteristics of the researcher and characteristics that are needed for successful action research.**

At first glance, the characteristic of being a talker can create the impression that I am very dominant during the learning sessions. However, as it is clearly stated in Table 5, during research actions and learning sessions this characteristic is mainly

used to ask clearly stated questions during interviews and to provide rich, narrative and detailed research reports. During the learning sessions, this characteristic allows me to ask clearly stated questions when using the Socratic questioning method. The combination of talking and writing allows me to create case studies that provide enough information to be used in various situations that appear in the different modules of the course that the learners are studying. This enhances the fact that the same knowledge and information can be used in different contexts.

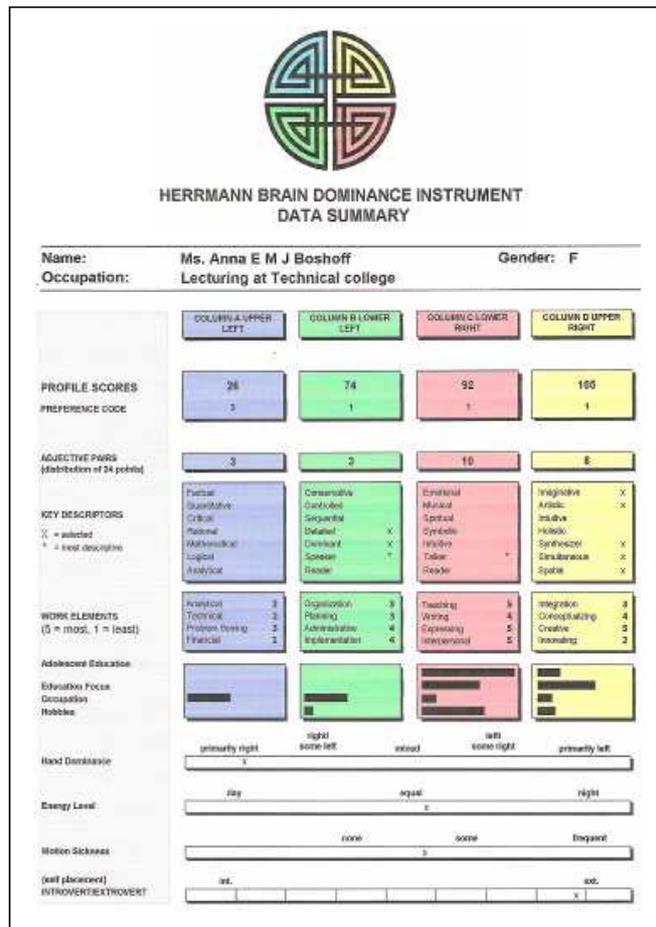


Figure 6. Herrmann Brain Dominance test summary

As a closing thought, I would like to mention that I was quite surprised to see that listening skills are not at all mentioned in the Herrmann summary instrument. I now wonder whether Herrmann sees good listening skills to be automatically included in strong positive interpersonal skills. This view of mine is based on the fact that a person can't hurt someone by listening to him/her and therefore listening can be

seen as an act that creates only positive results. On the contrary, the spoken word can be used in a positive way as well as in a negative way that can cause hurt or damage to the image and self respect of another person. It would be quite interesting to know the truth about Hermann's way of thinking regarding this matter.

### **3.4 METHODS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Figure 5 clearly indicates the strategies that can be used in a qualitative research project. These strategies are: naturalistic, ethnographic, ex post facto, surveys, historical research, case studies, single case study, field studies, and action research.

The following methods for data collection are seen as fitting for a qualitative inquiry: narrative inquiry, interviews, accounts, questionnaires, observation, personal constructs, role-play, and content analysis.

This study was conducted by using action research. The data collection methods were case studies, informal interviews, class discussions, and observation. Only the concept action research and the methods that were used in this study will be discussed.

#### **3.4.1 Action Research**

##### **3.4.1.1 Why Action Research?**

The first question one can ask is: When would you use action research? Dick (2002: accessed 05/02/2005) states that "*when you wish to achieve understanding and change at the same time*" you use action research.

Dick (1997: Accessed 05/02/2005) provides the following definition for action research:

*Action research is a process by which change and understanding can be pursued at the one time. It is usually described as cyclic, with action and critical reflection taking place in turn. The reflection is used to review the previous action and plan the next one.*

*It is commonly done by a group of people, though sometimes individuals use it to improve their practice. It has been used often in the field of education for this purpose.*

Kemmis and McTaggart (1992: 16) states that:

*Action research is concerned equally with changing individuals, on the one hand, on the other, the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to which they belong. The culture of a group can be defined in terms of the characteristic substance and forms of the language and discourses, activities and practices, and social relationships and organisation which constitute the interactions of the group.*

This viewpoint fits in with the main objective of this research project, namely to change the behaviour of the learners. The main aim of this attempt to change the learners' behaviour is to create a "culture" of identifying similarities in situations in order to improve understanding of the different situations. According to the followers of the hermeneutic approach to learning, better understanding will improve the level of learning.

Cohen, et al (2002: 227) states that according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1992) action research is not only about problem-solving, but action research also involves problem-posing. They state that the main aim of action research is to change the world in order to understand and improve the world by studying the results of the changes that were made. For this reason, action research is not research done on other people, but it is done by people on their own work in order to improve their own practice, including how they work with and for others.

#### **3.4.1.2 Action research and deconstruction**

The main aim of the desired new behaviour which is mentioned above is to 'help the learners out of their boxes' and the characteristics of action research as described by Cohen, et al (2002: 229) closely fit this aim.

*Action research establishes self-critical communities of people [...]; it aims to build communities of people committed to enlightening themselves about the relationship between circumstance, action and*

*consequence in their own situation, and emancipating themselves from the institutional and personal constraints which limit their power to live their own legitimate educational and social values.*

Deconstructive learning activities were mostly used in this project. Boje (2000: accessed 02/10/2005) states that deconstruction is often called a form of negative thinking or negative discourse that does not result in real change. The main purpose of both dialectics and deconstruction is to critically look at hegemonic logics ("tabooed meanings") that have people stuck in a rut. Both look at ways to change that which is seen as the only rules to be successful in practice, in order to help people to get out of the rut. Both action research and deconstruction are all about creating change and liberation.

The process of deconstruction is concerned with identifying situations, the analysis of these situations by using reflection and dialectic reasoning and the reconstruction of new situations in order to obtain improvement. Looking at the statement made by Romm (2006:20), clear indications could be found that the participants in action research also follow a dialectic thinking pattern in order to create new situations.

She states that:

*Therefore, it is argued that it is preferable to work with people in exploring the dynamics of their situations, with the aim of developing insightful ways of considering the arena of possible action,' The aim is also to develop ways of appreciating "what could be, rather than what is". Or, as Argyris and Schon put it: people "are in the situations they try to understand, and they help to form them by coming to see and act in them in new ways" (1996, p. 36). According to Argyris and Schon, AR (action research) contributes to the development of processes of "making things under conditions of complexity and uncertainty" (1996, p. 37). This involvement in change processes, they argue, requires a commitment to recognise how people might create things (by, for instance, participating in defining "what could be").*

Reading what Van Niekerk (date unknown (a)) stated about deconstruction with the above words of Romm in mind, it is clear that the new relations that Van Niekerk refers to can be seen as the “*what could be*” as explained by Romm (ibid...: 20). Van Niekerk stated that deconstruction is not about creating new theories, but it is the critical reading of existing theories in order to create new understanding of that which “is”. The new relationships that are created after new understanding was achieved can be seen as the change that is aimed at by doing action research.

Romm (ibid...: 20) refer to Greenwood and Levin (1998, p. 80) when she states that

*action research is helping people to develop new understandings through their ways of living together over time, sharing experiences and taking actions together.” AR (action research) is aimed at developing communication processes that “create meanings supportive of action”. The idea here is that through communicating around differing views, experiences and reflections on actions, people can come to extend their repertoires of action in the world.*

This developing of new understandings can be seen as the action of reconstructing meaning after rearranging the knowledge which was deconstructed. This reconstructed knowledge is used in the daily living of the person, which can be referred to as the person’s social environment, until a change in the environment appears which reactivates the process of deconstruction. Romm (2006:18) identifies this using of the new knowledge as one of the main aims of action research when she states that action research is the exploring of possibilities for creating some “practical” way of addressing what are deemed to be problematic issues of concern to the participants. This exploration is done with the participants in their own social settings.

Looking at the viewpoints as provided by these sources, action research, as well as deconstruction is aimed at empowering and/or liberating the people who are part of the research. For this reason, action research can be used effectively as research strategy in an educational research project in which deconstructive learning processes or activities are used.

### **3.4.1.3 Action Research and Hermeneutics**

The main elements of hermeneutics are interpretation and understanding through communication (Möller, et al, 2003:111). Looking at communication in educational context, communication takes places during class discussions and debates. Romm (2006:20) clearly refers to this action of communication in order to improve understanding when stating that action researchers hope that through the debates that are part of the research, participants will become more willing to include considerations of different ideas and concerns. Action research wants the participants to at least create a better understanding of others' points of view.

A researcher using a hermeneutical approach should be able to understand the concept of circumstance, the idea of being placed in a situation (Möller, et al, 2003: 112). Smit (1999 (a): 34) refers to this as the habit of 'seeing the other point of view'. This habit entails that beliefs must remain open to multiple ways of seeing realities and must invite continued revisiting of these realities in order to create a new sense and understanding of our world.

Seeing that the hermeneutical researcher has the ability to place him/herself in the shoes (situation) of the people involved in the research project, the research is mostly aimed at solving problems that people experience in their everyday activities. Möller, et al (2003: 117) indicates that learning experiences should become part of the learners' personal experiences and that they should constantly improve the learners' understanding. This viewpoint is supported by Greenwood and Levin (1998: 76) when they state that the focus of action research is on solving real-life problems. The participants determine the focus of the inquiry after considering what they feel to be important factors affecting their daily lives. The enquiry process is thus linked to actions taken to provide a solution to the problem being examined.

The more I studied the principles and value of and the reasons for using action research as method, the more it became clear to me that hermeneutics and action research can not be separated from each other. Cohen, et al (2002: 231) states that:

*...practical action research is [ ... ] akin to Schön's 'reflection-on-action' is a hermeneutic activity of understanding and interpreting social situations with a view to their improvement.*

Another very important element of hermeneutics which is stated by Möller, et al (2003: 112) is the fact that an author and his/her text can not be separated. They state that in order to fully understand what the author said, we must gain knowledge of the author him/herself in order to identify with him/her. The reader must have this knowledge in order to be able to place him/herself in the author's shoes (situation) and to see the author's point of view.

This way of reporting is supported by Guba and Lincoln (1989: 223) when stating that the report can not be simply about the evaluand and its context, but it must enable readers to see how the author makes sense of the information that is collected during the research project. They state that the best way to do that, is via a report, which provides a vicarious experience of the situation, allowing the readers to "walk in the shoes" of the participants as they can make their own sense of the situation under discussion. Greenwood and Levin (1998: 81) also supports this way of reporting when they state that *"individual cases and stories, the stuff of most action research, have immense power to alter theories."*

#### **3.4.1.4 Participatory Action Research (PAR)**

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 560 -561) draw clear distinctions between the different perspectives in action research. The characteristics of the different perspectives are summarised in Table 6.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 578) indicate that PAR opens space for communication between the participants. This fact enhances the legitimacy of the research findings as the members reached unforced consensus about actions that will create circumstances in which people can collaboratively search for understanding and acting in the world. They explain three conditions that are present in PAR to prove this point of view.

Firstly, PAR is aimed at *testing, developing, and retesting agreements, understandings, and decisions against criteria of mutual comprehensibility, truthfulness, and appropriateness.*

Secondly, the decisions are taken by the participants themselves who are willing to live with the consequences of the decisions they make, and the actions they take, and the actions that follow from these decisions.

Thirdly, participation is the central and defining feature of the research and the participants mutually agreed to act together on a shared topic or problem.

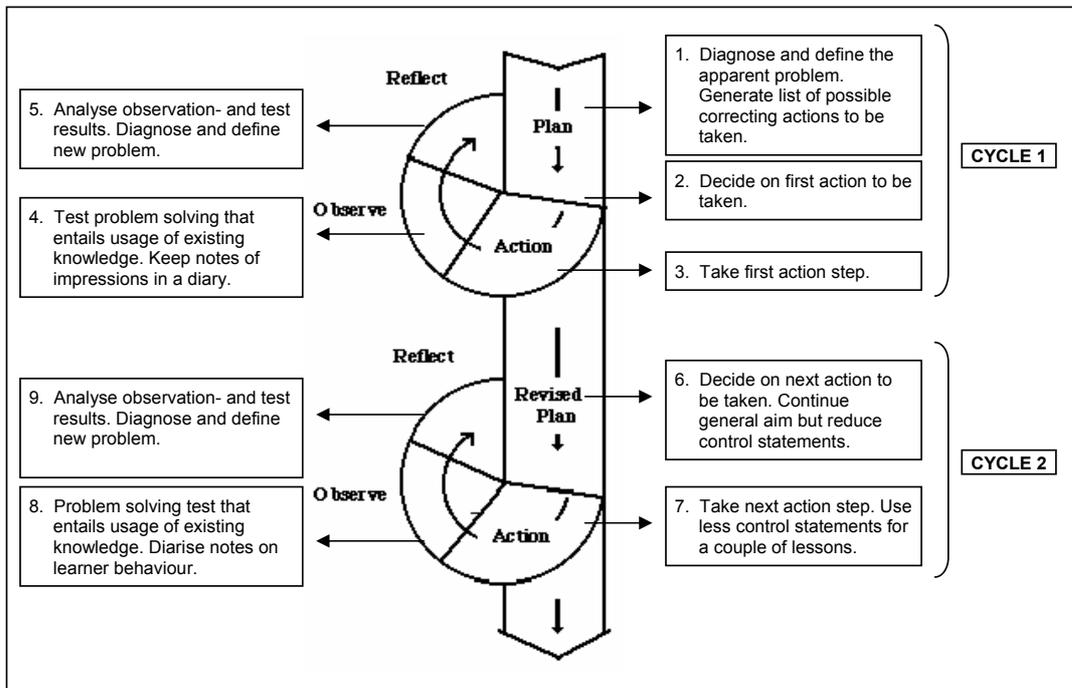
PERSPECTIVE	CHARACTERISTICS
<b>Classroom action research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Involves the use of qualitative interpretive modes of inquiry and data collection by teachers with a view to teachers making judgments about how to improve their own practices</li> <li>▪ Primacy is given to teachers' self-understandings and judgments.</li> </ul>
<b>Participatory research (PAR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Often associated with social transformation in the Third World</li> <li>▪ Community-based analysis of social problems</li> <li>▪ An orientation toward community action</li> <li>▪ Commitment to social, economic, and political development responsive to the needs and opinions of ordinary people.</li> </ul>
<b>Critical action research</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Strongly represented in the literatures of educational action research</li> <li>▪ Commitment to bring together broad social analysis-the self-reflective collective self-study of practice, the way in which language is used, organization and power in a local situation, and action to improve things</li> <li>▪ Takes a broad view of the role of the relationship between education and social change.</li> </ul>
<b>Action learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Brings people together to learn from each other's experiences</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on studying one's own situation, clarifying what the organization is trying to achieve, and working to remove obstacles.</li> </ul>

**Table 6. Different perspectives in action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005:560 - 561)**

When one compares the main aim of this research project and the characteristics of the different perspectives above, it becomes clear that this project cannot be seen as classroom action research only. It is dualistic in the sense that it aims at improving the educator’s practice but at the same time, it wants the learners to be able to voluntarily develop their reflective- and critical reasoning skills in such a way that they can use their knowledge and skills holistically in their lives, in their own socio-economic environment in order to become productive citizens in a democratic society.

**3.4.1.5 Kemmis Model for Action Research**

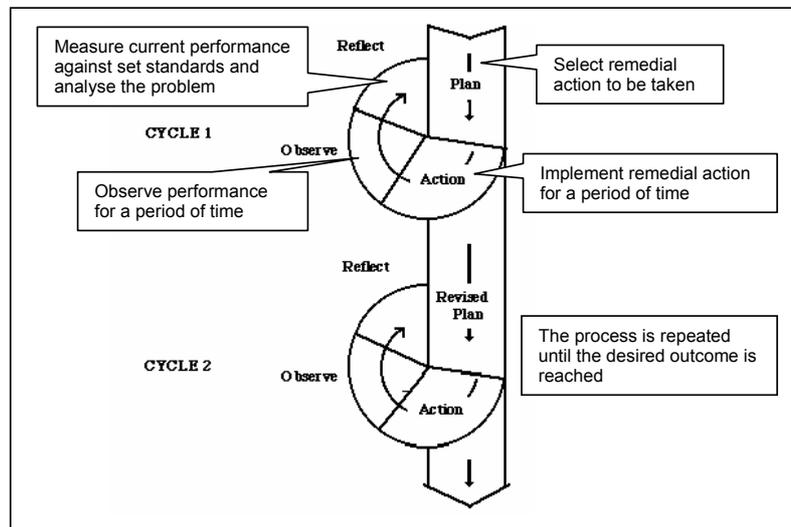
Action research is an ongoing process, as every action in life creates a reaction and every reaction creates a new situation or problem that needs to be solved and therefore it becomes a new field for research. The Kemmis action research model (Figure 7) clearly displays the different actions that are taken in each of the steps of this ongoing process of research.



**Figure 7. The Kemmis Action Research Spiral (Adapted from Kemmis, 1982: 8)**

The Kemmis model for action research was used for the following reasons:

Firstly, the Kemmis model corresponds in many ways with the models used in the subjects Personnel Management and Entrepreneurship and Business Management, on all levels offered by FET Colleges, for the control process (Smit, 1999(a): 155) (Figure 8) and the decision making process (Smit, 1999(a): 84) that are used in the business environment.



**Figure 8. The correlation between the control process (Smit, 1999(a): 155) and the Kemmis action research spiral. (Adapted from Kemmis, 1982: 8)**

The decision making process (Smit, 1999(a): 84) that forms part of the participants' course content correlates with the Kemmis action research model as well as with the Lateral and Parallel thinking actions as discussed by De Bono (2007: accessed 07 October 2007) (Table 7). One of the main objectives of this research project is to develop the creative thinking skills of the learners. De Bono (ibid.) indicates that creative thinking "*empowers people by adding strength to their natural abilities*". This idea of empowering (enlightening) human beings also fits in with the aims of the deconstruction processes which form part of the action research process (Section 3.4.1.2).

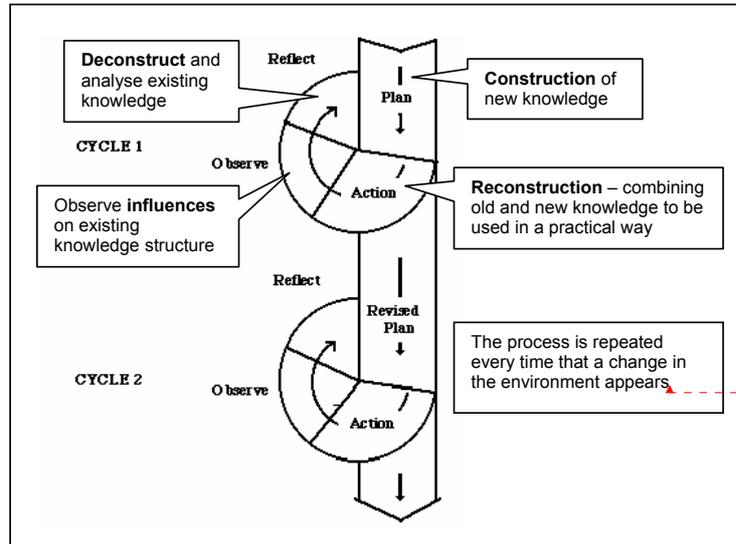
Seeing that the learners are active participants in this research process, they will be able to experience the truth of the fact that similarities appear in different contexts of life and that the knowledge that a person receives in one context can be used in

another similar situation. The learners will be able to experience that the deconstruction processes that will be used to change their own lives can also be used to manage the changes that need to be made inside a business that operates in a dynamic economic environment. This experience will contribute to the success of reaching the main aim of this project, namely to guide the learners to develop the necessary skills needed for using their knowledge holistically in their lives.

<b>Decision Making Process</b> (Adapted from Smit, 1999(a): 84)	<b>De Bono's Hats</b> Adapted from De Bono (2007, accessed 07 October 2007)	<b>Action Research</b> (Kemmis, 1982: 8)
<b>Step 1: Problem awareness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the cause or reason for the problem.</li> <li>▪ Divide the problem into smaller problems.</li> </ul>	<b>White hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Factual (state the facts objectively)</li> </ul> 	Observe
<b>Step 2: Definition of the problem</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ask the questions 'What?', 'Who?'. 'Where?' and 'Why?'.</li> <li>▪ Analyse how similar problems were solved in the past.</li> </ul>	<b>White hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Factual (state the facts)</li> <li>▪ Information &amp; reports, facts and figures (<i>objective</i>)</li> </ul> 	Observe Reflect
<b>Step 3: Establish decision criteria</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine whether the alternatives fit the organisations ethical and moral standards.</li> <li>▪ Decide how the possible ways of correcting the problem can be evaluated to see if they are suitable.</li> </ul>	<b>Red hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Emotional (state the emotions)</li> </ul> 	Reflect
<b>Step 4: Develop alternative solutions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use creative methods to get different ways to solve the problem.</li> </ul>	<b>Green Hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creativity: the possibilities, alternatives and new ideas.</li> </ul> 	Plan
<b>Step 5: Analyse the data</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Decide how effective the alternative solutions will be and what results you can expect.</li> <li>▪ Think about what new problems could occur.</li> </ul>	<b>Yellow hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Positive (positive aspects)</li> </ul>  <b>Black hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Critical (negative aspects)</li> </ul> 	Reflect Reflect
<b>Step 6: Decide and take action</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make a decision and start acting.</li> </ul>	<b>Blue hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Manage the implementation process.</li> </ul> 	Action
<b>Step 7: Make follow-up decisions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Observe and evaluate the result of the action taken.</li> </ul>	<b>White hat</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Factual (state the facts objectively)</li> </ul> 	Observe

**Table 7. The correlation between the decision making process, De Bono's creative thinking and action research**

Secondly, the Kemmis action research spiral comprises four basic steps which correlate closely with the four basic steps in the deconstruction process (Figure 9). This correlation will enhance the manageability of the research process as the deconstructive learning activities can be planned to be in sequence with the research activities.



Mis en forme : Police :8 pt,  
Police de script complexe :8 pt,  
Anglais Afrique du Sud

Figure 9. The correlation between the deconstruction process and the Kemmis action research spiral. (Adapted from Kemmis, 1982: 8)

### 3.4.2 Case studies

There are two perspectives around the term 'case study'. The first refers to the case study as part of the research process and it could also be seen as the method to collect data. Yin (in Merriam 1998: 27) defines a case study as part of the research process as follows: "A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."

The second perspective refers to a case as the object which is investigated, e.g. person, event, or situation. Here Merriam (ibid.) defines a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit."

Wolcott, as cited by Merriam (ibid.) sees a case study as "an end-product of field-

*orientated research*” rather than a strategy or method. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 36 – 37) provides their viewpoint of a case study by saying that a case study examines a case in detail, over a period of time, using multiple sources of data found in the study. Stake (2005: 444) on the other hand, sees a case study as both the process of inquiry as well as the product of inquiry. He claims that many researchers call anything a case study, but the quality of the study’s epistemological value determines whether or not it may be called a case study.

The fact that a case study can be seen as qualitative, becomes clear when McMillan and Schumacher (ibid.) states that a specific case is not chosen for its representativeness, but it is chosen for its uniqueness. It may focus on one entity (single case) or more entities (multiple cases). It entails detailed descriptions of the case, an analysis of the issues, and a rich description of the interpretations of the researcher.

McMillan and Schumacher (ibid.) further justify the use of case studies by saying that it can be used when an instrument will not be effective to collect data, in cases where people are more expressive nonverbally or where the respondents use a second language. As multiple methods can be used in qualitative research, observation can be used to monitor the nonverbal expressions of the participants.

Merriam (1998: 29 – 30) states that case studies can be further defined as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. The differences are explained as follows:

- *Particularistic*: The study focuses on a particular event, situation, occurrence, or phenomenon.
- *Descriptive*: The end product is a rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study. It is a literal description, including as many variables as possible and portrays their interaction over a period of time. This type of case studies has been called, *holistic, lifelike, grounded, and exploratory*.
- *Heuristic*: It can bring about the discovering of new meaning, extend the readers experience, and therefore improve the understanding of the phenomenon under study. It can also confirm what is already known.

### **3.4.3 SPONTANEOUS INTERVIEWS and/or INFORMAL DISCUSSION INTERVIEWS**

It is generally accepted that there are two types of interviews that are used in research, namely, structured and semi-structured interviews (Smith, 1995: 93 - 95).

With the structured interview, the investigator decides in advance exactly which type of data and on which topic information is needed. Questions are compiled beforehand to find exact information and usually no deviations from the pre-set questions are allowed. This type of interview limits what the respondent can talk about, and therefore there is no space for finding valuable information that the respondent could provide if his/her responses were not limited.

With the semi-structured interview, the interviewer will have a basic interview schedule, stating the different fields that should be covered during the interview. The starting questions for each topic can also be included in this schedule. The semi-structured interview also allows the interviewer to ask questions based on the answers that the respondent provided. This provides space for finding information on quite unexpected topics, values, and feelings. The analysis of this type of interview is harder to do than the analysis of the structured interview, as a wider range of information is received.

During the reflection sessions (Kemmis, 1982: 8) which formed part of this action research process, I have identified a specific spontaneous questioning pattern which appeared on a daily basis during the learning sessions. After intensely analysing the value of the information that was collected by using the different research methods used in this project, I realised that this spontaneous questioning sessions provided the most valuable information that were used during the planning of the next actions to be taken in the research process. My decisions regarding what to include as my point of departure during the learning sessions and the decision on the content of the case studies that were used during the learning sessions, relied heavily on the information that was collected during these spontaneous questioning sessions.

The following paragraphs provide a description of these questioning sessions. These paragraphs were created when trying to identify the characteristics and advantages of this type of information gathering in order to be able to confirm the validity of the

use thereof. It also indicates the correlations that exist between these questioning sessions and interviewing techniques that are already described by well-known authors.

An educator, who is involved in research, does not necessarily have an intention to find research information all the time during the learning sessions. However, it sometimes happens that a learner makes a comment that fits in perfectly with the matter that is investigated in the educator's research. The educator (researcher) will then enter into a spontaneous question-and-answer session with this learner. No questions or interview schedules were planned beforehand and the questions are purely based on the answer of the previous question.

The length of these spontaneous questioning sessions will depend on its content. If it is a personal perception or viewpoint that the learner expressed, only a few direct, specific questions related to the investigation will be posed directly to the learner who made the comment. The other learners will not take part in this discussion, they will just be witnesses of the event. The educator (researcher) can then decide whether a structured, semi-structured, or informal conversational interview (Hoepfl, 1997: accessed 13 August 2006) needs to be conducted with this learner. This will prevent a loss of time that was planned for curriculum-based learning.

If the content of the learner's remark or question can be related to the curriculum content, it can develop into a Socratic type of discussion where both the researcher and the learner can freely take part in the process of questioning and answering, and the other learners are witnessing the event. It can also develop into a class discussion. The learners learn while the researcher is collecting information. In my mind, this can be linked to the informal conversational interview, referred to by Hoepfl (ibid.).

Thinking in terms of the steps of comparison for the different types of interviews, it comes nearly spontaneous to be: structured → semi-structured → unstructured. However, these spontaneous questioning sessions cannot be seen as unstructured just because the questions were not planned beforehand. The questions are created on the spot but are still topic related and follow a logic sequence. For this reason, I feel that it can also be seen as semi-structured.

The spontaneous questions and answers can open up a new area to investigate or it can identify a new problem to solve in the current research process. It can also identify an unexpected addition to the current sample, which can provide rich information regarding the matter which is investigated. (It is generally accepted that in qualitative research, there may be deviations from and additions to the original plan of action.) In this instance, it can be said that it is a diagnostic interview.

These spontaneous questioning sessions can also be purely informative. This can be explained by thinking of a situation where a learner makes a comment that is actually answering a question which pondered in the mind of the researcher. The researcher will then just ask one or two questions to confirm his/her understanding of what was said or ask one or two questions of which the answers can provide motivation for the learner's viewpoint.

The difference between the informal conversational interview and the spontaneous questioning sessions therefore lies in the length of the discussion, the types of questions and the questioning method used during the discussion, and the number of participants who are allowed to take part in the discussion.

Seeing that the duration of these questioning sessions is very short it is easy to analyse the data that was collected. Due to the fact that in most instances, there are others witnessing the conversation, credibility can easily be confirmed. Misunderstandings of the questions or answers can be clarified during the session (Smit, 2001: 80), and the others who witnessed the conversation can confirm the researcher's interpretation and reporting of the event.

An intense literature study to confirm the validity of the use of these spontaneous questioning sessions followed. Firstly, I tried to define these sessions in order to know what to search for. It became clear that it can be defined as an interview as it follows a process of an interviewer who asks a question in order to receive information from the interviewee. The question is followed by an answer provided by the interviewee who provides the information that was needed. The fact that it always started in a spontaneous way made me to refer to these questioning sessions as spontaneous interviews.

A very wide study that included Smit (2001); Hoepfl (1997); Smith (1995); Merriam (1998); McMillan and Schumacher (2001); Stake (2005); Guba & Lincoln (1989); Denzin & Lincoln (eds) (2003 & 2005) and Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2002) to name only a few, were conducted to find any description of, or validation for the use of the spontaneous interview. None could be found. As it was discussed in the forgoing paragraphs, close resemblances could be found to other types of interviews, but no discussion fitting this specific type of interview could be found.

A re-thinking regarding the value of the information that was collected with this type of interview, convinced me that there was enough evidence in this research project itself, to confirm the validity of the use of the spontaneous interview. The reader will experience this statement when walking the road with me while reading chapter four of this dissertation.

#### **3.4.4 Observation**

Observation is firstly a physical act using your eyes to see what is happening. It can fit into the positivist, quantitative paradigm as well as in the interpretive, qualitative paradigm. Only observation as part of the interpretative paradigm will be discussed.

Wilson-Kirsten (2000: 63) describes observation as an act of watching people in order to see how they interact with one another. I feel that this is a very limited definition, as I believe that one can also watch people to see how they interact and communicate with the environment around them. It should not necessarily be only interaction with other people.

Le Grange (2004: 191) discusses observation as an assessment tool, but some of the statements can also be seen as applicable in the research environment. Le Grange (ibid.) cites Young by saying that observation is not merely 'seeing' but it involves selecting what is important and what is unimportant.

Wilson-Kirsten (2000: 63) indicates that observation can be very informal and casual (walking past a desk and see what the learner is doing) or it can be structured (by doing a time and motion study). Informal interviews and conversations are often interwoven with observation (Merriam, 1998: 94).

Merriam (ibid.: 97 – 98) provides a list of what should be included when observation is done. One should take note of the physical settings, the participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors (physical space, dress), and your own behaviour. If one looks at the elements included in the list, it becomes clear that observation can provide the researcher with a holistic picture of the matter that is under investigation. I believe that the fact that the researcher also takes note of his/her own actions, can create an awareness of one's own prejudices which can be seen as a limitation in the data collection and interpretation process.

### **3.5 SAMPLING**

The selection of people, places, situations, events, or objects to be used in an inquiry is referred to as sampling.

#### **3.5.1 SAMPLE TYPE**

Two main types of samples are widely discussed, namely: probability or non-probability samples. Probability sampling is the dominant sampling strategy in quantitative inquiry. It depends on the selection of a random and representative sample from the larger population with the main purpose to be able to generalise the research findings to the population.

In qualitative research, the sample is not selected in ways that satisfy statistical requirements of randomness. The sample is selected to serve a specific purpose and therefore it can be called purposive or purposeful (Smit, 2001: 78). It seeks information-rich cases which can be studied in depth.

Purposeful sampling requires that information should be obtained about the different fields of inquiry in a study and then the researcher searches for informants, groups, places, or events which can ensure the collection of "*rich information. These samples are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating.*" (Guba and Lincoln, 1989: 178)

Guba and Lincoln (ibid.) refer to Patton when stating that there are six different types of purposive samples: sampling extreme or deviant cases, sampling typical cases,

maximum variation sampling, sampling critical cases, sampling politically important or sensitive cases, and convenience sampling. Only some of these types will be discussed here. McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 402) also provide different sampling methods that fit different types of cases that are investigated. Many of these fit in with Guba and Lincoln's classification of the different cases. For the purpose of this study, only one from McMillan and Schumacher should be added, namely the concept/theory-based case.

### **3.5.1.1 Convenience sampling**

Convenience sampling is done by choosing the nearest individuals available to act as respondents and/or participants. This is very often used in education where the educator uses the learners of one class to act as participants. Convenience sampling may be used as strategy for sample selection for a case study or a series of case studies. This type of sampling cannot be used to generalise about the wide population (Cohen, et al, 2002: 102 - 103).

### **3.5.1.2 Concept/theory based sampling**

The researcher selects persons or situations known to experience the concept or to be attempting to implement the concept/theory under study. The reason for this is that the researcher can be sure to get valuable (rich) information (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001: 402).

### **3.5.1.3 Multiple or combination sampling**

In a qualitative study, different types of sampling can be used as the study progresses. For instance, in a study with a few cases, the cases can be selected according to different needs and criteria, to suit the different fields in the study. If this type of sampling is used and rich descriptions of the different studies are provided, the researcher may be able to identify shared patterns that cut across cases (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001: 402). This identification of shared patterns will not serve to create generalisations, but it can create an opportunity to prove reliability of the study.

## **3.5.2 SAMPLE SIZE**

Hoepfl (1997: accessed 13 August 2006) cites Patton (1990) when she says that the design of a qualitative study focuses on the purpose of the inquiry, the information

that will be most useful, and the information that will have the most credibility. Therefore, there are no strict criteria for sample size. Many authors agree about the fact that the ability to generalise is not part of the objectives of qualitative research and therefore small sample sizes are acceptable.

When a rare case is studied, it might happen that there is only one person available to act as sample, e.g. if the study is about the way a child who was born without arms will adapt in a normal school situation.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 404) states that the selection of the sample size depends on

*the purpose of the study, the research problem, the major data collection technique, and the availability of the information-rich cases. The insights generated from qualitative inquiry depend more on the information-richness of the cases and the analytical capabilities of the researcher than on the sample size.*

They also indicate that qualitative researchers usually start off with a small sample and then add on as the study progresses.

### **3.6 VALIDITY AND CREDIBILITY**

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 576) provide four criteria against which validity claims can be measured in an action research project. The participants in the research project should ask:

- a) *whether their understandings of what they are doing make sense to them and to others (comprehensibility)*
- b) *whether these understandings are true in the sense of being accurate in accordance with what else is known*
- c) *whether these understandings are sincerely held and stated (authentic)*
- d) *whether these understandings are morally right and appropriate under the circumstances in which the participants find themselves.*

These questions can be answered as follows:

- a) *Do the understandings of what they are doing make sense to the participants and to others (comprehensibility)?*

McMillan and Schumacher (2001: 407) elaborate on this question of Kemmis and McTaggart by asking the questions: “*Do researchers actually observe what they think they observe?*” and “*Do researchers actually hear the meanings that they think they hear?*” These questions indicate that McMillan and Schumacher measure validity of qualitative designs against the level or degree to which the participants and the researcher mutually interpret and develop the same meanings and understanding of the concepts that are researched, as well as the degree that the researcher and participants agree on the description or composition of events, especially the meanings of these events. Mertens, as cited by Smit (2001: 74) call this the “credibility test” which asks if “*there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints*”.

McMillan and Schumacher (ibid.) identify actions that can be taken by the qualitative researcher to answer their above-mentioned questions. They mention member checking and participant review. Smit (2001: 74) states that internal validity (credibility) can be accomplished when at the end of the interview, that which was said has been summarised, and the participants check the correctness of the researcher’s understanding.

I have utilised both member checking and participant review. Most of the discussions and informal interviews with the learners and peer lecturers were spontaneous and therefore not captured on a tape or any other form of electronic media. I created the document that would be part of this report, on the same day that the discussions took place. Two days after the discussion I handed the persons involved copies of the document, as well as my interpretation of what was said for their perusal and comment. I then also confirmed in a very brief open discussion that the rest of the group who witnessed the conversations also agree with the correctness of my document and interpretation. I have also provided a hard copy to whoever wanted to receive one for perusal in his/her own time.

This action helped to eliminate the main limitation of this project. These learners were in their final semester of learning at the college and I would have had a problem making contact with them after the final report was compiled as most of these learners were originally from Limpopo Province and were living in Gauteng only for the duration of their studies.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407) also suggest the use of a participant researcher. The term 'participant researcher' can be seen from two perspectives. Firstly, it can be when more than one researcher work together as a team, investigating the same matter/setting at the same time, in order to create a joint understanding. Merriam (1998: 100 -101) provides another perspective when referring to an observer as a complete participant, participant as observer, and observer as participant. These refer to the different levels that the group under study are aware of the observer's role in the research project. The observer is also a part of the group that is observed.

For this reason, I provided copies to the peer lecturers who were part of my inter-curricular network during this project in order for them to critically evaluate my viewpoints. Both the peer lecturers whom I have chosen to assist me are black African lecturers. This fact increases the reliability of my interpretations as it prevents that my white African culture can cause wrong interpretations from my side, as all the learners that were involved in the project were black African learners.

Greenwood and Levin (2003: 149) states that action research produces valid research results as it acknowledges diversity of experience and capacities of the group members and it uses the diversity for the enrichment of the research project. They also state that there are collaboration and communication between the participants and the researcher. The reflection on action leads to the construction of new meanings and social action. If the newly constructed meanings were not valid, it wouldn't be possible to apply the new knowledge in practice. Therefore, it can be stated that the connection between theory and praxis, enhances the validity of the information collected through an action research project.

b) *Are these understandings true in the sense of being accurate in accordance with what else is known?*

In order to answer this question of Kemmis and McTaggart a variety of source materials was used to be able to cross-check references for credibility and conformity. A re-reading of the sources also took place as part of the reflective practice which is indicated in the Kemmis spiral for action research.

In some instances where unexpected factors appeared, the literature study was extended after reading new sources in order to prove new information that was obtained during the research process.

Both, Stake (2003: 148) and Dreyer (2005: 110), indicate that triangulation, which is the process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, and verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation of data is generally considered as a valid way of ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research. Stake (ibid.) also makes it clear that it should be remembered that no observations or interpretations are perfectly repeatable and that triangulation only serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways in which the phenomenon under study can be interpreted.

c) *Are these understandings sincerely held and stated (authentic)?*

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:407) help to answer this question by stating that participant verbatim language in the report can prove validity. Rich narrative descriptions of the reactions of the learners as participants should be given. This will help to ensure that there is no doubt in the minds of the readers that the participants have really experienced positive gain from the knowledge and skills which they have obtained during the research process. Rich narrative descriptions of the reactions of the learners as participants of this project were given, in some instances in the form of verbatim language.

d) *Are these understandings morally right and appropriate under the circumstances in which the participants find themselves?*

Question about morality can be answered as follows: The final decision to take part or not to take part in the project can be taken by the participants themselves. In all instances, it should be made clear to them that they will not be victimised or penalised in any way if they would prefer not to take part. They should also be allowed the opportunity to withdraw at any time, if they prefer to do so for whatever reason.

As these learners who were part of this project are all adult learners, within the legitimate age to vote in the country's elections, it can be assumed that they have the capability to form their own ethical and moral stances. In all instances where the participants would be part of an emotional or attitude adjusting experience, the final decisions to take part or not to take part in the project, were taken by the participants themselves. In all instances, it was made clear to them that they will not be victimised or penalised in any way if they would prefer not to take part. In the instances where the participants were purely exposed to curriculum content and language education, the rules and regulations which appear in the code of conduct of the FET College involved, regarding classroom practices, were followed.

To increase the ethical standard of this project, and to protect the participants' identities, pseudonyms were used to protect the learners from being identified. The pseudonyms were created based on a positive characteristic which appeared in the personality of the learner. Only in one instance, the participant's real name was used on his request, in order to indicate how proud he is of his improvement. This learner is over the age of twenty one and has signed a disclosure and indemnity agreement.

Apart from the statements that link with the questions of Kemmis and McTaggart, McMillan and Schumacher (ibid.) provide two other ways of ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research. Firstly, they suggest prolonged field-work. Secondly, they indicate that multi-method strategies should be used.

The formal data collection period of this project was only one semester, but some of these learners (participants) were in my class for one year and in some instances for eighteen months. The reason for this is the fact that some have failed and others were in my class for all three levels of the course as I lecture (facilitate) Entrepreneurship and Business Management on all three levels.

A variety of methods were used to collect data, namely, spontaneous interviews, observations, class discussions, discussion with peer facilitators, reflection by the educator as well as the participants and diary entries were used to collect data.

### **3.7 CLOSURE**

The studying of the different methods used in this research project continued right through the research period. New experiences and evidence created a need for further reading on the methods used in order to prove the validity and credibility of the findings. The next chapter invites the reader to place him-/herself in my shoes and to 'travel the road' with me.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH IN ACTION

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on the research project itself. It will only provide the basic information that is directly applicable to this study regarding the strategy, sampling, data collection methods, and tools that were used. A comprehensive discussion of my thinking patterns while deciding on these factors was provided in Chapter three.

#### 4.2 STRATEGY AND METHODS

This qualitative study was conducted by doing action research. The epistemological grounding of the study is based on the hermeneutical approach of communication in order to allow interpretation and understanding, mostly based on the idea of “placing oneself in the shoes of the participants”. Deconstructive processes were used in the dialectical process of the learners, in both instances of creating understanding of their own life situations, as well as creating understanding regarding curriculum related matters.

A very small part of this study was based on quantitative information. This was used only to display the improvement of the marks of the learners who were involved in this study.

#### 4.3 DATA COLLECTION

##### 4.3.1 DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

The formal period of collecting data was between 13 February 2006 and 12 May 2006. Information that was collected since 2000 was used as background information. Information that was collected after the formal collection period was in some instances included in this report, as it served as evidence of the success of the actions that were taken during the research period.

##### 4.3.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

This project mainly consists of a number of descriptive, heuristic case studies (Par 3.4.2). These studies mainly focused on the behaviour of specific learners who

have experienced problems which prevented them from excelling in their curriculum studies as well as from excelling in their lives in general. These studies were conducted in a spontaneous manner by using spontaneous interviews and/or informal discussions in the classroom as well as discussion with the specific learners in their own time.

Observation was utilised to monitor the behaviour of learners in general when they are in the class situation. The observations mainly focused on learner actions such as participation in discussions, spontaneous learner input, answering during questioning sessions, the role played by the learner during team work and the type of questions posed by the learners. The learners who were part of the case studies were also observed while being a part of their social circle outside the classroom environment.

My general daily experiences as an educator as well as spontaneous information that was provided by the learners during the learning sessions, were recorded in a diary.

Information was also obtained through informal discussions with peer educators regarding the actions of a specific learner during learning sessions of the other subjects, in the instance of either a high degree of participation or passiveness during my learning sessions. These peers also provided me with information regarding cultural differences between me as a white African, and my learners who are black African citizens.

The quantitative part of this study entailed the writing of diagnostic tests by the learners to determine up to which level they could identify similarities between different situations experienced in different subjects, concerning the variety of ideas, terms, actions, problem solving, and processes that are studied in the business studies field. These tests were not compiled specifically for research purposes, but the normal formative assessment tools were used for this diagnostic evaluation.

One of my peers was willing to provide me with information about the conduct and achievements of this specific group of learners in one of their other subjects. He provided me with copies of all the formative assessment tools as well as the results

that the learners achieved in the specific parts that covered cross-curricular learning content.

Information was also gathered by my own daily reflection sessions about what happened in class on that day. An ongoing reading of literature to substantiate my findings and beliefs followed these reflection sessions. Whenever I have identified or tried something new in my classroom, I have tried to verify it or measure it against something that was tested by someone else or by myself before. I have tried to find correlations between the findings of this project and the findings of a similar research project that I have conducted on a very superficial level as part of a modular assignment for earlier studies at the University of Pretoria (Boshoff, 2000). Some of my actions in this project were a further and deeper extension of the findings of this previous superficial research assignment.

### **4.3.3 SAMPLING**

The sample was composed by using a combination of purposive sampling methods namely, convenience sampling and concept/theory based sampling. Convenience sampling is done by choosing the nearest individuals available to act as respondents and/or participants (Cohen, et al, 2002: 102 - 103). Concept/theory based sampling is done by selecting persons or situations known to experience the concept under study. The reason for this is that the researcher can be sure to get valuable (rich) information (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001: 402).

One N6 class of learners studying in the field Business Management at the FET College where I am employed was used as this ensured easy accessibility to the possible population (Convenience sampling). These learners were also in my class on N5 level of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management and even at that stage I could identify the problem that they do not use the knowledge that they were supposed to have obtained on N4 level (Concept/theory based sampling).

Table 8 provides attribute information about the sample that was used.

<b>Sample Size</b>	24	
<b>Demographic Information</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	Male	10
	Female	14
<b>Race</b>	Black African	
<b>Age</b>	20 - 27 years	
<b>Living conditions</b>	Living with parents	1
	Living with older sibling	4
	Landlord previously unknown	19
<b>Educational Background</b>		
<b>Study Field</b>	Business management	
<b>Attended the lecturer's class on the previous level</b>	21	
<b>In the lecturer's class for the first time</b>	3	
<b>Repeating the level</b>	3 (In lecturer's class with first attempt)	
<b>Schooling up to grade 12</b>	Urban areas	6
	Rural areas	18
<b>Previous Work Experience</b>		
None	18	
Shop assistant: 5 months - 10 hours per week	1	
Waiter: ± 2 years - 12 hours per week ± 6 months - 12 hours per week	2	
	2	
Direct sales - cosmetics: 6 months part-time	1	

Table 8. Attribute information about the sample.

#### 4.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Due to the nature of qualitative action research, which entails an ongoing process of plan, act, observe, analyse, and reflection on the analysis in order to plan the next cycle, the data analysis and presentation form an integral part of the reporting of an action research project. For this reason in this report, there is not a specific section set aside for the analysis and presentation of the data, but it appears as part of the reporting section.

The analysis of the qualitative information collected in this project, is presented to the reader in a rich narrative manner which allows the reader to walk the road with the researcher. The reader can follow the reflective thinking actions which were part of

the data analysis process. This approach also allows the reader to create his/her own analysis of the information.

In qualitative research, triangulations and correlations are identified not with the purpose to prove statistical value, but in some instances, it is done in order to prove validity.

The limited amount of quantitative information that was collected and used in this project is presented in graphical format, in conjunction with a description of the analysis.

#### **4.5 PLACE YOURSELF IN MY SHOES**

Some of the findings of this research project might at first seem inappropriate to the original problem that was investigated. However, I haven't allowed my own preconceived ideas to interfere with the possibility of identifying quite unexpected influences on the original stated problem, which was the fact that learners do not make use of their existing frame of knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives.

Some of the factors which I have identified aren't completely new but in some instances, I was quite amazed by the fact that a specific factor would have an influence on the level of transferability of knowledge experienced by the learners. Sometimes my amazement was connected to amusement and I had to practice deconstruction myself in order to stay focused on what this research project was all about. The amusement wasn't created by the errors that the learners made, but it was created by the ways that they sometimes indicated that they have mastered the skill of using their knowledge in an inter-curricular as well as holistic manner. At the latter times, I was glad that I have an open and relaxed relationship with my learners. In some instances, I wouldn't have been able to identify the success that was reached, if I myself couldn't see the lighter side of life and if I have acted only in an authoritative manner.

This report was compiled by using a relaxed narrative style, using a large amount of verbatim language. I took the liberty to use this style in an attempt to display the relaxed and open relationship that existed between me, and the learners who were

participants in this action research project. In some instances, very rich background explanations were given. Guba & Lincoln (1989:223) indicate that the qualitative report must enable the readers to see how the author makes sense of the information that is collected during the research project. They state that the best way to do that, is to use a reporting style that allows the readers to "walk in the shoes" of the participants of the research project in order to be able to make their own sense of the situation under discussion (hermeneutical approach).

Another very important element of hermeneutics which is stated by Möller, et al (2003: 112) is the fact that an author and his/her text can not be separated. They state that in order to fully understand what the author said, we must gain knowledge of the author him/herself in order to identify with him/her. The reader must have this knowledge in order to be able to place him/herself in the author's shoes (situation) and to see the author's point of view. This statement was the main motivation for the fact that experiences from my own life, which acted as starting point for certain actions in this action research process, were included in this report.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005: 573) provide five traditions or perspectives of the study of practice when discussing participatory action research. Looking at the characteristics of this project, it can be classified as part of the fifth tradition. This tradition's characteristics include *"Both reflective-dialectical view of subjective-objective relations and connections. Practice as socially and historically constituted by human agency and social action [using] critical methods and dialectical analysis (multiple methods)"*. They clearly state that the reflective dialectical perspective of critical social science tends to see practice from the perspective of the insider group, whose members' interconnected activities constitute and reconstitute their own social practices and that the reports of this perspective are written in the first person or the plural of the first person ("I" or "we") (ibid: 572).

Not only information collected during the official research period was provided in the discussion of the findings. Information was collected since 2000. Since then I have been permanently engaging myself in action research regarding this problem. Relevant information collected since 2000 as well as information and incidents that appeared in my daily interaction with all the learners during the second semester of

2006, which was after the formal data collection period, was included in the discussions.

I have used a hermeneutical approach, and therefore the previous information is needed as understanding the past brings new insights which might have value in the present and future (Möller, et al, 2003:110). The learners who were involved in this study had been in my class during the second semester of 2005. For that reason, background information (history) should be provided in order to identify or understand any change in current behaviour.

## **4.6 DISCUSSION OF ACTIVITIES**

### **4.6.1 External factors**

I have no control over the external factors influencing the learning styles of learners in FET Colleges and therefore I can't make it part of an action research project in my classroom. Only the internal factors will be discussed in this report. However, it is worth mentioning only a few facts about the most prominent external factor that contributed to the problem, namely the nature of the national external summative examinations in FET Colleges. Another reason for not discussing this factor is the fact that I believe that assessment can be seen as a specialised field on its own and the influence of assessment can therefore be a study on its own. This mentioning of a few facts will only act as background knowledge when reading this report.

The biggest problem concerning assessment is the fact that currently the majority of national external summative examinations are theoretical, written examinations and the memoranda are compiled strictly according to textbook contents. All assessments in the college where I am employed are done according to national standards in order to provide the learners with experience of what to expect in the national examinations. It is also done in order to create a year mark that is in line with national standards. Assignments do form part of continuous assessment but in some instances, theoretical knowledge also forms part of the criteria for assessment of these assignments. Following a hermeneutical approach (Möller, et al, 2003:114), one can understand why the learners do not see the need to be able to use their knowledge in a practical way, as they do not need the skill in order to pass the examinations.

In the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management, open book examinations are written, but because of the various reasons discussed below, the learners do not have the ability to apply/use the knowledge that they have acquired during the learning sessions. For this reason, the learners actually prefer to write closed book examinations as they can memorise the facts and write it down without having to understand what it means (rote learning).

With the new courses that are being phased in at FET Colleges from 2007, this will partially change, as the summative assessment for all subjects will consist of an external practical component as well as theoretical examinations. For this reason, it is extremely important for the learners to be able to use the theoretical knowledge that they acquired during the learning sessions in a practical way.

#### **4.6.2 Internal factors**

As a starting point for this research project, I have repeated some of the actions which I have taken during a similar, but very superficial research project in 2000 (Boshoff, 2000). The purpose of this was to identify any correlations or differences between the current and previous learner behaviour.

During the preparation phase of this project, the syllabi and the contents of the textbooks of the different subjects forming part of the course that the learners are studying were analysed. This was done in order to see which knowledge and skills the learners had already acquired, and which would be experienced in future. This was also done to determine correlations that exist between the syllabi of the different subjects.

Since 2000, I have used the actions that previously proved to be successful on a continuous base in my learning sessions. I wanted to test the current level of effectiveness of these actions and for this reason the first step involving the learners was the repeating of the diagnostic test.

##### **4.6.2.1 Diagnostic testing**

The learners were given a sheet on which different terms and concepts were listed. They had to indicate in which subject curricula that they have studied during the two previous semesters, could all these terms and concepts be found (Table 9).

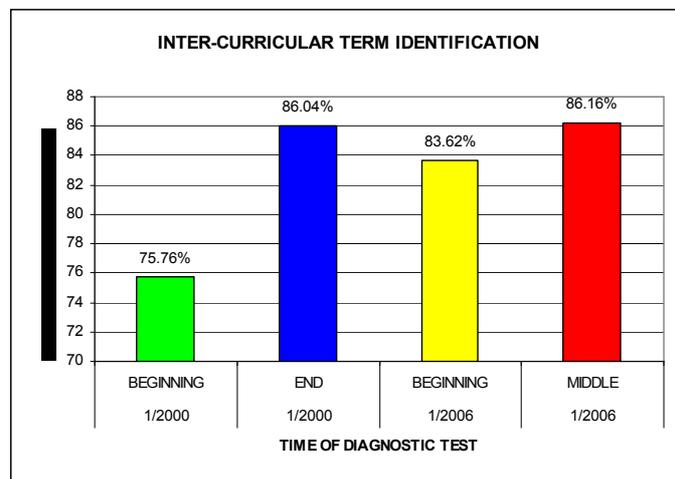
In the beginning of the first semester of 2000, before any action was taken, the average percentage for correct identification of the terms by the learners was 75.76 %. At the end of the action research period of 2000, the learners could identify 86.04 % of the same list of terms. This was an increase of 10.27 %.

This increase was due to the following actions that were taken:

- The prescribed literature from other subjects were used during learning sessions, in order for the learners to experience the truth of the fact that overlapping of skills, knowledge and outcomes, does occur across curricula as well as in different levels of the courses.
- The learners had to complete a chart, which was pasted on the inside of the front page of their scripts, to act as a reminder of overlapping terms, ideas, and outcomes. It was updated the moment that a new term could be linked to an existing one already on the chart.
- The prescribed literature used in the other subjects had to be used as the only source of information during the answering of open book tests.
- The learners developed assessment criteria according to which they could assess their own learning experiences and the learning experiences of their peer learners. During the creation of these criteria, the learners analysed the part of the curriculum that had to be assessed in order to identify terms that can be found across curricula. These terms were then included in the assessment criteria for the specific task.
- The learners created word games and quizzes which their peer learners had to complete, to indicate corresponding ideas and terms. This action of creating the games and quizzes is stimulating creative thinking, which is an inherent element of meta-learning. (Slabbert. 1997:140). The interaction with their peer learners is also promoting cooperative learning.
- By utilising group work, each member of the group had to use another literature source to find the meaning of a specific term, idea, or concept. These were then compared during

group sessions and a definition was created by the group. This definition was subsequently compared with the meanings created by the other groups during inter-group communication sessions, and a new definition was created if necessary (Social constructivism). The learners combined these terms to serve as a subject dictionary.

When the learners, who were in my class during the second semester of 2005, which is the semester just before the current research period started, completed the same diagnostic test in the beginning of the first semester of 2006, their ability to identify terms which appear across curricula was about the same as the learners who were part of my research project of 2000.



**Figure 10. Comparison of the learners' ability to identify terms which appear across curricula.**

In 2000, the learners could identify 86.04% of the terms after the actions taken during the action research project. In the beginning of the first semester of 2006, which was also the start of the current research project, the learners could identify 83.62% of the terms when the same list of terms coming from 2000 was used. The deviation was -2.42%.

After reminding the learners on a continuous base to keep up with the habit of identifying overlapping terms, they could identify 86.16 % of the terms. This was only 0.13 % better than the results achieved at the end of the 2000 project.

This correlation in the results of the two tests provides evidence that my actions that were taken since 2000 were still effective enough to be included in the learning sessions.

**SUMMARY OF CROSS-CURRICULAR TERM IDENTIFICATION**

EBM5: Entrepreneurship and Business Management N5 SMAN5: Sales Management N5		CPR5: Computer Practice N5 MCOM4: Management Communication N4						
TERM	APPEARANCE IN SYLLABI				LEARNER IDENTIFICATION (%)			
	EBM5	SMAN5	CPR5	MCOM4	START 1/2000	END 1/2000	START 1/2006	END 1/2006
Alternatives	x	x		x	60	70	65	69
Arbitration	x				75	81	78	78
Bargaining	x	x			68	72	70	70
Brainstorming	x	x		x	70	81	74	80
Branch	x	x			65	67	65	68
Budget	x	x			83	97	87	94
Collectivity	x				70	92	89	90
Communication	x	x	x	x	76	94	90	95
Community	x	x		x	74	89	87	89
Competitors	x	x			90	97	92	95
Conciliation	x				71	79	78	81
Contract	x	x		x	75	84	83	85
Control	x	x	x	x	64	97	96	98
Conversion	x		x		24	72	68	70
Decision making	x	x		x	78	89	90	87
Delegation	x	x			68	72	70	73
Departmentation	x	x		x	72	84	78	85
Discrimination	x	x		x	82	98	80	95
Dispute	x	x			77	78	79	78
Employment	x			x	74	78	79	74
Environment	x	x	x	x	84	92	93	89
Ethics	x	x		x	76	84	83	83
Fractioning	x	x			62	74	75	72
Herzberg	x			x	87	97	98	98
Induction	x			x	69	77	78	79
Input	x	x	x		71	79	79	80
Interview	x	x		x	84	92	89	90
Job rotation	x				54	71	72	72
Labour costs	x				71	74	73	73
Leading	x	x		x	92	95	98	96
Legislation	x	x			77	82	78	84
Management	x	x	x	x	90	98	94	94
Marketing	x	x			98	92	93	93
Maslow	x			x	97	100	98	100
Media	x	x	x	x	71	84	86	85
Mediation	x	x			68	75	72	76
Motivation	x	x		x	74	89	89	88
Negotiation	x	x			75	82	83	86
Obligation	x	x			86	94	94	96
Organising	x	x	x	x	81	97	96	97
Output	x	x	x		57	86	87	88
Participation	x	x			74	87	87	86
Planning	x	x	x	x	87	100	100	100
Power	x	x			61	77	78	76
Probationary	x	x			74	77	75	74
Procedures	x	x	x	x	99	99	99	99
Productivity	x	x	x	x	84	92	90	93

Promotion	x	x		x	67	72	70	83
Recruitment	x	x		x	74	77	76	78
Resources	x	x			71	84	78	85
Selection	x	x	x	x	87	97	89	98
Strike	x				84	92	90	93
Subordinate	x			x	86	95	92	96
Synergy	x				61	74	68	78
Trade Union	x				97	100	96	100
Transformation	x		x		81	94	70	96

**Table 9. Learner identification of cross-curricular terms.**

When analysing the effectiveness of each of the above actions, the following negative aspects were identified:

- When using the literature of other subjects as a source of information during an open book test, only factual knowledge was quoted straight from the other source, without using a practical example to elucidate the answers. In an open book test, half of the marks can be allocated for factual knowledge and the other half is allocated for practical application of knowledge. For this reason, the learners could only achieve 50 % of the possible marks allocated for a test.
- The completion of the chart where the learners had to identify overlapping terms, served a practical purpose other than the intended purpose of this exercise. The learners used the chart mainly as a page of content during open book tests. Eighty percent (80%) of the learners wrote the page numbers on which the terms appear in the textbook, on this chart.
- When the learners develop their own assessment criteria as explained above, it happened regularly that the group of learners who are assessed can identify more overlapping terms than what the group who created the assessment criteria, could identify. This causes unrealistic high marks as the group members who are assessed score 100 %, as they have identified all the terms included in the criteria which were used to assess them. Therefore, these marks cannot be used as part of the final term mark of the learners.
- The creation of quizzes and word games had to be done in group sessions, as some of the learners just couldn't create a game or quiz questions on their own.
- The group effort of creating definitions by using different sources was hampered by the fact that some learners don't have a dictionary. In some instances, only some of the learners found the meanings and the other learners just accepted the explanation as given by the other learners without questioning it. When I've asked the learners why they don't get the meanings from other textbooks and not

necessarily from a dictionary, they said that they “*don’t understand what the books say*”.

Although the learners had the ability to identify single terms across curricula, as well as providing factual knowledge taken from other subjects, they still didn’t have the ability to provide practical examples when answering questions that are based on a case study.

I wanted to determine which factors were preventing the learners from achieving a higher level of inter-curricular, but mostly holistic understanding of the curricula contents. In order to get this information I had to analyse the personal characteristics and behaviour of the learners who were most successful with using the actions discussed, as well as the personal characteristics and behaviour of the learners who were least successful. Table 10 indicates the differences between the two groups of learners.

<b>Most successful learners</b>	<b>Least successful learners</b>
<p>The learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participate in nearly all class activities</li> <li>• have a medium to high level of English language proficiency</li> <li>• are willing to guess/create an answer to a question when they are not sure</li> <li>• find a solution for an obstacle to the learning process</li> <li>• have a positive self-image</li> <li>• have regular informal conversations with me regarding personal matters, e.g. a personal problem at home or a new love in their lives</li> </ul>	<p>The learners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• are passive observers during class activities</li> <li>• have a low level of English language proficiency</li> <li>• don’t even want to answer although they know the answer to a question</li> <li>• suffer the consequences of an obstacle in the learning process without trying to solve it</li> <li>• are very shy</li> <li>• never have any informal self-initiated discussions with me</li> </ul>

**Table 10. Personal characteristics related to the learners’ level of ability to apply knowledge inter curricular.**

After analysing these characteristics the following internal factors were identified to be the main causes of the problem at hand (mentioned in random order):

- Language inefficiency
- Inability to use imagination
- Low self-esteem
- Psychic distance between lecturer and learner

These characteristics became the main focus points for this research project.

#### **4.6.2.2 Language inefficiency**

When deconstructing this factor, the following problems could be linked directly to the low level of language proficiency of the learners (discussed in random order):

- Learners do not want to communicate or participate during the learning sessions.
- Learners do not know the different meanings of some words and are therefore unable to use the word in the correct context.
- Learners write down what they have heard without trying to make sense of what they have written down.

The fact that the learners' language skills have an influence on their learning skills is nothing new. The main aim of my research concerning the problem of the language barrier was therefore aimed at finding ways to improve the learner's language skills while at the same time completing the prescribed learning content of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N6. The learning should also take place in such a manner that the learners will be able to use the knowledge in a practical way in their own lives as well as in the business environment which they will enter after completing their studies.

#### **a) Learners do not want to communicate or participate during the learning sessions.**

The fact that the learners can't speak English fluently was identified as one of the biggest influences on the interpretation and understanding skills of the learners in this project.

Thinking of this problem, I remembered the storyline of the motion picture "*Lost in Translation*" which was about the experiences of an English-speaking business person in an Eastern country who felt completely lost, as he couldn't understand the

language that the people spoke around him. He was highly successful in his own country but felt completely incompetent in the country where he couldn't communicate properly.

The storyline clearly indicated that the man was unhappy in his marriage and that it was a type of escape for him to move to the East. Experiencing the problem of language being a barrier to communication, he started to withdraw into his hotel room and he developed the feeling of complete alienation and depression. Sitting in his hotel room watching television, he couldn't enjoy the humour of the television show, as he couldn't understand the language. The only time he showed enjoyment was when a friend who could speak English invited him to visit local friends who could also speak English. They had a karaoke evening playing English songs and he sang whole-heartedly with the music although he didn't even have a good voice.

At the end of the storyline, he decided to go back to his country and back to his unsuccessful marriage. It was clear that he experienced the language barrier and the feeling of alienation to be much worse than the ordeal of being in an unsuccessful marriage.

This made me think of what my learners experience when they sit in a classroom in which communication is in English and they feel lost, as they don't understand completely what is happening or what is being said during the learning sessions. I can quite well understand why they also become withdrawn into themselves and why they don't take part in the discussions in class. One can imagine that they would also develop a feeling of alienation and rather suffer the ordeal of being marginalised as unintelligent as they do not answer questions or take part in the activities during the learning sessions.

Looking at my own experience and feelings when I have to communicate in a strange language, I can identify the same type of behaviour as that of my learners. I have studied German up to Grade 12 (school level) and at one stage I could speak the language fluently as I had a German friend with whom I have conversed in German. I have lost the ability to speak German fluently and feel that I am not as talkative in a German conversation, as I would have been, had it been in English or Afrikaans. Sometimes I feel that I have some valuable input to add to the

conversation but refrain from it as I do not know how to express myself in German, and then I rather keep quiet. One of the learners once said: *"I know the answers in my own language but I don't know how to say it in English."* This indicated that the learner wanted to say something, but he also rather kept quiet. For this reason, I have empathy with the learners if they do not want to communicate during the learning sessions.

Möller, et al (2003:111) indicates that according to hermeneutics, *"without communication there is no possibility of understanding."* As we are using language to communicate in the learning sessions, it is of the utmost importance that the learners' English language skills should be improved in order for them to be able to interpret and understand the concepts and principles that are communicated to them. In order to motivate the learners to take part in the classroom discussions, I always explain to them that it is also better to test your answers in class and make a mistake that can be corrected without losing marks, than making that same mistake in the examination. When they do take part in the classroom discussions, it provides them with an opportunity to improve their language skills as well as experiencing the skill of public speaking in front of an audience of limited size, as it would be the case in a business organisation. These learners are studying to become business managers and therefore it is important for them to be able to communicate in English as most business communication on national as well as international levels is conducted in English.

When I've tried to find out what the main reasons are why the learners don't take part in the conversations during the learning sessions, the following reactions were received:

- *My English is no good and I am too shy to speak English where the other people can hear me.*
- *I am too shy to speak in class. My English isn't good and if I also make mistake with answers, it will be double reason for others to say I am stupid.*
- *English ... eich Ma'am, what can I say, is not easy to speak.*
- *I do not know the word in English then I cannot write the answer and then I get no marks and so fail.*

Sentence construction and spelling errors are not taken into consideration when the tests and examination papers of these learners are marked (even on national external level). As long as the main idea of what the learner wanted to say can be identified in the sentence, the marks are allocated without any penalties. However, in some instances the language is of such a low standard that one can't make sense of what the learner is trying to say. The following is an example of this statement:

*"The man and whoman busnes is motivae through owe toughs as postive and self."*

Knowing the context of the question, the learner wanted to say that, "Business men/women can motivate themselves by having positive thoughts about themselves." In this instance, no marks could be allocated as all marking is done according to national marking standards and no marks would have been allocated in the national examination for this answer.

I wanted to know what <sup>3</sup>Perseverance's English language ability is, when having a conversation which is not subject related, and therefore it should place less stress on her. I've asked Perseverance to stay behind after the class and I had a short conversation with her, asking her about the traditional attire that she was wearing. She wasn't able to answer open-ended questions. She could only reply with single words and couldn't use full sentences. She could only use three words at the most in one sentence. Her nonverbal communication, looking at her body language, displayed that she was very uncomfortable. She kept on rubbing her hands together, she stood with her head bowed down, and she spoke very softly.

I couldn't believe the contrast when she left the classroom and started to talk in her own language to her friend who was waiting just outside the classroom. She laughed spontaneously and spoke in a normal tone of voice and at a normal volume.

Knowing that her African cultural values could have an influence on her way of communication and posture while communicating with me (my age, authoritative

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<sup>3</sup> Pseudonym – referring to the fact that she didn't give up her studies but keeps on trying until she will finish her course.

position as lecturer and ethnic group), I've asked one of my female African colleagues to test her language skills for me.

She spoke fluently and with confidence when my colleague spoke to her in her own language but when she spoke in English, Perseverance immediately adopted the same body language as when she spoke to me. The question that comes to mind, for which I will never know the answer, is how she could pass grade 12 English as indicated on her Senior Certificate.

I wanted to determine how long it took a learner with such a low level of English language proficiency to reach N6 level. Looking at Perseverance's academic record, the following pattern could be indentified:

- She passed Computer Practice on the first attempt on all levels as it is a practical skill subject and the computer offers a spell check facility to ensure accuracy.
- She passed Sales Management, of which the continuous assessment and final examination is based mostly on rote learning, on every second attempt at each level.
- Financial Accounting, which relies mostly on figures and calculations, was also passed on every second attempt.
- Communication, of which a large part consists of the creation of business correspondence and in which spelling and grammar are tested, created the biggest problem. She only passed the subject on the fourth attempt and also with very low marks.
- The second largest problem was experienced with Business Management, of which the examination is an open book examination but relies only on application. She only passed this on every third attempt.

SUBJECT		LEVEL		EXAMINATIONS WRITTEN			
				6/2003	11/ 2003	6/2004	11/2004
N4	Business Management	N4	Fail	Fail	Pass		
	Management Communication	N4	Fail	Fail	Fail	Pass	
	Computer Practice	Intro N4	Pass				
	Financial Accounting	Intro N4	Fail	Pass			
N5	Business Management	N5			Fail	Fail	Pass
	Sales Management	N5			Fail	Pass	
	Computer Practice	N4			Pass		

	Financial Accounting	N4			Fail	Pass		
N6	Business Management	N6					Fail	Fail
	Sales Management	N6					Fail	Pass
	Computer Practice	N5					Pass	
	Financial Accounting	N5					Fail	Pass
	Labour Relations	N5						Fail

**Table 11. Academic record of Perseverance.**

The duration of the complete N4 to N6 course is eighteen months (three examinations) and this learner had already completed three years (six examinations). It can be predicted that she will pass both Business Management N6 as well as Labour Relations N5 in the June 2006 examinations, looking at the pattern that could be identified.

This learner is from a low-income family and therefore it created great concern in my mind to think that the learner's language abilities actually placed an economic burden on this family. It cost her more than double the amount it should have taken to complete the course. With such a low level of language proficiency, she will also experience huge problems to find employment, which will create a further economic burden on her family. For this reason, it was extremely important to me to find a way to improve her language proficiency. I told Perseverance why I think it is important for her to improve her language skills and she decided to work with me, even if it would take extra effort and time from her side.

First of all, we had to determine why her language skills were of such a low level compared to that of the other learners. She asked me whether she may ask her friend to act as translator during our discussions as that will make it easier for her to communicate with me. I then realised how hard it should have been for her all the time in class trying to understand the learning content without understanding what was said in class. I was quite surprised when she told me that she has thought about the causes of her language problem for a long time and she could identify certain aspects of her own.

Her explanation of why she can't speak English was because she went to rural schools until Grade 12 and the teachers spoke mostly Sesotho and not English in the classes. Her comment was "*English, the language, they taught in Sesotho*". Her school friends having an equally low fluency in English also deprived her of gaining experience in the language. She didn't like reading, as she cannot understand what

she reads when it is not in her own language. Her family didn't have money to buy magazines and the school didn't have a library where she could get some books to read. They also lived on a farm about 50 km from town and therefore she couldn't get to the public library. When she did get some books to read she didn't understand what she read and they didn't have money to buy a dictionary.

When I asked her why she didn't use the library facilities that are available on our campus, she said that none of her friends ever go to the library and that she already feels shy for not being able to pass exams. She didn't want them to laugh at her when she goes to the library when they are having a good time during breaks and during their off periods. She doesn't have a lot of friends because all her friends are leaving college faster than her and therefore she didn't want her new friends to laugh at her.

By following the hermeneutical approach of reading between the lines, finding the alternative story or plot (Morgan, 2000:10), I have realised that Perseverance has a dual problem. Firstly, the English language itself and secondly, a low self-esteem.

She acted in a reactive, therefore behaviouristic manner, by blaming factors in her environment for her poor language skills. She allowed her behaviour to be determined by forces in her environment that were beyond her control rather than to exercise her own free will (Möller, et al, 2003:35).

This reminded me of the conversation that Freire (2004:38 – 39) had with an agrarian community as they didn't want to communicate with him during the session. They said they couldn't speak to him as he was educated and they were not. He asked them why they were not educated and they said it was because their parents couldn't send them to school because they were peasants. They said that to be a peasant means "*not having an education ... not owning anything ...working from sun to sun ...having no rights ...having no hope.*" When Freire asked them why it is like this, they said it was the will of God. After he convinced them with using a real life example that it would not be the will of God, they started to blame "*the boss*". Slavin (1991: 331) refers to this type of behaviour as "*learned helplessness*".

Perseverance played the same 'pass the blame' game as done by the peasants in Freire's experience. This behaviour of Perseverance created a real life experience which I could use in a class discussion about why change is needed in an organisation (part of the curriculum of the current semester) and also refer back to their N5 work concerning the managerial habit of being proactive. Smit (1999(a):27) provides the following definition for proactiveness, in easy to understand language: "*Taking action to prevent bad things from happening to you.*" Smit (1999(a):28) also provides clear practical examples to illustrate the differences in the paradigms of a proactive (positive) attitude and that of a reactive (negative) attitude.

<b>REACTIVE LANGUAGE</b>	<b>PROACTIVE LANGUAGE</b>
<i>There's nothing I can do.</i>	<i>Let's look at alternatives.</i>
<i>That's the way I am.</i>	<i>I can deal with it differently.</i>
<i>He makes me so mad.</i>	<i>I control my own feelings.</i>
<i>They won't allow that.</i>	<i>I can make a proposal.</i>
<i>I have to do that.</i>	<i>I will choose a suitable response.</i>
<i>I can't.</i>	<i>I choose.</i>
<i>I must.</i>	<i>I prefer.</i>
<i>If only.</i>	<i>I will.</i>

Table 12. Reactive vs. proactive thinking (Smit, 1999(a):28)

Working in a deconstructive manner, I have used the statements as used by Roger von Oech (Par. 2.2.3) to indicate to the learners how one can determine whether change is needed in one's own life. I have indicated to them how to critically evaluate the different statements. The questions and statements were made in the first person, as every person had to do personal reflection in order to determine the answer.

1. *We make rules based on reasons that make a lot of sense.*
  - Ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?" or "Why am I in this situation?"
  - Ask yourself "why are these rules in place?" or "what can be seen as the original cause of my situation?"
  - Who made the rules?
  - Who gave them the power to make these rules?

2. *We follow these rules.*

- What will happen if I don't follow these rules but act in an alternative manner?
- How will it improve/worsen the situation if the rules are followed/not followed?
- Do these rules create a "win-win situation"? (Another one of the seven habits of effective management (Smit, 1999(a):33).

3. *Time passes and things change.*

- What has changed in my own situation?
- What has changed in the environment around me?
- How will I respond to the changes in the environment around me? (Proactive or reactive)

4. *The original reason for the generation of these rules may no longer exist, but because the rules are still in place, we continue to follow them.*

- Which new rules can be created to replace the old ones?
- What must I do and what do I need to change the rules?

After I have explained how these statements and/or questions should be applied, the learners had to identify something that they want to change in their own lives in order for them to become successful managers of a business and citizens of their country. They had to apply the four statements to determine what needed to be changed in their lives and they had to identify ways to manage that change. I was hoping that Perseverance would use her language situation as her example, but I didn't want to suggest it, as it was also important to me to find if there might be something else that she perceived to be more important than the language barrier.

Perseverance completed the assignment with the help of her close friend, who by now became the regular translator when she wanted to communicate with me. Through life experience, by looking at my own children's behaviour, I have realised that this could create a new problem. My youngest son couldn't speak up to the regular standards generally accepted for his age until he was two and a half years old, as his older brother communicated on his behalf. My older son would say what the younger one wants and he then just confirmed what his brother said with a single "Ja" (Yes). After I had identified this situation, the younger brother quickly had to

learn to speak as I pretended not to understand what he wanted when his brother communicated his needs to me. It also took a while to get the older one off the habit of speaking on his brother's behalf.

To prevent the development of the same situation where Perseverance would rely on her friend to communicate with others and still not get the experience of using the English language, I told her that this was the last time that I will allow her friend to act as translator. Apart from the problem of not being able to speak, I also wanted to prevent Perseverance from developing a low self-image. It could create a feeling that the person who answers on her behalf thinks that she is not competent enough to speak for herself.

Perseverance had indeed identified her language situation as the most important thing that she wanted to change in her life. She already knew the answers to the question as to why she couldn't speak English but she didn't mention anything about the reasons why she didn't currently use the library facilities on campus. The following day she provided the answer to this and she has identified peer pressure and her low self-esteem as the reasons for not using the library. She realised that the friends and classmates could afford not to spend all their time in the library, as their language skills were much better than what hers were.

In answering the questions in the second step, she realised that she will benefit from spending more time in the library as she will improve her language skills and through that, she will be able to improve her marks. She realised that the other learner's attitude towards her will also change as "*they won't have anything to laugh at anymore*" if her marks improve.

In step three, she identified the changes in her own life with the most important one to be the fact that she is not a small child anymore and that as an adult she is responsible for her own academic results. She also realised that she couldn't use the fact that she has no resources as an excuse anymore, as it is available on campus and it was through her own choice that she didn't use it.

In step four, Perseverance was very clear about the fact that she needed to adapt her own attitude, and that she had to choose behaviour that would be the best for

herself, not only for the present, but also for her future. She created a “to do” list for every day of the week, which included reading in the library, every second break at college she would communicate only in English with her trusted friend and she will write one paragraph in a diary in English.

During the first two weeks, she was still afraid that the other learners would make fun of her if she visited the library on a daily basis. In order to help her in this regard and at the same time also improve the other learner’s interest in reading, I gave them an assignment which entailed that they must read specific articles in the business magazines available in the library on a daily basis. Every day the learning sessions started with a few learners providing feedback on, or explaining their viewpoint of what they have read. As the selection of the learners who had to provide feedback was done randomly, by means of a draw from the hat, everybody had to visit the library on a daily basis. At the end of the second week, I had included Perseverance’s name in the hat for the first time. Seeing that on that day we had only a half an hour learning session and with the excuse that I wanted to discuss the test paper that I had handed back to the learners, only one person would have been able to provide feedback on his/her reading in the library. Needless to say, Perseverance’s name appeared on all the secret papers in the hat.

When she started talking, one could see that she was very nervous as she was again rubbing her hands continuously. I knew she has used the full two weeks to prepare for this two minute talk. Although her pronunciation of the words was still very poor, she really gained respect from the other learners, as she was the only one who attempted to talk without a note in her hand. This in turn helped to improve her low self-image.

The aspect that caused the most joy in my heart looking at Perseverance’s situation, was when she came to me after four weeks and said: *“Ma’am, is not wrong for me say I’m proactive, cause book say I did something to prevent something bad from happening to me, cause people not going to laugh to me anymore if me can speak English”*

Although this sentence was still full of errors, I was overwhelmed by the fact that she actually used a full sentence and not only three words per sentence as she used to

do before. Even more important was the fact that she actually linked the experience to the work that they have done in the previous semester, concerning the habit to be proactive. I wanted to know whether she really understood why she said she was proactive. I was wondering if it wasn't only something that her friend told her to say, but she clearly indicated that she understood her statement when she said: *"Before I said I can't, if only, ... now...it's I can, I will... see Ma'am... I speak positive and do things to better me."* Perseverance had indeed created a cognitive bridge between the knowledge that she obtained during the previous semester and the work that she has done during the current semester.

The fact that Perseverance has achieved the skill of being proactive and not being reactive anymore fits in perfectly with the description of deconstruction as given by Boje (2000: accessed 02/10/2005):

*Learn to identify dualities, to reverse perspectives and tell the other side of the story, to see the hierarchical logic, and re-plot and most important RESITUATE (i.e. see through tabooed meanings to suggest a better way once you can rise above [ ... ] dualistic reasoning and dichotomy logic). In RESITUATION - you work through the solutions to the system of oppression that you deconstructed. You propose a less oppressive way of being/doing. [...] Deconstruction is often called a form of negative thinking or negative discourse that does not result in real change. Yet the very purpose of both (dialectics and deconstruction) is to see ways beyond hegemonic logics ("tabooed meanings") that have people stuck in a rut. Both look at changing the rules of the game (the logic that embeds actors in their context). And critically thinking, perhaps more that deconstruction is about liberation.*

Perseverance experienced a less oppressive way of "being" by "resituating" herself. By "breaking out of the rut" which was created, to a large extent, by her socio-economic situation as well as peer pressure, she rose above the "oppressive way of being/doing" of others and has liberated herself.

At the end of the semester, Perseverance's language skills had improved well enough for me to believe that she would be able to at least understand what was asked in the question paper. I could reach this conclusion as I had checked her own memoranda which she has created for eight previous examination papers. I checked

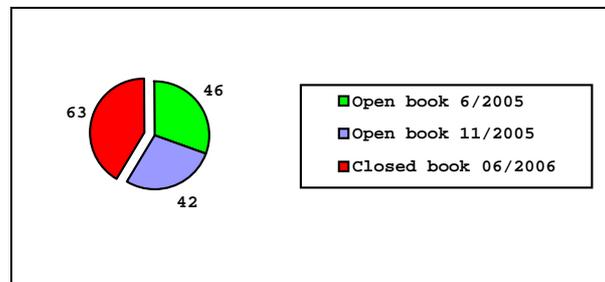
her work for factual accuracy and at the same time, I have corrected the language errors. Seeing that the final examination is done on an open book base, she was well prepared for any question that might have arisen in the question paper. As the examination is based on case studies testing insight, we developed generic answers which can fit into any business environment. She still had to be able to understand the question in order to decide which answer would be applicable and she also had to be able to provide examples from the type of business that was included in the question paper.

I was very happy with Perseverance's improvement in her language skills as O'Donnell, et al (2007: 61) clearly indicates that adults find learning to speak a second language much harder than what young learners do. Perseverance is already twenty seven years of age.

After the learners had completed the exercise of identifying something that needed to be changed in their lives and deciding on what had to be done in order to achieve the change, I challenged them to apply the same principles to a case study concerning a business that needed some change, without discussing it at all. Usually, the new learning content is discussed in the class, examples from real life are used during the explanations and discussions, and after that, the learners are given a case study to test their understanding. To be able to determine whether the other learners have also gained from using the deconstructive way of learning, I've changed the sequence of the learning activities. In groups consisting of four members, they have applied the knowledge which they have obtained during their personal experiences. All the groups displayed that they could apply the knowledge to a specific business scenario.

Seeing that the learners must be able to apply the knowledge while working on their own in the examination, I compiled a closed book test in which I have tested the knowledge that would usually be tested in an open book test, concerning the need for change in an organisation. The average percentage achieved by the learners was sixty three percent (63%) which is seventeen percent (17%) and twenty one percent (21%) respectively, higher than what the learners in the two previous semesters had achieved for a similar test which was written on an open book base (Figure 11).

This clearly indicated that the learners have gained from using something in their own lives in a deconstructive manner as an example while learning the new learning content. They were able to identify the correlation between something that has happened in their own lives and that which may happen in the business environment.



**Figure 11. Marks obtained for the test concerning change in an organisation**

During a reflective class discussion based on their reading experience of the previous two weeks, some of the learners admitted that they have never read a complete article in an English magazine or an English newspaper. They usually stopped at approximately the fourth paragraph as they find it too hard to understand what is said. Some were honest enough to say that they are too lazy to use a dictionary and stop reading at the first word that they do not understand. They admitted that they don't even try to determine the meaning of the word by reading the full sentence to try to fit the word into the context in which it was used.

The spelling errors that occurred in tests and assignments provided a clear indication that these learners do not read enough to even be able to know the spelling of words through word recognition. Some of the learners who made the most spelling errors can speak English on an acceptable level to be easily understood, but their written language skills can create a situation where an external examiner may not be able to award marks for the answer that was provided. In some instances, the learners use phonetic spelling. In other instances, there is just a vague resemblance between the incorrect and the correct spelling.

I found that the words of which the spelling usually creates a problem for all users of the English language, whose home language is not English, are also the words that are spelled incorrectly in such a way, that it becomes incomprehensible.

The following are examples of spelling errors that occurred. The first group of words are the words that generally create spelling problems and the second group, are the words that the learners spell in the same manner as what they pronounce it.

LEARNERS' SPELLING	CORRECT SPELLING
Group 1	
Hygeaing	Hijacking
Deanoroas	Dangerous
Cqutiones	Cautiousness
Difrenton	Differentiation
Cuance	Change
Group 2	
Frunsize	Franchise
Mejer	Merger
Buckup	Backup
Stratagee	Strategy
Culcha	Culture
Pucking/packing	Parking
Jeem/jeam	Gym
Coss	Because

**Table 13. Spelling errors which occurred in tests.**

In order to get the learners to read more, I have continued to start my learning sessions with short feedback sessions on what they have read. I became more lenient on the topics for their reading as I also wanted them to enjoy the reading sessions and not only experience reading as a compulsory learning task. I wanted them to develop a love for reading in order for them to make reading a lifelong habit. A part of their curriculum also includes a discussion on why having a wide range of general knowledge can be seen as an advantage to a business manager, and through the reading sessions, I wanted them to experience the excitement of finding new interesting general knowledge facts.

The fact that I have allowed them freedom of choice regarding the reading topics provided quite amusing evidence that the actions that I have taken as part of this project were effective. One learner indicated to me that they learn in the subject Labour Relations N5 that it is compulsory that the employees are allowed to have a tea break and lunchtime according to the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. He said that the learners could link most of the college rules to labour laws, and therefore they should also be allowed to have a tea break and lunch time without having to go to the library. He indicated that they have actually already prepared a memorandum which they would have handed to me in order to inform me about their intentions to strike to indicate their disagreement with my reading rules. By just reading this part, it might sound very serious, but in actual fact, this whole conversation happened in a “tongue in the cheek” manner.

This situation could have been used to give the learners a long lecture on the attitude of going the extra mile that should be adopted by employees in order to have the competitive advantage over other employees in a business. However, I have realised that it will have much more value if I acknowledge the correctness of this application of what they have learned in another subject. I remembered the words of Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds,1992:221) who said that an educator should not allow his/her knowledge “to tyrannize his students’ fantasies” and Freire (2004:36) said that “for the progressive educator, there is no other route than to seize the educands’ “moment” and begin with their “here” and “now”. Reflecting on these statements, I knew I did the correct thing to just acknowledge the correctness of their application.

Although the whole event happened in a relaxed and humoristic manner, the body language of this learner clearly indicated that he has gained some self-confidence through this situation. The fact that the other learners openly enjoyed the situation and the fact that I have admitted to my “unfair labour practices”, indicated to him that he is not “stupid”. This learner was one of the learners who indicated that they “don’t want to look stupid” if they provide the incorrect answer to a question during a learning session. I believe the fact that this learner is not a very outgoing person by nature, enhanced the value of this situation as he stepped out of his box of shyness as well as seeing beyond the pages of his textbook.

I was so curious to see what Perseverance's marks were when the results became available, that I went to the college during the June holidays, the moment that I heard that the results were available, to see if we have succeeded in our mission or not. Perseverance had passed with an excellent mark! For the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N6, of which the examinations are based on practical application, she achieved 49%, which is an improvement of 18% from the previous examination. In the subject Labour Relations N5, of which the examination is based on rote learning, she improved with 23% from the previous examination, by achieving 55%. In FET colleges a person must achieve 40% in order to pass a subject.

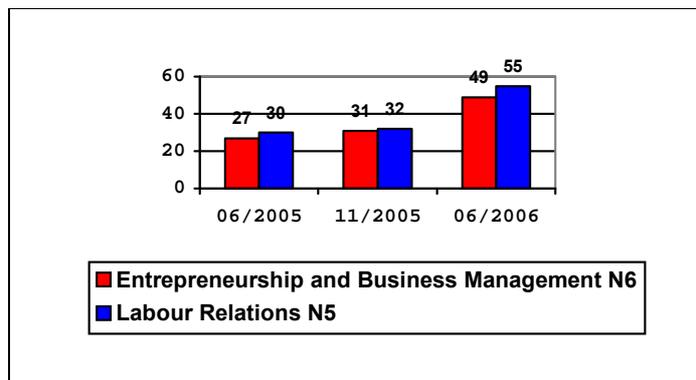


Figure 12. Perseverance's marks improvement

If one looks at the difference between the first two examinations, it is clear that there was no mentionable improvement when she repeated the examinations. Only after the deconstructive intervention, a drastic improvement had occurred.

When I saw Perseverance's marks, I really reacted as if I were the student myself, by loudly expressing my joy with a "Yes! Yes! Yes!" while dancing with joy. Thinking that I was alone on the campus on a Saturday afternoon during the holidays, I had a huge surprise when I turned around and saw a parent standing watching me, just shaking her head in disbelief. When Perseverance's friend who acted as translator, came around the corner quite unexpectedly and started shouting "Ma'aaaaam!!!! Yes! Yes! Yes! ", the moment that she saw me and joined in my dance of joy, the parent said: "*You must be Ma'am B, now I know why my daughter always say Yes, yes, yes and start dancing when she succeeded in something. I just saw my*

*daughter's marks and she passed, so Ma'am B, Yes! Yes! Yes!*" This yes, yes, yes of the mother changed to become the traditional African praising of "Lololololololo!" at a very high pitch of the voice. I joined in wholeheartedly in this praising and at that moment, I felt sure that I had created a trust relationship with this parent, which will last for ever.

When I heard who this parent's daughter is, I couldn't believe it; and it was my turn to shake my head in disbelief. This woman was the mother of the learner in my class who never displayed any emotions, whether it is anger, joy, hurt, sorrow, or anything that I can mention here. Her daughter never spoke to me in the whole year that she was in my class. She would only greet me if I had greeted her first by calling her name. The other lecturers experienced the same situation. When I asked her a direct question, she just bluntly refused to even look at me. I had tried anything that I could think of, without success, even referring her to the psychologist on campus. She never kept her appointments and just refused to speak to anybody. She didn't even have friends and whenever she was seen, she was reading. Her written English language skills were excellent and when she greeted you, her pronunciation was also very good, even without an accent.

I've mentioned to the parent that her daughter never speaks to anybody, and she told me what the origin of this problem is, but I may not repeat it in this report, as I have signed a secrecy agreement with the mother. She said that her daughter only speaks to her and that her daughter used to be a very quiet person, but she could see the change in her daughter happening during the last three months. She has for the first time in about five years, expressed joyful emotions. This expression was the "Yes! Yes! Yes!" when she achieved high marks or when she could do something which she couldn't do before.

I asked the mother what she suspects to be the reason for the change in her daughter's behaviour. She said that her daughter told her about the other girl who couldn't speak English, but after she worked through the questions to determine why she allows her past to still negatively influence her life, she started to actively do something to improve her situation. She was talking about Perseverance. She said that she once found notes in her daughter's room in which she was answering these questions and since then her daughter started to show emotions when she is alone.

I was so thankful to the Lord that I have met this parent, as I now know that my deconstructive approach towards personal change is definitely successful. I was really sad when I realised that this learner will not be in my class anymore as she has completed her studies. She is also living in Limpopo Province, 280 km away from me and therefore I might never see her again. Her mother agreed to it that I can phone her to stay informed if any more improvements appear in her daughter's silence. Many of my colleagues regularly criticize me for my outgoing way of communicating with my learners, but if I haven't done this on this particular Saturday afternoon, I would never have known who the parent standing next to me, was.

I am sure that I don't have to tell the readers what Perseverance's reaction was when her friend phoned her to inform her about her results. This extreme form of expressing joy has been a part of my character for many years. One day one of my students asked me what my first reaction would be if I were to find that I had won the lotto jackpot. I showed them the Yes!-routine and since then they have adopted it as general practice to express joy.

The fact that the learners imitated me, reminded me of the words of Van Niekerk & van Niekerk (1998:19 - 20) who stated that the learners' experience of reality depends to a large extent on the intervention of the teacher, as learners do not distinguish between a teacher and the subject that is taught.

In Perseverance's case, it was a relatively long process of four months working very intensively with her that brought change in her level of participation in class. However, there are actions that an educator can take to improve class participation that can actually be implemented without any preparation or intensive work and it can be part of the daily actions in class.

The following action is one of the easy to implement daily actions. Seeing that language inefficiency was identified as the most prominent barrier towards class participation, I started to take more effort in looking at the learners' books as I pass them during the learning session. (I never stand in front of the class during a learning session, I always move around between the learners.) During discussions, I would read the answers which they have prepared as part of self-study, from the learners'

books by correcting all the language errors without even mentioning it. In the beginning, the learners didn't react at all, but after about a week, they started to correct the errors while I was reading from their books. Some learners previously didn't even want me to look at their work in the passing by and closed their books when I came nearer to them. Once they realised that I was correcting the language errors while reading their answers, they were willing to share their ideas and actually turned the book to my side to make it easier for me to read it.

I still wanted the learners to develop their verbal skills. I started to correct the language and spelling errors in red pen in their books in the passing by and then I asked them to read their answers. Learners, who never wanted to answer in class, were now sometimes upset if they didn't get a chance during a learning session to share their ideas. My whole perception that the learners have an enormous problem with the application of their knowledge has changed. They can apply their knowledge but are scared of losing marks if they have to explain something in their own words and therefore they provide rote learning answers or don't answer at all.

It is a true fact that they do experience application problems in areas where they do not have any life experience, e.g. with the development of an organisational structure, the trading between countries and the interpretation of financial statements, to name a few. Educators commonly believe that the learners cannot apply their knowledge inter-curricular and in general in their lives. I found that learners are too scared to apply their knowledge inter-curricular, especially in subjects of which the examinations are based on rote learning and of which the external marking of examinations is done strictly according to a memorandum.

**b) Learners do not know the different meanings of some words and are therefore unable to use the words in the correct context.**

I found that learners experience a problem with words which are spelled in the same manner but have different meanings. This situation causes that the learners do not understand the questions posed in a test or examination and are therefore not able to answer the questions correctly. It causes the learners to provide an answer that would be correct in another part of the curriculum content of the subject, but the answer does not fit the question that was posed.

An example of this is the word 'interest'. The learners had to compile a business plan for a franchise organisation. The business plan consisted of different sections of which one section included the personal resources of the franchisee, e.g. personal characteristics, interests, experience, knowledge, and skills. In the financial section of the business plan, the learners had to calculate the projected instalments on their loan, based on different interest rate scenarios. In stead of doing the calculations as requested, four of the learners of this group duplicated the answer that they have provided in the personal resource section, concerning interests in the type of franchise business that they want to enter, e.g. a restaurant owner have an interest in the traditional dishes of the different countries of the world.

Other words that created the same type of errors for this group of learners are:

Estate	What is left in the will of a deceased person A big house on a large piece of land
Agents	Cleaning agents (soap, shampoo, etc.) Sales personnel selling a product/house
Security	Financial- or job security Security guard or an alarm system

**Table 14. Words which are spelled the same but have different meanings.**

The learners also experienced a problem with words that sound similarly but which have different meanings if not spelled correctly. The following words are regularly used in the incorrect context when used in written assignments:

Profit	Prophet
Save	Safe
Excess	Access
Personnel	Personal

**Table 15. Words used out of context.**

I have tried to get the learners to identify words that could create the same problem, but only the learners who already had good spelling skills, could identify these words. Whenever one of these words appeared in the curriculum, I have written both words on the whiteboard and the learners then had to indicate which one is the correct word fitting the context under discussion. They then had to find the meaning of the other word in a dictionary. At the end of the semester, I gave them a

paragraph to complete concerning the work that they have done. They had to choose the correct word from a list to make the paragraph to be a true statement. I included the correct as well as the incorrect spelled words in the list from which they had to choose the correct word. During the semester seven (7) of the learners from this group used the incorrect word. When they had to do the revision exercise, only one (1) of the learners chose the incorrect word, namely “save” working conditions in stead of “safe” working conditions.

I could identify two words that are generally used in an incomplete manner, not only by the learners but also by the public in general. Speakers in television programmes are even guilty of this practice. These words are ‘environment’ and ‘quality’.

Most of the time when someone talks about the natural environment, they just use the word environment. In business management, there are different kinds of environments that are studied, e.g. international-, economic-, labour- and competitive environments, to name only a few. I have experienced that when the learners are asked to do an environmental scanning of a business, seventeen of this group of twenty four learners, referred only to the influences that can be created by the natural environment, e.g. floods, fires, wind and pollution.

The word ‘quality’ is very often used in a sense that indicates something of a high standard, e.g. “We want our children to receive quality education”. In actual fact, quality is something that is measured against set standards in order to determine the level of quality, to be of a high or a low standard measured against expected or set standards. In the learning session concerning quality assurance, the learners cannot understand why they do not receive a mark if they indicate, “the product sells good as it is a quality product”. I do not award a mark and ask the question “Good or bad quality?” or “quality of a high or low standard?”

I had a feeling of great satisfaction when one of the learners identified this way of using these two words as a bad habit. He referred back to the work that they have done during their N5 course, concerning the influence that habits have on ones life. He could also provide an idea of how the learners can change the habit, based on what they have learned the previous semester. He clearly reminded the other learners about the three elements that are needed in order to change a habit, being

knowledge, skills and desire (Smit, 1999(a):26). He said that they now know that the words are used incorrectly or incompletely and that is the element of knowledge. They want to be able to use the words in the correct manner in order to earn marks in the examinations and tests and to be able to communicate correctly on managerial level once they have completed their course. That fulfils the element of desire. The only element missing was the skill to change the habit. He proposed that we declare the two words as swear words. He indicated that one uses a swear word only after you have observed who can possibly hear you using the word. In other words, you think of the word or the value of the word before you use it. Therefore the words 'quality' and 'environment' were declared as swear words by this group of learners.

I was quite surprised to realise that this team effort had more far reaching results than what was expected. A great feeling of togetherness and team spirit also developed between the learners. As a team, the learners decided that whoever used one of the "swear words" incorrectly, will be punished by singing the national anthem in front of the class all on his/her own. Only two learners received this punishment before the words were regularly used correctly. I wanted to test their awareness of the correct use of these words and two weeks later, I deliberately used the "swear word" quality, without indicating a standard. It provided great pleasure when "Ma'am B" also received the same punishment and had to sing the national anthem. I was satisfied - a bad habit had been changed and the change was managed by the learners themselves.

Another language problem that was experienced was the fact that learners use jargon instead of proper English. This creates the situation that the lecturer and/or examiner must be knowledgeable about the jargon that is used by the learners. An example of this is the term "stop nonsense" used for security gates, fences and burglar proofing. The learners have decided that these kinds of words will be classified as semi-swear words and will not be used in class but they can still be used in their daily lives at home.

**c) Learners write down what they have heard without trying to make sense of what they have written down.**

During the reflection session of the daily reading assignment, the learners admitted that they don't even try to determine the meaning of the word by reading the full

sentence to try to fit the word into the context in which it was used. This statement confirmed the reality of the finding that the learners don't try to make sense from what they write down in class while making notes of what is said during the learning sessions.

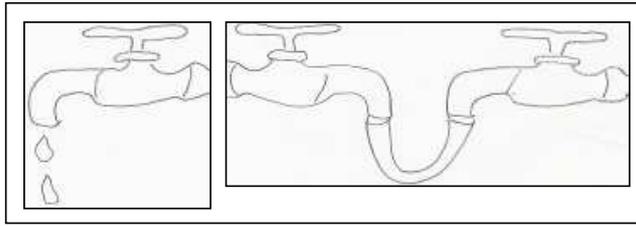
During the learning sessions concerning the social responsibility which a business has towards the natural environment, I usually provide the example that you can save water by ensuring that there are no leaking taps on the business premises. For the third semester in a row, some learners wrote: "You must make sure that there are no linking taps on the premises." Four of the learners provided this answer.

During the feedback session of this test, I have asked all the learners to draw a picture of a leaking tap and I have also asked them to ensure that their fellow learners do not see their pictures while they are drawing it. All but one of the learners provided a picture of a leaking tap. One of the learners, who have used the word "linking" tap, provided a picture of two taps which are connected with something like a hosepipe (Figure 13). Asking the other three learners why they have used the word linking and not leaking, they indicated that the learners who have used the textbook before them made the notes in the book and have used the word "linking". When I've asked them to explain to me what a linking tap is, they provided an explanation of a leaking tap. They indicated that they knew that I was talking about a leaking tap but they thought that they were always wrong in using the word leaking and that linking is the correct pronunciation and spelling.

The other learner said he didn't know what a linking tap was, but because it seemed that all the other learners knew what I was talking about, he thought it was something that is used in the cities and as he comes from the rural areas, he wouldn't know of it. When I asked him why he didn't ask me what it was, he said he "*didn't want to sound stupid*".

With these self-drawn sketches, I have shown the learners to always try and create a picture in their minds (imagination) of the word that they want to use. If the picture doesn't make sense, they must know that they might be using the wrong word and then take effort to find the correct word. For each option that they want to use, they

must follow the same procedure of imagining what the word means and then use the word which makes the most sense in their imaginary picture.



**Figure 13. Leaking taps vs. linking taps**

The next set of words that the learners regularly use incorrectly, are the words *owe* and *own*. During a learning session concerning the financial ratio analyses of a business, the learners had to calculate the current ratio of a business, to determine the short-term liquidity of that business. They had to indicate, by interpreting the calculated ratio, whether the business would have enough money to continue operations if no sales are made during a specific month. Five of the learners answered: “*The business owes enough money to pay the accounts and then it will still owe enough money to continue operations. They owe R2,00 for every R1,00 that they owe.*” The sentence should read: “The business owns enough money to pay the debts and then it will still own enough money to continue operations. They own R2,00 for every R1,00 that they owe.”

I’ve asked them what the word ‘owe’ means. They all agreed that it means that you must pay someone something. When I’ve asked them what the word ‘own’ means, they said it means “*mine*”. I have indicated to them that the word ‘mine’ has many meanings and I provided the following examples: “The property is *mine*” (pronoun), “We get diamonds from a *mine*” (noun) or even “We *mine* (verb) for coal in New Castle”. I have asked the learners to provide another word (synonym) or explanation for the word ‘own’. After a discussion between them, they came up with the explanation “I am the owner of the property, therefore it is mine”. As they have used the word ‘owner’, I could show them how to deconstruct a word, provide meaning to the different parts, link the characteristics of the word to that of other words with similar characteristics, and then reconstruct new meaning to the word or parts of the word.

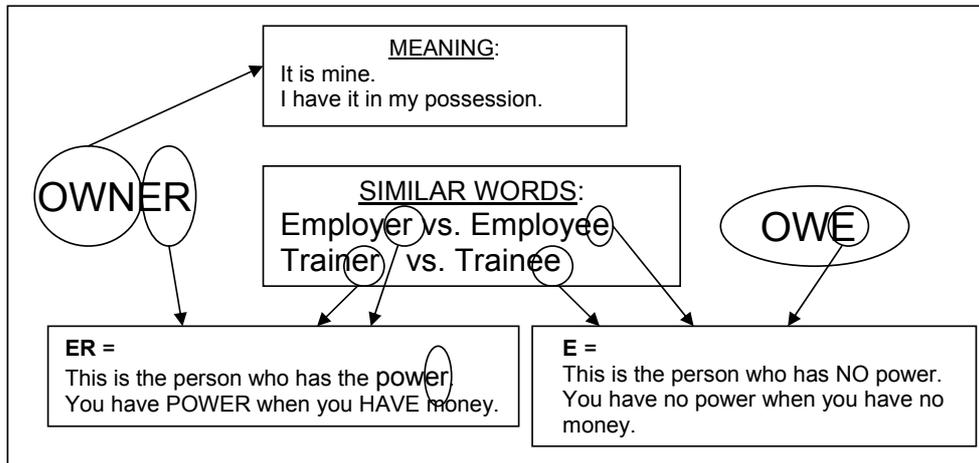


Figure 14. Deconstruction of a word to determine its meaning.

After showing the learners how to determine the meaning of the words, I have instructed them to correct the sentence which they have provided as answer in the ratio analysis exercise. Four of the five learners could correct the sentence completely and one learner only had one mistake.

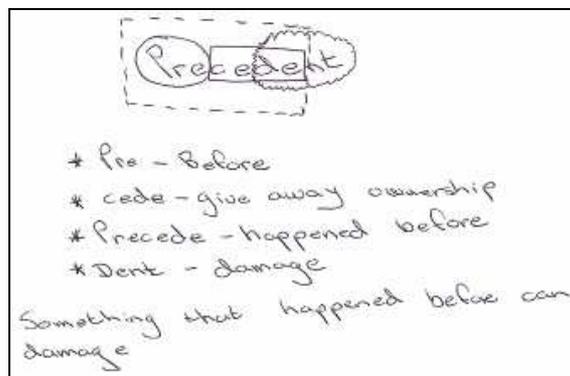
After I could see that the learners had mastered the technique of deconstructing the words, I indicated to them how they could also replace words which sound similar with synonyms to make reading and understanding easier. I rewrote the same sentence in the following manner: The business has enough money to pay the debts and then it will still have enough money to continue operations. They have R2,00 for every R1,00 that they owe.”

Four weeks later, during a learning session about franchising, one of the learners became very excited and said: *“Ma’am, don’t tell us – I want to tell you – thinking of what we have learned last month, the franchisee is the person who buys the business idea and the franchisor is the person who sells the business idea.”* Hearing this, I realised that my deconstructive way of understanding a word does carry value.

In a learning session concerning the disadvantages of buying an existing business, it was mentioned that the buyer can inherit bad precedents (Smit, 1999(b):101). Not one of the learners stopped me to ask me what that phrase means. I asked if someone can tell me what the meaning of the phrase is, and I was informed, without

hesitation, that the “*CEO of the company is a bad manager*”. I knew that the learners would link the meaning of the word ‘president’ to the word ‘precedent’.

As the previous deconstructing exercise of the word owner was successful, I’ve asked the learners to identify words inside the word precedent that can stand on their own and still have meaning. The learners could identify the words pre, precede, cede, and dent. I’ve then asked them to put meaning to the different parts. Most of the learners could indicate what the meanings of the different fractions of the word are, but they couldn’t reconstruct the meaning of the word. The closest version of the reconstruction of the meaning that I have received is displayed in figure 15.



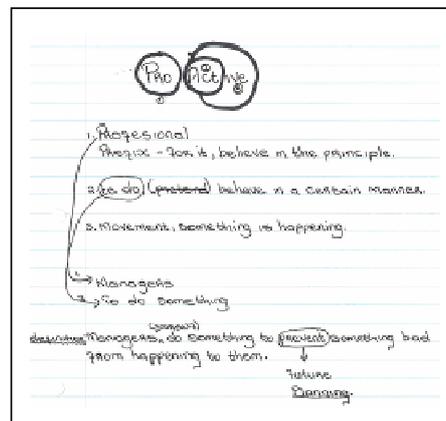
**Figure 15. Deconstruction of the word 'precedent'.**

On N4 level of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management, they learn the meaning of the phrase ‘to cede a policy’. In a Socratic way, I’ve helped them to recall the meaning of the word ‘cede’. I’ve asked them what it means to cede a policy, they answered that the bank takes ownership of the policy if you don’t pay your loan. The next question asked was whether you can change anything, such as premiums and beneficiaries, on the policy once the bank took ownership, the answer – no. I then asked, “What have you then actually lost by ceding a policy?” After quite an active discussion between the learners, someone replied, “Your right and power to change anything on the policy.”

After they have constructed this new knowledge, I gave them more time to create the full meaning of the word 'precedent'. The learner who created the deconstruction in figure 15 then provided the following explanation: *"Inheriting a bad precedent means that you have lost the right and power to change something that has happened before in the business, perhaps something that the previous owner did, that can be seen as a weakness in the business and that can damage your business, like loosing the business' good name. The weaknesses come from the SWOT- analysis in N4 Ma'am, see I still remember."*

After I acknowledged the fact that these learners do remember something from a previous level of the course, all of a sudden one of the learners reacted in an exited, surprised tone: *"Oookaaay!!! Eich Ma'am, only now I understand what it means to cede a policy!!!!"* This reaction made me even more aware of the fact that time constraints force educators sometimes to work just to get through the syllabi and educators don't really know whether the learners really understand the concepts that they were supposed to have learned.

Perseverance provided the final evidence that deconstructing the words can improve understanding of its meaning. She brought her version of the deconstruction of a word for me to see if she understood the process of deconstructing words (Figure 16).



**Figure 16. Perseverance's version of deconstructing the word 'proactive'.**

She said that she used a word of which she already knows the meaning just for practice purposes. She felt very proud when I told her that she even went one step

further buy indicating that she new what the word 'prevent' means, by showing that it refers to when something is planned for the future. To me it also indicated that she was not only busy improving her language skills, but she was also busy developing her skill of recognising knowledge inter-curricular. She used knowledge that she obtained while studying the principles of planning as a managerial function.

This experience indicated to me that the educator should act in a hermeneutical way and place him/herself in the shoes of the learners and think of synonyms that are easy to understand, and rather use those words in the classroom where the learners are not learning in their own language. The more advanced managerial terms can be explained after the learners have reached the specific outcomes, which formed part of the main aim of the learning session.

I was very happy when I realised that the learners have actually developed the skill of deconstructing the words even if they don't do it on paper. In a learning session concerning delegation, I asked the learners to explain the term authority. After a very short silence, one of the learners who hardly ever took part in the class discussions said, *"Ah! Ma'am B, that's easy! An author writes something and we are talking about the power of a boss, so, it is the power of the boss to write the rules and the workers must follow these written rules and regulations."*

#### **4.6.2.3 Inability to use imagination and/or creative thinking**

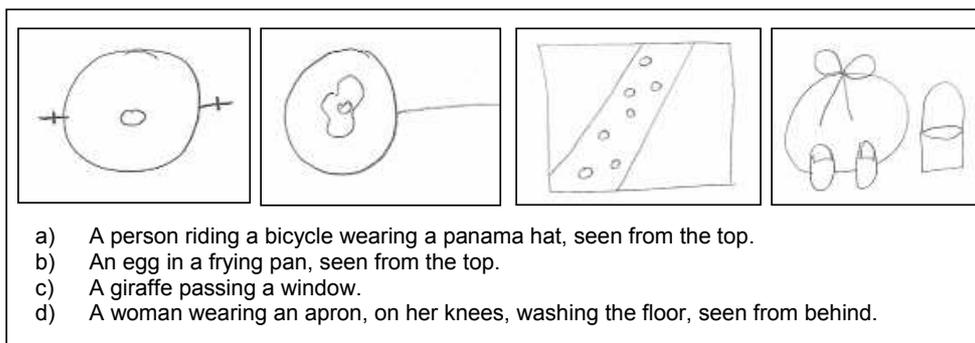
As mentioned in section 2.2.6 it is very important for a learner to be able to use his/her imagination during the learning process. One of the biggest problems that are experienced by the learners is the fact that they don't know how to create answers for case study questions. These case studies require of them to place themselves in another milieu and to imagine how you will handle the situation explained in the case study.

Creativity is seen to be a crucial part of the characteristics of a business person, to the extent that it forms part of the curriculum content of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N4. The learners must use material such as an empty 2 litre plastic cold drink bottle, the lid of a spray can, empty toilet paper rolls or any waste material to create something to sell, in order to stimulate creativity as well as displaying the advantages of recycling. They must also use innovation to improve a

product such as a pencil case or a ruler, to make it more useful and attractive to the customers.

I was unpleasantly surprised to realise how low these learners' creative abilities were. I used tasks, similar to those that they did on N4 level, as ice breakers in my learning sessions and it seemed to me that they have never done this part of the curriculum content during their studies on N4-level. I repeated these exercises on a weekly base and by the sixth week, the learners started to show an improvement in their creativity. The use of hand puppets also stimulated the learners' creative abilities as they sometimes created their own hand puppets to use in their puppet shows (See section 4.6.2.4).

In order to stimulate their imagination and creative thinking I have regularly started the learning sessions with short riddles and little drawings that they must identify what they see. I can't acknowledge the sources of these drawings, as some of these drawings come from my childhood (Figure 17). The learners usually come up with the strangest explanations of what is displayed in the drawings. In some instances, only the person who gave the explanation can see what he/she sees, but any answer is acceptable to indicate that you are allowed to see things differently from what others see them.



**Figure 17. Simple exercises to stimulate creative thinking.**

I usually start the learning sessions that fall in the period right after lunch (graveyard session) with mind games in order to activate the brain functions and keep the learners awake. One of the games is designed to be used as a memory test. It is done by displaying ten objects in a picture with the use of an overhead projector and

the learners only have one minute to try and identify and remember these objects. When time is up, they must list the objects that they can remember to be in the picture (Figure 18).

After I have used this picture in three classes, I found that the learners can't remember all of the objects. On average, they can remember six of the objects in the picture. These six items are the scissors, eraser, brush, pencil, glue, and the paper clip (learners call it a money clip). The objects that are regularly left out are the scalpel, ruler, drawing curve and the highlighter. After they have listed the items which they remember, I display the picture again for thirty seconds. The highlighter is then usually added.

As I could see a correlation between what the learners of the different classes remember and what they forget, I started urging them to try and remember more of the items. Without displaying the picture again, I kept on asking: "Can you really not remember anything else?" The learners kept on trying but only mentioned those items that have already been listed. When I've asked them "*what are these things?*", they could tell me that it is stationary. I then told them to think of other items that can be seen as part of stationary and try to remember whether it was in the picture or not. The next item that was then added is the ruler. The one learner commented by saying, "*Ma'am, how can it be a ruler? It doesn't show the centimetres*". This comment indicated to me that they want to see realistic pictures and that they don't create their own holistic view of the objects in the picture. They think in a box, as they do not see beyond the borders of the picture frame.

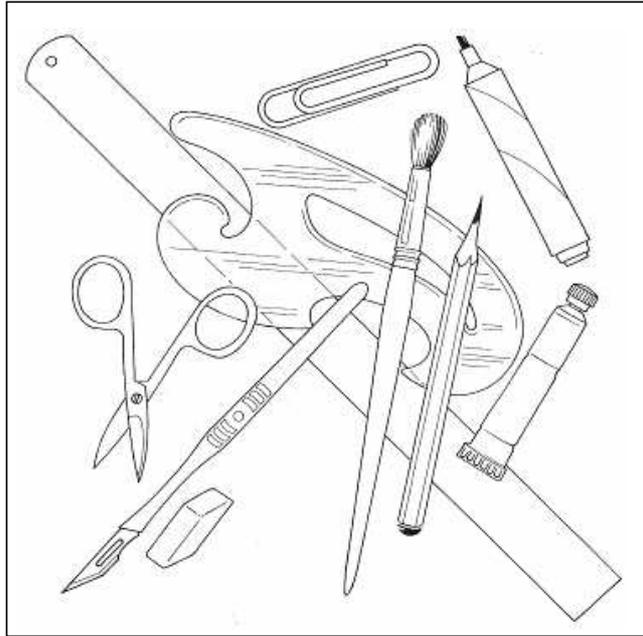


Figure 18. Memory test (Allen & Fulton, MENSA, 1995:31)

After urging them a few more times in one of the classes, one of the learners said: “*There is something like a knife and another thing that looks like this ...*”, and the learner has drawn the outline of the drawing curve in the air. On asking him when he has remembered that, he said he could remember all the items from the start but he didn’t mention or count the items that he didn’t know the names of. After deconstructing and analysing the attributes and uses of the scalpel and drawing curve, it was named ‘art knife’ and ‘curly whirly’ respectively.

One tends to think that the deconstructive process should follow the sequence of deconstruct → analyse and interpret → reconstruct. In this instance the sequence that was followed was reconstruct → analyse and interpret → deconstruct. The learners saw the different objects as loose (deconstructed) objects and they didn’t see the relation between the objects. Once they have reconstructed the objects by realising that they all fall under the collective noun ‘stationary’, they could analyse their answers to see what they have remembered and they could then identify more objects that fit under the word ‘stationary’. They have then deconstructed the term stationary and they could list more objects.

The fact that the learners didn't even mention the "something" and "another thing" that they saw in the picture as they didn't know its name, made me realise that the learners might then also write down only what they can explain or have experience of during a test or examination. The educators then assume that the learners didn't study and in the mean time, they don't have any knowledge of the type of business in the case study on which the test is based and they do not make use of their imagination to create an answer. My fear was confirmed when we had a spontaneous class discussion about this.

Another example to prove the fact that the learners do not use their imagination was found in an open book test. This also fits in with the finding that the learners write down what they have heard without trying to make sense of what they have written down (See section 4.6.2.2 (c)).

During a class discussion regarding the social responsibility that a business has towards the natural environment, which fits in the curriculum of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N5, I used a crèche as the business in the case study. One of the examples that I used as a method that the crèche can use to prevent littering, is to teach the children to throw all fruit peels and yoghurt cups in the rubbish bins when they have finished their lunch.

In the open book test which I used to test the learners knowledge of this module, I used 'Monkey Town', a business near Cape Town, as the business on which the case study is based. The following was the case study as it appeared in this test.

*A few animal lovers started a business named MONKEY TOWN, near Cape Town. This business is run as a zoo where customers can walk between large areas of natural environment that are enclosed with animal-safe fencing. It also acts as a rehabilitation centre for wild monkeys, baboons, and chimpanzees that were abandoned by their mothers, in order to train them to survive on their own once placed back in the wilderness. There is also a restaurant where the visitors can be served with light meals or just buy refreshments like cold drinks and sweets.*

I deliberately included the cold drinks and sweets in order to make it easy for the learners to have an example of how the company can prevent littering, by providing enough dustbins on the premises with notices against littering.

One of the answers of how this business can fulfill its responsibility towards the natural environment which was provided in this test reads as follows: *“The zoo keepers must teach the monkeys to place their peels in the dustbins once they have eaten their bananas.”* This answer proves the fact that the learners make notes of the examples that are provided during a learning session and later they use the same examples in the assessment sessions, without applying it in a proper manner to the case study at hand and without thinking of what they really are saying.

During the feedback session, without disclosing the name of the learner who provided this answer, I have asked the other learners whether I should allocate marks for this answer or not. I was quite surprised when the majority of the learners immediately said “Yes, why not Ma’am?” Some learners didn’t respond but I could see on their faces that they were not sure what to think, but they didn’t say a word. Lebo<sup>4</sup> burst out laughing and the other learners couldn’t understand the reason for her amusement. She said that she wants to show them what this answer suggested.

Lebo provided a hilarious dramatisation of a monkey in the wilderness who finished eating his banana and is now looking for a dustbin in which he can throw the peel, but he can’t find one. Lebo displayed how this poor monkey even gets old and dies with the banana peel still in his hand.

I could observe three main emotions in the class. Firstly, the learners were amazed by Lebo’s acting talents, secondly they were amused by her dramatisation and lastly, they were astonished by the fact that this answer suggested something completely impossible although it looks as if it is a perfect answer. I think nobody will ever forget the action of visualising what he/she has written in a test.

In order to test whether these learners still remembered what they have learned on N5-level through Lebo’s dramatisation, I created a similar situation. In the N6 module about international trade and exporting, after completing the part of how to decide

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<sup>4</sup> The learner who helped me with the puppet shows.

what type of transport should be used, and the different countries that have harbours, I showed them a picture of a product that is larger than two big trucks with trailers. The component is about 30 meters high. I've told them that I want to export this component from Cape Town to Mozambique. They had to identify which method of transport I should use.

One learner immediately replied "*Rail, as there are railroads from South Africa to Mozambique.*" A few of the other learners started laughing and just said "IMAGINE!!!!!" The learner who answered reflected for a while and then started laughing and to hide his embarrassment he said quite as if he intended it: "*After the delivery is completed I will start a business by selling flat trains.*" His best friend replied with "*And I can make money by starting a construction company repairing the bridges that your flat train has damaged.*" Within a few seconds, everybody started awarding themselves a position in these two 'businesses'. Some wanted to be the marketing managers, others the accountants or human resource managers and I was awarded the position of training manager.

This might sound like a fruitless conversation and a waste of time. In actual fact, I was amazed by this situation as the learners have used the knowledge which they had obtained on N5-level regarding the ways in which a business can be divided in different departments. Two of the learners who never want to take part in class discussions even laughed loudly and also picked their positions in these 'companies'. This was also in indication that the learners do have the ability to use their imagination, but it just needs to be stimulated.

Once the order was restored, I have acknowledged the fact that the learner, who made the mistake which caused this whole situation, could think on his feet and use humour to make his embarrassment less. At the same time, he also involved others in a relaxed manner which is needed in order to have effective group dynamics in any organisation (Part of the N5 syllabus). This created a good example of the fact that to make a mistake is not the end of the world as we can learn from our mistakes. It contributed to the principles of developing a positive self-efficacy, which are discussed in section 4.6.2.4.

This incident confirmed to me that the lecturer/facilitator should have an open and relaxed relationship with the learners as the evidence of learning that took place, sometimes shows itself in strange, unexpected ways.

To improve their imaginative skills, I've let them experience the skill of placing yourself in the shoes of the other person (Hermeneutics). This was mostly done by using role-play. I've challenged them by giving the male learners a task that is traditionally seen as a task for females and vice versa. The reason for this is the fact that the case studies on which the national examinations are based covers all types of businesses such as crèches, hair and beauty salons, bed and breakfast outlets, motorcar repair workshops, building contractors, and handyman repair services and all learners are expected to be able to answer questions over the broad spectrum of the business environment.

During these role-play sessions, I have, for example, given the male learners the task to display a typical day in a crèche and the female learners acted as the children in the crèche. In the next session, the female learners had to be the mechanic in the motorcar repair workshop and the male learners acted as the customers who bring their motorcars for a service.

In some instances, it seemed so obvious that they would know the answers, but they still couldn't provide practical examples. I used an international bus service as the case study in a class discussion. Seeing that these learners regularly make use of public transport, I thought that they would be able to identify the ill-will (negative aspects) or goodwill (positive aspects) of a public transport business. Only six of the learners took part in the discussions.

I asked the rest of the learners to make a list of all the things that they don't like about the taxi service which they regularly use. After they had completed that, they had to list the positive aspects of the taxi service that they use. When they finished this exercise, I asked them what the general word is that we use to describe the vehicle that is used for a taxi service. Nearly immediately, the reply came as if in a choir, "minibus". I didn't have to say anything different than just asking, "So?! ..."

One of the learners explained that she now realises what the problem is. She said that she sometimes thinks of an answer but as it is something that fits in her daily life, she thinks it is not good enough to use as an example in college, as she is living a simple township life. I explained to her that the majority of businesses are catering for the people living “simple” lives, and that she can be sure that the things that irritate or attract her in a business, will also be the things that irritate or attract the higher income customers of a business. She stood thinking for a moment and replied thoughtfully, “... *Eich, all the time I thought I am stupid not to think of the answers and in the mean time I am stupid because I think I am stupid*”.

Her comment created another amusing situation but I was happy as she had just displayed her ability to deconstruct her own thinking patterns, analyse them and identify the errors in her thinking patterns and reconstruct the new knowledge in way that could improve her level of self-concept, class participation as well as her ability to apply her knowledge holistically in her life. This can be seen as emancipating herself, which is one of the main aims of action research and the process of deconstruction. The most important thing in this instance was the fact that she could do it within a few seconds without any coaching or prompting from anybody.

Her success in realising that all people are important no matter what our income level is, has created the situation that three of the other learners also started to apply their own life experiences in the answering of the case studies by placing themselves in the situation by using their imagination (*Vicarious experience*. See section 4.6.2.4).

I realised that educators mostly complain about the fact the learners cannot use their knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives. Deconstructing this idea, I have realised that most educators are only concerned about the fact that the learners must be able to use the knowledge that they receive through formal education in an inter-curricular way. I now wonder how many times the educators forget that the learners might have knowledge which was created through life experience which is the perfect answer to some questions. The fact that so much emphasis is placed on the importance of knowledge that was gained from formal education may create a situation as explained by this learner. The learners might

think that their own experiences in life cannot be seen as valid or important enough to act as a starting point in their formal learning process.

Looking at the personal attributes of the learners who are more confident in using their own life experiences and comparing it to those of the learners who are less confident, it became quite clear that the learners who are living in a better socio-economic environment, have more confidence and a more positive self-concept. Because of this, they see their lives as important enough to use their own life experiences as a point of departure for their formal educational development.

During the role-play sessions, I have observed something which I at first didn't deem as being important for this study and it nearly went by unmentioned. While reflecting on a role-play session I've realised the link between a lack of creativity and the situation which I have observed.

My observation was the fact that the dialogue of the learners who took part in the role-play sessions wasn't in the present tense and it wasn't done in a direct conversational manner. The learners used a narrative conversational style by using the past tense. The learners also didn't act what they were saying. They stood still at one place and had the discussion in a narrative style. An example of this is: in stead of the learner acting as if he/she comes around a corner and then unexpectedly bumps into the other person, the learner would say to the other person while standing dead still, ".... and then I came around the corner and bumped into you".

The first time that it happened, my thoughts went back to twenty five years ago, the time of my children's childhood. I noticed the same behaviour when my children were young. At that stage, I wasn't involved in the educational environment and purely on instinct, I wanted to correct this deviation from what I deem to be the correct way for children to play. I played with them by acting the situation without the narrative commentating. As soon as they started their narrations, e.g. "... and then I kicked the ball", I just said, "No, you didn't, you are still standing in the same place and the ball is still lying in the same place". Then, without me saying anything more, he kicked the ball. This reaction of mine created great frustration for them but I persevered until they started to play in an acting way without the narrations.

After my realisation that this phenomenon is still prevalent in the behaviour of the learners who are nearly the same age as my children, I've started to observe my grandchildren while they are playing. They use the same narrative way of playing.

I wanted to know what the reason for this is, and I didn't have to spend a lot of time watching my grandchildren at play, before I've realised that they reproduce (I can't call it act) what they have seen before. In one instance, it was something that they had seen on television the night before and another was a reproduction of one of my acts that was part of our 'concert' when I had played with them the day before. Technology became a part of the children's lives, many of the toys are merely switched on, and the child is amused by watching the toy's actions while the child stays passively at one place.

This made me to realise that the children become mere passive observers of what is happening around them and they don't create the actions themselves anymore. This habit goes on into their adulthood and I believe that this creates the situation where they also sit passively in class and just want to observe what is happening around them. The fact that all of them sits and wait for someone else to do something, creates the situation where there is no class participation by any of the learners.

When discussing my observation with my son, he highlighted something quite interesting. He said that I must note that when they say something that you "have done", it is sometimes actually a command that they are giving to you. This can be explained by the following example: when the dog passes by where they are playing, the one child would say, "... and then you scratched the dog's head" but he/she actually wants to say to the other child "scratch the dog's head!".

When reflecting on this viewpoint, I've realised that the child actually verbalised what he/she has visualised in his/her imagination and this served as a confirmation that children depend a lot on vision and therefore, observation. This knowledge provided an explanation for why the learners can't think innovatively. They have never learned the skill of creating their own stories, they just reproduce what they have seen others doing.

This was the main reason why I have started a drama society on campus. We don't use scripts of authors but the learners create their own scripts while they are playing the parts. All the sessions are based on improvisation. The title of the play is given by one of the actors and the story then unfolds on stage.

To bring this action into class, one of the creativity activities which I've used in class was the game where the first person writes down one sentence, the paper is sent down the row and each person in class must add a sentence to follow the previous one in order to create a proper storyline. Once the learners were used to this action, I took it to a higher level.

The learners of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management usually have to answer questions based on a case study. In other words, they have to deconstruct the storyline to be able to match the information with the questions asked. To develop the learners' creativeness, I've changed this process around. I've given them the questions that were asked, based on a case study, and they had to create a storyline for the case study. This storyline had to provide enough information for someone else to be able to answer all the questions up to the level as it would be expected in an examination. This then meant that the learners had to deconstruct the questions and then construct a story which provides practical examples that can be used in the answers to the questions.

Only the learners with strongly developed language and/or conceptualising skills could do these tasks on their own. When I gave this task as a group project in class, I observed the learners' actions and the same learners, who could do the task on their own, were the ones who took the lead in the group discussions.

To eliminate the language barrier, I told the learners that they may use their own language to create the story and one of their peers may then translate the story into English. Only two of the nineteen learners who couldn't do this task on their own, succeeded when they could use their own language. This created a clear indication that in this instance it is not mainly a language barrier which prevents the learners to create the story, but that it is actually either a lack of insight or a lack of creativity.

I then gave the learners who couldn't do this task, a story consisting of about ten lines, regarding a very basic topic and they had to create a title for this story. The storyline was about a cat that found his owner's chicken sandwich on the kitchen table and the cat dropped the sandwich on the floor and ate half of it as the dog ate the other half. The owner found the dog eating his part of the sandwich and the dog got the hiding, without the owner thinking of how the dog could reach the sandwich on the table. The cat was lying in the sun watching this, as if he wasn't part of the crime and the dog had to unfairly carry all the blame.

The most basic titles that I have received were: "The cat", "The dog", "The cat and the dog", and "The naughty cat". The more creative titles were: "So what about the cat?" and "Eich cat, that's unfair".

Only two of the learners deconstructed the plot of this story in order to find that which wasn't said but was meant, in other words, to find the message of the story. These learners created the titles "Never trust any partner in crime" and "Don't just do as others do".

I was quite surprised when I noticed the irony in the last title. The purpose of this whole action was to try and get the learners to create something new and not to just reproduce the actions of others that they have seen. This learner implied this same idea with his title, but he still followed his old ways as he used a well-known phrase instead of creating something excitingly new. I've explained this irony to him and he was quite amused by this. He then decided that he will immediately start to change his ways and changed his title to "*Me doing the same as you? No way!*" and he asked me to help him in the same way that I have helped Perseverance to overcome her barriers. This incident happened at the end of the data collection period of this project and therefore no feedback can be given on the outcome of the deconstruction process that would be used by this learner.

This last action provided proof of the fact that the learners have a very low level of creativeness when language is concerned and that the development of creative skills is a long process.

#### **4.6.2.4 Low self- efficacy**

The term self-efficacy will be used in this section rather than the term self-concept. The thesaurus function of Microsoft Office Word® provides the synonyms effectiveness, efficiency, usefulness, worth and value for the word efficacy. The learners only displayed signs of feeling worthless to their environment because of different reasons such as their inability to speak English and the fact that they are used for the less important tasks in their living environments. Not one of them ever referred to other ideas such as their physical appearance which is usually linked to a low self-concept. They also behaved completely differently when they were speaking in their own language and while they were communicating and socialising with their peers outside the classroom. Even when we've played games as part of teambuilding exercises, not one of them withdrew themselves and didn't want to take part. According to my understanding, the idea of a low self-concept is usually linked to behaviour such as shyness that is consistent in all situations. Only one learner displayed consistent social behaviour problems but the reason for this behaviour was identified by her mother (section 4.6.2.2 (a)).

O'Donnell, et al. (2007:144) refer to Bandura (1983; 1988) when saying that low self-efficacy is the root cause of anxiety. Most of the learners usually show signs of anxiety (shivering hands, a dry mouth, stuttering, constantly moving their weight from one leg to the other) when they have to speak in class. O'Donnell, et al. (ibid.) indicate that learners use four sources to appraise their sense of self-efficacy, namely:

- *Personal behaviour history*, where the learners remember previous experiences in their own lives that can be related to the current situation;
- *Vicarious experience*, where the learners see that their peers can do something and then they believe they can also do the same thing;
- *Verbal persuasion* can be used where the educator and the peers can tell the learner that he/she can do the task at hand, and
- *Physiological states*, which involve that the learner reflect on how he/she felt while speaking in class. If they experience it as a terrible event, they may not want to try again, but if they found it not to be as hard as what they have expected it to be, they are willing to speak again.

Slavin (1991: 90 – 91) discusses the changes in adolescents as they move from one level of schooling to another. He indicates that the move from the less structured

primary levels to the more structured higher levels can cause insecurity in the learners.

Looking at this, one can deduct that the changes that are experienced by the learners in FET colleges, can also have an influence on their personalities. In this instance, it is a move away from the highly structured environment of the high school to the less structured FET college environment. In high schools the learners are in the classes the whole day without any free periods, they have to ask permission from the principle to leave the school grounds before the end of the school day and they are wearing a school uniform. The teachers closely monitor the submission of assignments and the learners are 'forced' to do the work. If the work is not done, the learners are punished by e.g. having to do the work during break times. In the FET colleges, the learners do not attend classes in all the periods and are free to even leave campus without prior permission during their free periods. Neither do the learners wear a school uniform. The submission of assignments is left to the responsibility of the learners. The lecturers will only remind them about it, and the only punishment for non-submission is to receive a zero mark.

Slavin (ibid) also refers to the influences that the changes in the expected roles and peer relationships have on the behaviour of the adolescent. This can also be related to the learners in the FET institutions. The learners in the institution where I am employed mostly come from Limpopo Province and are living in rented rooms in the local township. In some instances, they share a commune with working adults who have no respect for the duties and circumstances of a student. As the learners are the youngest in the house they are treated like children and are often bossed around to do the general house chores, without consideration of the amount of homework they have to do. These learners have no one to go back to at night and discuss things that they experience as overwhelming and threatening. They are expected to immediately take up the role of an adult and it is expected of them to sort out their own lives and problems. Their peers at home are of all ages, gender and cultures.

Most of the learners spontaneously complained that they are not even allowed to express their feelings if they feel exploited in their homes (if you can call it 'home'). This can create a feeling of worthlessness and the learners become shy as they are

always belittled by the other occupants of the commune. I found this to be more often the case with the female learners.

It became evident that the traditional African view of the role of the woman has a big influence on the behaviour of the female learners. The women are seen as the inferior members of the family and therefore they are not allowed to voice their opinions, and they are responsible for the work inside the house. Some of the older generation people can't see the need for a woman to study and improve herself. The males are seen as the most important and privileged party with inborn sagacity and therefore the male learners do not suffer as much from their living conditions. Dambudzo (2005: 146) quotes a female learner who said that society created an inferiority complex for female learners as it is generally accepted that females can't attain the same results as males. He also states that the lack of female role models in a way confirms this viewpoint held by society. Although Dambudzo refers to the achievement in science subjects, I found that this viewpoint fits in with the general social view held by society regarding the importance of females. During class discussions the majority of male learners agreed on the fact that the females are there for the enjoyment of the male and to serve the male in his everyday needs, e.g. cooking and cleaning. One of the male learners said that he wants a "*stupid*" wife "*because then she will not know more things than what [he] know[s].*"

During one of these spontaneous discussions one of the female learners said that she never speaks at home and she always stays in her room, as she is one of two women in a commune where ten people are living. Her room-mate is a working female who is 28 years of age and she grew up in the township where they are living at the moment and therefore this woman is used to the way of living in the townships. As she is much younger than her room-mate, they don't share the same interests and she finds it hard to create a friendly relationship with her. The other woman has invited her to go out with her, but she doesn't have enough money to accompany her and she also feels uncomfortable at the places that the room-mate visits on her evenings out. This discussion made it clear that the learners also experience the change between the rural environment and the city life as a traumatic experience. Any traumatic experience creates a sense of insecurity which in turn can increase the level of shyness of a person. Dambudzo (2005: 110) also found that the rural learners have a more negative self-concept than what the urban learners have.

As mentioned in section 4.6.2.2 (a), one of the reasons why learners do not take part during class discussions is the fact that they are too shy to speak English in front of others. This in turn has a negative effect on the way they see themselves. I felt that I had to find a way to overcome this barrier.

The following attempt to get the learners to speak in class was created after deconstructing and analysing the reaction of many people when they find that somebody is watching them when they do something. When children are playing or when someone is busy working and they find that someone is watching, they usually stop their action with the words “don’t look at me” or “I can’t do it while you are watching me” or they simply stop doing what they were busy with and they just smile, looking very embarrassed. This reaction of people in general was the reason for the birth of Mopani. A Mopani worm is a well-known caterpillar specie found in the Limpopo area, were most of the learners originally come from.

Mopani was created by using a sock which was pulled over my hand and buttons were sewn onto the sock to act as eyes. I opened the door of the cupboard in the classroom and I stood behind the door. Mopani was peeping around the door, introducing himself in a strange voice to the class. At first, there was dead silence. When Mopani became very sad, asking the learners why they don’t want to talk to him, the first reaction was laughter. A learner, who isn’t shy at all, playfully started having a conversation with Mopani. At first, it was a very relaxed conversation but Mopani slowly changed the subject to be curriculum related.

Lebo<sup>5</sup> asked the class what they thought the answers to Mopani’s questions were. They answered her in their own language and then she translated it in order for Mopani to understand what was said. Mopani complained that he also wanted to hear what they say when they answer and that they should speak English, as tuition in English is also the language policy of the college. He said that he wasn’t fluent in English himself and that the learners should help him to correct his language errors.

Mopani had to speak through Lebo for about three days, making minor language errors. Only one of the learners realised that Mopani was making language mistakes

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<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym for the learner who had the conversation with the hand puppet called Mopani.

and corrected his language. I asked Lebo to act as if she had a throat infection and that she had lost her voice. When the learners came into class the next day, the general administration was completed and when Mopani came from behind the cupboard, there was dead silence. He kept on asking why nobody wanted to speak to him and Lebo tried her best to whisper to him that she wanted to speak to him but that she didn't have a voice due to her throat infection. Unfortunately, Mopani had a hearing disability, and couldn't hear her and became very sad that his friends didn't want to speak to him on that day.

All of a sudden, a learner who is suffering from serious visual imparity and who never speaks in class started talking to Mopani in a clear voice. This was a wonderful surprise. I spontaneously developed Mopani's disability and never expected that it would have created rapport with a learner who suffers a disability. Once this learner started to talk to Mopani, the whole class joined in (*Vicarious experience*). Mopani had the best time of his life with so many people to talk to and he asked the learners to visit him again the next day as he really enjoyed their company.

On day five I decided to test their openness towards Mopani and I used one of the words that we have declared as a swear word (see 4.6.2.2 (b)) to see whether they just enjoy the game with the puppet or whether its presence is really contributing to their learning process. I used the word quality without stating the standard (good or bad) and three learners, nearly at the same time, started telling Mopani that he used a 'swear' word and that he should sing the national anthem on his own, the regular punishment that was created by the learners for using the 'swear' word.

Some of the learners still didn't want to take part in the class discussions. I had invited them to act as Mopani but I was calmly told that they can't talk like him. I had to make a plan and invited Mopani's cousin from Limpopo, named Popo, to come and stay with him. Popo, another sock puppet, turned up in class the next day. I wanted the female learners to also take part in the conversations and therefore Popo brought his niece Dusty with when coming to live with Mopani. Dusty was created by using an old duster which was also decorated with buttons and a few embroidery stitches and beads.

I gave the learners the opportunity to prepare curriculum based dialogue and they could choose when they want to be Popo and Dusty. Keeping the principles of O'Donnell, et al. (2007:144) in mind, I let the learners prepare just a small part for the first time that he/she had to speak in order to ensure a *positive behaviour history*. If the learner is applauded by the educator and peers, the learner will find the next time that he/she has to speak, much easier. The fact that I also allowed the learners to prepare beforehand, helped to prevent a negative *physiological state*. It is a known fact that a prepared speaker is a more confident and relaxed speaker.

I experienced another exciting surprise when some of the learners brought their own puppets to take part in the discussions. Some were just hand-drawn faces on a paper plate which was stuck on a kebab skewer.

Lebo was excellent in helping me to get the learners to be involved. Without my knowledge, she asked a few of the learners who were the shyest ones in class, to be a part of her group. These learners, with their paper plate puppets, just had to reply with a "Yes", "No", "Is that a fact?" or "I never knew that!" as well as other minor answers.

To save time, and at the same time to prove that one doesn't need to spend a lot of money to create successful learning media, the lecturer's table acted as a puppet theatre. The learners sat on the floor behind the table on a blanket and the puppets appeared from behind the table.

Some learners didn't want to be part of the puppet show at all, but they were willing to ask the puppets some questions. In one case, the learner didn't want to speak in my presence at all. When I disappeared behind the cupboard door and Mopani spoke to the learners or to the other puppets, she wholeheartedly took part in the discussion. When Lebo asked her why she did that, as I am Mopani, she said that she is too shy to speak English when a white person is looking at her. When she spoke to Mopani, I was not looking at her as I was behind the cupboard door.

The puppets were used for about three weeks. The next week Mopani brought the news that he was going to start his own business in another town and that he and his friends would only come to visit the class on a Friday. The news created a big

disappointment but Mopani told the learners that if they were able to speak through him and his friends without making too many mistakes, he is convinced that they will be able to cope without him (*Verbal persuasion*).

The learners still had to prepare parts of the curriculum in dialogue form but they were allowed to use the puppets only on a Friday. Most of the learners were now more willing to take part in the class discussions, but three of the learners still didn't want to speak without using the puppets. When I asked them what the reason for this was, one learner said that she still didn't like it when people were looking at her and when she spoke the whole class was looking at her. If she used the puppet, they looked at the puppet and not at her.

I arranged for these three learners to visit the educational psychologist on campus to see if she could identify ways in which I could help them to remove the hindrances to their learning process and the development of a positive self-efficacy. Unfortunately, they didn't want to consult her, as they didn't experience their passiveness in class as a barrier towards learning and the development towards one's full potential. No matter what I tried, I couldn't convince them and I had to make peace with the situation by remembering the proverb "You can take a horse to the water but you can't make it to drink".

#### **4.6.2.5 Self motivation and self-efficacy – the winning pair**

The discussion above clearly indicated that the reason for these learners not to participate was mainly a low self-efficacy as a result of poor language skills on the one hand and the influences of their living conditions and traditional beliefs on the other. Although these learners had a low self-efficacy it was clear that they were still motivated and dedicated as they attended class regularly and always handed their assignments in on time. However, I also found that the learners' self-concept can have an influence on their motivation levels and vice versa.

Steve started attending this campus of the college at the beginning of the research period of this project. He previously attended another campus of the same college and failed his course on N5 level. The first time that Steve entered the classroom, he drew a lot of attention and comments, as he is a very attractive young man. The reaction of the female learners made it obviously clear that they agreed on this point.

He was fluent in English and didn't have a problem in communicating with me at all. During the learning sessions he provided creative but still relevant answers to my questions. At first, I couldn't understand why such a gifted learner would fail his course. I didn't want to ask him what he thought the reason for this was, as I didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable, seeing that he was still new on campus and he didn't know any of the other learners and still had to create a new circle of friends.

After the first two weeks, I started realising that Steve's motivation level is very low. He came late for class everyday and was absent at least twice a week. He never handed his assignments in on time and sometimes didn't hand them in at all. He was absent or late for class even on the days on which the learners wrote continuous assessment tests. This behaviour could then clearly be linked with the fact that he has failed his course during the previous semester. I wanted to find a way in which I could increase Steve's motivation levels.

I had a short informal discussion with him and he told me that the family experiences problems at home and that he sometimes feels that he doesn't have the energy to get up in the morning and to face the day. At first I thought that his problem was, like most of the other learners' problem, a poor financial situation. However, he informed me that although they struggle to live just above the breadline, his problem was related to the behaviour of some of the family members.

Steve needed to deconstruct his own life story in order to try and make sense of it and to determine the way forward. Morgan (2000) explains the use of narrative therapy. She states that humans live their lives through stories and one can change your life by focusing on a different, more positive part of your life story. Through the different chapters of the book she explains how one can learn to identify the positive aspects and focus on these positive aspects in your life.

I didn't explain the process of narrative therapy to Steve, as I was afraid that he would then manipulate his stories to make them look good. I told him that I am not a qualified psychologist but that I would like to try and help him to solve his problem. He accepted my offer with the condition that he had the right to decide what he wanted to share with me and what he wanted to keep a secret.

I asked Steve to write his story as if he was telling the story of someone else's life. After a week he told me that it was completed but he didn't want me to read it. I then explained to him how to analyse what he had written. I told him to indicate which parts of the story he felt happy (positive) about and he must highlight that in a colour that he likes. He should also identify the parts of the story which he experienced as negative and he must highlight that in a colour which he doesn't like. He immediately related this action to the identification of strengths and weaknesses as part of the SWOT-analysis and that then was a sign that he already has the skill to use his knowledge holistically.

Once he had completed the process of identifying the positive and negative events, I asked him to write down every negative event and he had to identify the time when these events took place and if possible, he had to indicate what started this event. He also had to try and verbalise the feelings that it created within him. The same had to be done with the positive events.

By now he started trusting me as I had not tried to find out what his story was, and I was just guiding him through the process of self-discovery. When I asked him to try and identify ways in which he could handle the negative situations differently, he allowed me to read his story and asked me what I thought his biggest problem was. He said that he had identified something in his story that creates a very confused feeling in his mind. He said that he felt like a failure because he loved his little sister dearly and he felt guilty, as he couldn't improve the conditions in which she was growing up. I was very glad to see that he had identified his biggest problem himself when he said that he felt that it was not his responsibility as a child in the home to worry about the conditions in which they grew up. He said that it was his parents' responsibility and now he was carrying the blame himself.

Steve then had to rewrite his story by telling it as he wished it to be. I told him to remember that not all negative things are useless as we learn from our mistakes and that nobody has a perfect life. Everybody make some mistakes in their lives.

I was quite amazed when he came back with the new story and without telling him what the next step would be, he had already identified what he had to do to change his life in order to fulfill his own storyline. He said that he had realised that he should

start by setting goals for himself that he could at least experience the positive feelings when he achieved his goals. He also realised that by not completing his course because he kept on failing, he was actually prolonging his own time of suffering as he had to stay in the house as long as he was studying. The sooner he could finish his studies, the sooner he could get a job and then perhaps he might even afford it to take his sister to live with him and that will also take her out of the negative atmosphere.

The habit of beginning with the end in mind (Covey, 2004: 95 – 145) forms part of the learning content of the subject Entrepreneurship and Business Management N5. I believe that it was planned by a higher power that Steve had to come to his conclusion of how to solve his problem on the same day that I was planning to start discussing this part of the work in class.

The learners had to compile their own mission statement and they also had to set short-, medium- and long term goals for themselves. The first goal that Steve set for himself was to pass the next test as he had failed the previous test because he didn't study. I told him that it would be easier to pass the tests if he attends the classes. As if I meant it to be just a second thought, I also said "and then you at least don't have to suffer the circumstances at home the whole day". He looked at me for a few seconds and then he said, "So why didn't I think of that?"

From that day onwards, Steve was never late or absent, right up to the last day of his course on N6 level. Where he previously had received letters of warning for his high absenteeism rate, he now received a certificate for a hundred percent attendance. When I commented on this he said that he had realised a few things while rewriting his own life story. He said the most important was: don't make the responsibilities of others your own, set goals for yourself as that creates purpose in your life, and that things don't change by themselves, you have to make them to change by changing your own attitude and actions.

This was one of the most wonderful experiences that I had with a learner. I had started the deconstruction process by forcing him to critically look at his own life and he then, without any further prompting, started his own dialectic process until he could find his own solution for his problem. He later told me that he had realised that

I was actually teaching him all seven of the habits as discussed by Covey (2004). As he was repeating the course, he recognised the elements of what he had done the previous semester and then he used that information to complete his deconstruction and reconstruction process. The best words that I could ever have heard were, *“Ma’am, you told me that one has to have a purpose and goal in life. You must know why you have to do something as that motivates you to go beyond the ordinary. Only if you can look back and see your successes you don’t feel worthless and you start believing in yourself. It feels great to be a winner!”*

Two months after he had completed his course my joy reached even higher levels. I walked into a large well-known retail outlet, known for high quality and good customer service, and there was Steve, serving the customers with dedication and self-confidence. He wasn’t living at home anymore but still couldn’t afford to let his sister live with him. He said that he was trying to help her by teaching her the skill of finding your purpose in life and finding ways to motivate yourself in order to reach your goals. With a big smile he said, *“... and you know what Ma’am, I have never been late since I started working here!”*

Steve reminded me of my purpose in life as an educator and the responsibilities that lie in this career. He has passed his exam and he uses the knowledge that he obtained, holistically in his life. He experienced *“learning that lasts”* and not only *“learning to pass”*.

If I reflect on the time and experiences which I shared with Steve and my other learners who experienced success after our interaction in the learning sessions, one thing stands out clearly above all other aspects which were part of the success of my practice. The closeness which I experience with my learners allowed me to enter deeper in their worlds than what is usually experienced between a learner and an educator. This forced me to include the next part regarding my experiences which created my special bond with the learners.

#### **4.6.2.6 THE PSYCHIC CLOSENESS/DISTANCE BETWEEN THE LEARNERS AND THE LECTURER**

Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992:216) indicated that many educators experience a problem determining the correct closeness/distance that should be maintained between the teacher and the learner. I experienced the same problem as a junior lecturer in the college environment.

At the time of my appointment as a lecturer at the college, it wasn't necessary to have received formal educator's training and education. Specialised subject knowledge and many years of practical experience in industry allowed you entrance as a lecturer at a college. That has since changed and all lecturers must have received formal educator and trainer education. Seeing that I entered the educational environment as a lecturer only ten years ago, without receiving official training to become an educator, I had to rely on colleagues to inform me about what "the rules" are that should be followed by educators.

By nature, I like to receive different viewpoints and then create my own belief after critically reflecting on the different viewpoints at hand. One thing that all my colleagues agreed upon was the fact that an educator should keep his/her personal life a secret to the learners. They felt so strongly about this that it was decided on a meeting that the corporate nametags that we wear should not display your name but only your initials and surname. This was quite 'unnatural' to me. When I asked them why your name shouldn't appear on the nametags I was informed, with eyebrows raised because of the fact that I didn't know the reason, that the learners shouldn't know your name because it can create a familiarity with you.

All my working life has been in small organisations where the staff members became as part of your family and therefore a very close relationship always developed between the staff members. Everybody shared everybody's heartaches and good news. The employees were from all age- and cultural groups. Even young people who had just left school for the first time were part of the team and therefore some of my previous colleagues and the learners in my classes had the same attributes. In my working environment, there were never any instances where respect became an issue. Everybody respected each other according to the rules that were laid down during your upbringing concerning respect for others, for example according to your age or the authority vested in you through your position in the organisation. For this reason, I couldn't understand why problems should develop in the classroom

situation. The biggest organisation where I was employed had thirty six members at the branch where I worked. This was the average number of learners that I had in my classes and therefore it felt strange to me not to form a 'family' relationship with my learners.

I tried to follow the rule of keeping a distance, seeing that all my colleagues agreed on this, but I felt very uncomfortable with the situation. I had to concentrate so hard not to have a slip of the tongue and tell the learners something personal about my life, that I sometimes felt as if I couldn't be relaxed and just concentrate on what I was suppose to do, namely teaching.

During a learning session concerning the habit of 'seeing the other point of view', one of the seven habits for effective management (Smit 1999(a):34), the learners had to provide an explanation of what they think this habit entails. One of the learners gave a perfect explanation of this habit and also added that many of our problems in relationships are that we do not know enough of the reasons for people's actions, but we are fast to criticize. On my question if anyone can provide an example to explain the main ideas of this habit one of the learners answered that the lecturers do not accept the reasons that the learners provide if they didn't do their homework or arrived late for class.

Another learner reacted on this by saying that the lecturers' attitude towards the learners' problems is the main reason why they don't want to communicate freely with the lecturers. He explained that the learners rather take the punishment for not doing their homework (most of the times this punishment is a zero mark added to their year mark for that specific project), than trying to explain something to the lecturer which the lecturer will not accept anyway and that will just break down the self-esteem of the learner. He said it seems that the lecturers live in a world of their own, are far apart from the learners, and know nothing of their situations, but the lecturers don't want to see the learners' point of view. He felt that the lecturers always gave the impression that they had never made mistakes in their lives and that they were perfect, even that their children were perfect, and therefore they (the learners) felt that they were judged negatively because they were not as clever as the lecturers or their children. This reminded me of the words of Gravett (2001: 21),

who when discussing constructivist learning stated that, "*individuals should feel free to explore ideas, ask questions, critically discuss ideas, and make mistakes*".

Another learner reacted on this comment by saying that "the lecturers also never talk to the learners as human beings but only as learners in the class that must just pass to make the lecturer look good and not to help the learner to improve his/her own lifestyle." He said that they felt that the lecturers didn't make any effort to become part of their world and to understand their way of living, but the lecturers wanted the learners to become part of the lecturer's world without asking any questions.

When I asked if they could think of a way to solve this problem, one learner said that the lecturers should sometimes tell something about themselves. The whole class clearly showed that they agree with this statement. On the question of what they would like to know about the lecturers, a few of the reactions were: "We want to know about things that the lecturers have done that they regret and how they would have done it differently if they had a chance", "Where and under which circumstances did you grow up Ma'am?", "Things that the lecturers' children do wrong", "eich Ma'am ... anything that shows us that the lecturers are also just human and not perfect, Ma'am"

After trying to keep up with keeping the psychic distance for about six months, I couldn't handle the unnatural feeling anymore and this was now the perfect reason for me to become more open to my learners. I decided to relax, to be open, but still be very selective with what I would share with them. Through that, I was trying to follow the so-called golden midway. The information that I had shared with the learners were basic things about my life e.g. where I worked before and I sometimes used examples from my experience in the different business where I have worked in order to explain the topic under discussion in the learning session. I've assessed the situation on a daily basis to see whether the learners showed any disrespect or became too familiar with me as my colleagues predicted that would happen.

In the beginning, I couldn't notice a big difference. The learners started to ask me questions such as my rating of my weekend and what my plans for the holidays were. The learners had never asked me these questions before. As time went by my relationship with my learners became more relaxed and I have since shared more

information about myself with them. I have never provided any information which they didn't ask for. I have just answered their questions when they asked me something about my life e.g. whether I have children, where I grew up and went to school and the date on which I celebrate my birthday. I could never find any indication that they were losing their respect for me or becoming too familiar with me up to the extent that disciplinary problems could have started to appear.

Reading the content of the interview of Eskell-Blokland with a respondent called Cabangile, as discussed in chapter 2, reminded me of this conversation that I had with my learners. Reflecting on the conversation that I had with my class and on the content of the Eskell-Blokland interview with Cabangile, I felt assured that I had taken the correct decision at that stage to open up to my learners. Up to now, ten years later, I have never experienced any behavioural problems with my learners. The negative predictions of my colleagues never realised.

Since the end of my first year as lecturer, I have had a very open relationship with my learners and I do share the things that they have mentioned in the conversation described above. I do not sit down and tell them my whole story at once, but I sometimes use fractions of my life to illustrate something that can be seen as a very good example for the part of the curriculum that is under discussion. This also fits in with the cultural habits of my black African learners. A part of African culture entails that the elderly tell stories from real life to the young in order for them to use the content of the stories as a base for decision-making in their lives. Many of my colleagues still regularly criticise me for this, as they still believe that the lecturers' personal life ought to stay confidential.

I found that one golden rule that should be followed carefully in this situation is the fact that the lecturer must be very cautious not to make use of yourself as an example too many times, as it can create an idea of you being self-centered and egocentric. As the semester goes by and the learners start feeling more comfortable in communicating with you, they do start asking questions about your life and it is up to you to decide how much you want them to know.

However, although it is up to you to decide how much you want them to know, I firmly believe that you should answer their questions honestly at all times. The

reason why I have decided to have this honest relationship with my learners was created by an incident that would be seen as uncomfortable by many people. We are living in a small world and there is a good reason for the saying that your name travels ahead of you. We usually live and work in the same community and therefore there is a very high possibility that people, who you don't know, know something about you. Five years ago, one of my learners asked me something that any mother would rather like to deny and on that day, I decided to be honest and to tell the truth. That was the best decision that I ever made in class.

We were discussing the remedial action that should be taken by an employer when one of the employees is found to be under the influence of a harmful substance. The learners started asking questions which caused the discussion to develop into a broader discussion including the use of drugs and alcohol by teenagers. One of the learners asked me: "Ma'am ... did any of your children ever use drugs or have too much alcohol to drink and were drunk when they arrived home after a night out?"

I felt as if he threw a bomb at me and I had to decide whether I would catch it and stand a chance to explode with it in my hands, or whether I would drop it and anyway still stand the chance of dying in the explosion. I took a deep breath and sent an instant prayer to the Lord that he must now speak through my mouth, as I didn't know what would be the correct thing to do in a class situation. When I started talking, I heard myself saying in a calm voice: "Unfortunately I have to admit that I had such an experience with one of my sons." The most intense silence that I have ever experienced in class followed until the same learner just asked: "And...?"

I continued by saying that I condemn what my son was doing, but although I hated the act of him using drugs, I still love my son and therefore we had to find a solution for his drug problem. The learner stood up and said to the other learners: "This is evidence that we can believe everything that Ma'am ever tells us." He turned to me and said: "Ma'am, I was in the same class as your son at school and we were together on the evening when you found out about his bad habit. It was me that was with him when those people dropped him off at home. And I am glad to say Ma'am, like your son, I haven't touched those things again."

For once in my life I was very relieved that I have this openness with my learners. If you are caught out telling a lie, you will have a problem regaining the confidence and trust of the learners. Mutual trust is one of the main elements needed between a learner and an educator and therefore it is important that nothing breaks down this trust in the relationship. "*Mutual understanding and trust inevitably leads to mutual respect.*" (Steyn, 2003:63) The closeness that I have experienced with my learners during that semester was something special. At the end of the semester, some learners called me "Mom" and I wasn't called "Ma'am" anymore.

A week after this incident I extended an invitation to the learners that they must feel free to communicate with me if they have a problem that they need to solve. I had explained to them that I am not a psychologist but that I will help them to make an appointment with the psychologist on campus and I promised to provide the moral support that is needed as if they were my own children. Two learners made use of this invitation. After reading Eskell-Blokland's writings, I now realise that my actions on that day in class were "*creating family*" for my learners.

I believe that the fact that the learners were the same age as what my children were, contributed to the fact that I didn't experience a situation of the learners becoming too familiar with me and through that lose their respect for me. Discipline was maintained as I allowed them freedom up to a certain point, but it was very clear to them where I would 'draw the line'. In many cultures and religions, respect for your parents is a very important philosophy. One of my black African colleagues told me that I should know that the fact that they called me "Mom" displays respect of the highest level as in most of the black cultures respect for your mother is seen as part of the most important aspects of life.

Another finding regarding the factors that can influence the closeness with one's learners was quite unexpected. Without any special intent, I bought myself an African designed skirt. On the first day that I wore it to work, the learners all reacted with amazement. Even the learners who never/hardly ever take part in the verbal communication in class, showed a positive reaction by just using a simple "Hhmmff" of which the tone clearly indicated acceptance and approval. At that stage I didn't relate it to the fact that the learners experienced it as a sign of my willingness to

become 'one of them'. It is also natural for the learners who are more open to react when one wears something new for the first time.

Completely coincidental, the second time that I wore the skirt was on the day that ethics and morality was the topic of the learning session. Usually the learners are careful in expressing themselves regarding the ethical stance that should be adhered to in a business environment. When the sincerity of managers towards the staff members of an organisation was discussed, the most common view was that the managing staff members of an organisation only act as if they care about the employees just to get the workers to do their best in order for the organisation to make more profit for the owners. I asked the learners to provide an example of how managers can display the truthfulness of their actions in order to create closeness between themselves and the workers. One of the learners immediately reacted by saying: "*Look at you Ma'am, you even started to wear our clothes. You don't just say you are one of us, you even dress like one of us. Like you always say – practice what you preach*".

Coincidence appeared again when at that specific time period, the SABC broadcasted the screenplay "*Dangerous minds*" (Bass, 1995) which is based on the book "*My Posse Don't Do Homework*" by Louanne Johnson, a public school teacher who has written books about her experiences as a teacher. It displays a situation where Johnson dressed in jeans, t-shirt and jacket, similar to those that her learners were wearing, in order to receive their acceptance of her. The storyline indicates that she drew the attention of the learners and that they communicated more openly with her when she wore 'their' clothes.

The reaction to the African designed skirt was different from other new outfits, in the sense that every time that I've worn the skirt the learners acknowledged it, although it wasn't new anymore. Sometimes it was just lifted eyebrows, a 'hhmmff' or just a pull of the corners of the mouth, of which all signalled approval. The first time that I realised how important this skirt is to them was the day before they would have had a debate in the Labour Relations N5 (another subject in their course) class. The two opposing sides both asked me to wear my skirt as that will give them the strength to win the debate. The one learner explained that "*a debate is like politics. The more voters you have on your side the more successful you are and when you wear your*

*skirt, without you saying it, we know you are on our side*". When I asked them why the skirt is as important, as my personality stays the same, whether I wear the skirt or not, one learner jokingly replied in a ghostly voice: "*Perhaps it has ancestral powers*" and all the learners started laughing.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

The main factors that were identified as being the reasons for the learners not to participate during learning sessions and therefore create the situation, and in some instances the impression, that they can't use their knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives, are language inefficiency, an inability to use their imagination and a low self-esteem. It was also found that the psychic distance between the lecturer and the learner could also have an influence on the learners' level of participation during learning sessions. In all instances, deconstructive processes were used to help the learners to overcome the barriers in their leaning process.

In this chapter a rich, narrative reporting style was used in order for the reader to understand the context in which each of the situations took place. The use of verbatim reporting furthermore allowed the reader to be part of the discussions and it will also assist the reader in evaluating the conclusions and recommendations that will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter one an introduction to the research project, providing background information regarding the context in which the research would be conducted, was presented. The rationale and time span of the project were also discussed. The objectives of the project were stipulated as follows:

This research project was conducted in order to enable me, as an educator, to:

- Identify the reasons why the learners do not acquire the ability to use existing skills and knowledge (referred to as their existing frame of reference) across the curriculum, which in turn prevent them to be able to identify similarities in problem situations across the curriculum.
- Identify methods that can be used to develop the conceptualising, reflective, and critical thinking skills of the learners.
- Experiment with different facilitating actions and methods in order to identify the most effective actions and methods that can be used by the educator, to motivate and lead the learners through the learning process of using their existing frame of reference across the curriculum, as well as holistically in their lives.
- Assess the actions and methods in my own practice to determine which of my actions are hindering and which are stimulating the learning process.

In chapter two, the literature study was discussed and the chapter was divided into two sections. Part one provided an overview regarding the points of departure of this study namely, the metaphor 'thinking in boxes', hermeneutics, deconstruction, and constructivism. This part of the chapter also included discussions about my own conclusions and perceptions regarding the process of deconstruction and the relation thereof with constructivism and reconstruction. The second part contained a discussion of fields of study that were identified during the research process. This discussion included the psychic closeness/distance that exists between an educator and the learner, creativity and imagination.

Chapter three presented an overview of and the rationale for the methodology used in this project.

Chapter four invited the reader to place him/herself in the shoes of the participants and to travel the road of *learning to learn* with them. A rich narrative reporting style was used for this mainly qualitative study, in order to provide as much contextual information as possible. This style was also used to allow the reader to feel the closeness, trust and openness which existed between all the participants of this project.

Only a limited amount of quantitative data was presented. This was based on the results of diagnostic testing in the introduction phase of the project and it mainly indicated the improvement in the marks of some of the learners who were part of this project.

In the current chapter, the conclusions to the entire study will be presented. In addition, it will also present recommendations for the improvement of the learners' skills to use their knowledge inter-curricular as well as holistically in their lives. The limitations of the study will be highlighted and recommendations will also be made regarding fields for further research. Finally, this chapter will clearly indicate whether the objectives of this study have been achieved.

## **5.2 CONCLUSIONS**

This part can be seen as a summary to remind the reader of what was said in the previous chapters. The conclusions that were drawn during the research process were richly discussed in the relevant parts. The nature of an action research process, which happens in cycles, compels the researcher to constantly draw conclusions as part of the reflection process in the research cycle (Kemmis, 1982: 8). The researcher then acts upon these conclusions and the cycle continues until the necessary result is achieved. For this reason I believe that it can be seen as appropriate to include the conclusions as a part of the discussion of the progress during the research process and not only at the end of the report.

In retrospect, this study can be seen as an ex post facto research project as some of the findings regarding the creation of the impression that the learners can't use their knowledge in an inter-curricular manner, proved to be situations that were created over a long period of time, even as far back as the learners' early childhood period. Therefore, the variables couldn't be influenced or manipulated during the research process. Cohen, et al. (2002: 205) indicate that ex post facto researchers "*investigate cause-and-effect relationships by observing an existing condition or state of affairs and searching back in time for plausible casual factors*". The learners have identified certain factors from their past that had an influence on their current behaviour. The main aim of the actions in class was then to correct the errors or barriers towards learning and/or class participation, which were created in the learners' past.

### **5.2.1 General conclusions**

I came to the disturbing conclusion that educators (and here I include myself) far too easily jump to conclusions regarding the reasons for specific learner behaviour in their learning sessions. I find it disturbing due to the fact that any misconceptions can have the result that the abilities of the learners are under-estimated. This in turn can cause the situation where the educators offer the course on a lower level to suit the perceived low skills levels of the learners. This can cause boredom and an absence of motivation due to the fact that there is no challenge for the learners in the learning sessions. This fact was confirmed during a qualitative research project that was conducted with learners in the same institution as where this project took place (Boshoff, 2004(b)). The low expectancy level can also cause that the level of competence that is reached at the end of the course is at a lower level than what it potentially could be.

One of the most often mentioned general assumptions is the belief that the majority of learners do not have the ability to use their existing frame of knowledge in an inter-curricular manner. Listening at discussions between peer educators from both higher- and further educational institutions, that took place over the ten years that I am involved in education, as well as listening to the reactions of educators from all over the world who attended my presentation regarding this matter at the ALARPM 6th and PAR 10th World Congress (Boshoff, 2003), it became evident that educators have the same generalised assumptions regarding the learners' level of knowledge

transfer. Mestre (2001:2) confirms this generalised belief when stating that “*at this point in time we know that transfer is very difficult to achieve, and very little is known about how one might structure teaching in ways that maximize transfer.*” Woolfolk (2007: 320) also states that “*years of research and experience show that students will master new knowledge, problem solving procedures and learning strategies, but usually they will not use them unless prompted or guided*”. This might be the case in many instances but in this study it was found that misinterpretations can be created when the educator only observes behaviour and reaches conclusions without communicating with the learners in order to test the validity of his/her interpretations of a situation. (Sections 4.6.2.2(a) and 4.6.2.6)

The most prominent example of this finding is the fact that educators tend to immediately assume that the learners do not participate in the learning sessions due to the fact that they don't know the answers to the questions that are asked during the learning sessions (Section 4.6.2.2 (a)). I held the same viewpoint until the findings of this project indicated that it is a generalised assumption.

The fact that the educational problem regarding the transferability of knowledge and learner participation is widely discussed in education circles and the fact that well-known authors deemed it important enough to write about it, was the reason for my unconditionally acceptance of the phenomenon without questioning it. I constantly tried to seek for solutions for the problem. As this project progressed, the findings made me aware of the fact that some unexpected influences on the learners' participation are over-shadowed by this most supported assumption that the learners do not participate because they can't use their existing frame of reference. This caused me to start seeking for ways in which the causes of the non-participation of the learners could be identified and corrected.

This study showed that there are many other reasons that are rarely thought of when discussing the passiveness of the learners during the learning sessions. The factors that were identified to have the biggest influence on the participation of the learners who were part of this project, are the learners' low level of language proficiency (Section 4.6.2.2) and shyness as a result of a low level of self-efficacy (Section 4.6.2.4). The *psychic closeness*, as discussed by Taubman (In Pinar and Reynolds, 1992: 216 – 233) that exists between the educator and the learners also

influences the learners' willingness to speak in the presence of others (Sections 2.2.5 and 4.6.2.6). These factors correlate with the sociolinguistic factors that are mentioned by Woolfolk (2007: 196 - 197) as being barriers to learner participation.

Another very prominent misconception that is held by the educators employed at the institution where this study was conducted is the general feeling that the learners will lose respect for the educator if they receive information regarding the personal life and experiences of the educator (Section 4.6.2.6).

The experiences of this project convinced me that the closeness that existed between the learners and me enhanced the respect that they have shown towards me. The learners displayed a high level of respect by calling me "Mom" instead of "Ma'am". In the African cultures respect for your mother is seen as one of the highest levels of respect in society (Section 4.6.2.6).

The learners displayed a general feeling that the educators try to create the image of being perfect (Section 4.6.2.6). They needed to know about "*Things that the lecturers' children do wrong*", "*eich Ma'am ... anything that shows us that the lecturers are also just human and not perfect, Ma'am*" (Section 4.6.2.6). Due to the fact that I shared some of the problems in my life with them, some learners experienced me as someone who doesn't try to create the image of being perfect while I am still human and therefore not perfect. Some regarded me as honest regarding all aspects of my life. This can be confirmed by the remark made by one of the learners after I told them about a problem situation which I experienced with my son. The learner said to the other learners: "*This is evidence that we can believe everything that Ma'am ever tells us.*" (Section 4.6.2.6). Because of the fact that I have shared my own imperfections with them, they accepted minor weaknesses in my practice such as the fact that during times that I have a large workload, I do not provide feedback within three days after assessment. They have shown their positive acknowledgement and respect for my situation by offering help with tasks that they can do, such as filing, to help to relieve workloads creating high stress levels. This in turn enhanced their self-efficacy as they have experienced my willingness to accept their help as a sign that I respect them enough to trust them with my tasks. This also contributed to the success level of the study as they have experienced the elements

and conditions that they have learned concerning delegation as part of the curriculum.

### **5.2.2 Conclusions based on the qualitative data**

Different aspects which had an influence on the learners' ability to use their knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives were identified. The main factors that were identified as being the reasons for the learners not to participate during learning sessions and therefore created the situation, and in some instances only the impression, that they can't use their knowledge inter-curricular and holistically in their lives, are language inefficiency (Section 4.6.2.2) , an inability to use their imagination (Section 4.6.2.3) and a low self-efficacy (Sections 4.6.2.4 and 4.6.2.5). One can also conclude that the *psychic* distance between the educator and the learner, as discussed by Taubman (In Pinar & Reynolds, 1992: 216 – 233) (Section 2.2.5), can also have an influence on the learners' level of participation during learning sessions (Section 4.6.2.6). It also became evident that in some instances the language inefficiency of the learners created other barriers to learning, such as shyness (Section 4.6.2.2 (a)).

#### **5.2.2.1 The influence of the learners' English language proficiency**

Looking at the findings regarding language proficiency, one can safely conclude that the low level of English language proficiency, of the learners who were part of this study, can be seen as the most significant reason for the creation of the impression that the learners do not use their knowledge holistically and in an inter-curricular manner. The following findings provide evidence for this conclusion:

**Conclusion 1:** During a learning session using a mind game, the conclusion was reached that a wrong impression is created when the learners can't provide an answer in a test or examination. If the learner can't provide all the information during a test or examination, the educator immediately gets the impression that the learner does not know the facts. It was found that the learners do remember certain elements of information that was provided to them but these are omitted in their answers because of the fact that they don't know how to verbalise the facts when they have to apply them in specific scenarios, such as in a particular case study (Section 3.6.2.3).

**Conclusion 2:** The learners write down what they have heard during the learning sessions without trying to make sense of what they have written down. In some instances, that which they have written down is completely different from that which was said. When studying for the test or examination they learn the incorrect notes that were taken down during the learning session and as they provide the incorrect information as the answers to a question, it also creates the wrong impression that the learners do not know the facts.

The learners were guided to develop the skill of visualising that which they have said in order to determine the validity of the statement. They had to draw simple pictures to illustrate what they wanted to say and these pictures were then evaluated against that which was written down. The skill of deconstructing a word, giving meaning to each part of the word and then reconstructing the meaning of the word was also introduced to the learners (Section 4.6.2.2 (c)).

**Finding 3:** The most often provided reason for the non-participation of the learners during the learning sessions was their shyness (Sections 2.2.6, 4.6.2.1, 4.6.2.2 (a) and 4.6.2.4). Their language barrier created a low self-concept (self-efficacy) which resulted in shyness. That in turn created the situation that the learners do not take part in discussions during the learning sessions as they were afraid that the other learners would laugh at them or think that they are “*stupid*”, as they couldn’t speak English well. The fact that the learners are not shy when they are speaking in their own language proves the validity of the conclusion that a low level of language proficiency can create low self-efficacy.

When analysing the information that was provided by the learners during the deconstructive activities, one can conclude that the social- and socio-economic environments as well as the educational environment in which the learners were educated before he/she entered the Further Education and Training band, had the biggest negative influence on his/her English language proficiency. The deficiencies in these environments had a ripple effect and barriers were created towards the learners’ ability to interpret and reproduce the learning content. These social and educational factors included:

- The manner in which the language was taught in schools where an African teacher with an African accent had to teach the learners English;

- The fact that they lived in rural areas where there were no or few resources like libraries available;
- Their socio-economic situation was of such a nature that they didn't have money to travel to the libraries and they also couldn't afford to buy magazines to do more reading;
- The people in their direct environment couldn't speak English and therefore they had nobody with whom they could communicate in the required language.
- A reason that was tacitly implied but which I believe to be the main reason for the situation that they didn't try to improve their English language skills, was the fact that they also weren't aware of the importance of the ability to communicate in English as they lived quite comfortably in their own small world and they got along quite well by using only their own language.

The following actions which were taken in an attempt to get the learners to communicate in English, proved to have positive outcomes:

- The learners were motivated to communicate in English outside the class situation. This was achieved by using deconstructive processes where the learner him/herself could identify the reasons for his/her low level of English language proficiency and then the principles of narrative therapy (Morgan, 2000) were used to motivate the learner to change his/her situation;
- Learners had to present short parts of the curriculum which they could prepare beforehand in order to ensure a *positive behaviour history* (O'Donnell, et al. 2007:144);
- Puppets were used to distract the attention from the learner him/herself while talking (Section 4.6.2.4);
- Language errors in their written work were corrected before they were asked to present it (Section 4.6.2.2 (a)).

Due to the level of improvement in the learners' class participation and their ability to interpret knowledge and to reproduce (use) that knowledge in other contexts such as case studies, one can conclude that a false impression was created that the learners did not have the ability to use their existing frame of reference in an inter-curricular manner.

This misconception can create boredom if the educator tries to accommodate the perceived low level of cognitive skills of the learners. The learning content is then offered at a lower skills level than the true cognitive skills level of the learners. The lower presentation level can also create the situation that the learners are not exposed to all the information and experiences that would have been given to learners with a higher cognitive level. This in turn will create a lower level of competency at the end of the learning cycle of a course. This practice can actually be seen as a form of discrimination against the learners as they were not stimulated to reach their full potential. This also creates a transgression of two of the most important presuppositions of a democratic society, namely equality and progression (Möller, et al, 2003: 242 – 243).

### **5.2.2.2 Inability to use imagination and/or creative thinking**

**Conclusion 1:** I noticed that the learners did their role-plays in a narrative past tense way (Section 4.6.2.3). I also observed this way of playing in my own children (1970's to 1980's) as well as in the children of today. After reflecting on the way that the generation of children of which I was a part was playing (1950's to 1960's) and analysing the way in which the children of today are playing, I came to the conclusion that the children of today mostly use their visual senses and only reproduce what they have seen before. I have linked this phenomenon to the development of technology such as television, computer games and remote controlled toys for which the children mainly need to use their visual senses.

From this experience one can draw the conclusion that although technology such as computers and television can be seen as sources of information for learning, it can also be seen as factors creating hindrances towards the learning process as it has a negative effect on the development of the creativity levels of the children.

Looking at the level on which children and young adults of today depend on the use of their visual senses, one wonders whether less visual teaching aids shouldn't be used. The teaching and learning processes should be structured in such a way that the development of the learners' creative, imaginative, and therefore innovative skills can be stimulated. In a dynamic and technological developed world, innovation is the key to success.

**Conclusion 2:** During the process of guiding the learners to develop the skill of visualising what they have said it was found that some learners do not have the ability to use their imagination to its fullest potential. Learning activities that proved to be successful in the process of removing this barrier was the action where the learners had to draw simple pictures to illustrate what they have written (Section 4.6.2.2 (c)). Creative thinking exercises (mind games) as well as role-play were used to overcome this barrier (Section 4.6.2.3). The learners also had to write the text for their own puppet shows based on the curriculum content (Section 4.6.2.3).

### **5.2.2.3 Low self-efficacy**

In literature, much has already been said and much is known about the influences on the self-efficacy level of learners. Analysing the information that was provided by the learners regarding their viewpoints on why they are shy (section 4.6.2.4), can lead to the conclusion that the following situations or factors have a prominent influence on the level of self-efficacy of the learners who were part of this project:

- The role of the male and female in cultural context. It can also be referred to as cultural gender discrimination;
- Insecurity in their homes due to the fact that they do not live with family members but they live with strangers, as they are renting accommodation. This creates the situation that there is an absence of psychical closeness at their homes;
- The absence of peers of their own age group in their homes and therefore their social needs are not fulfilled;
- Language and cultural differences between the members of their living environment;
- Insecurity after their relocation from the rural environment to city life;
- The absence of a recognition of the importance of learning and self-development in their living environment since their early childhood (some indicated that their parents only attended school up to grade eight) as well as in their current living environment;
- The learners' false perception that only economic advantaged society members are seen as important and valuable to society;
- The insecurity that is created by a learning environment in which communication takes place in English in stead of using their own language;

- A learning environment that expects the learner to have enough personal responsibility in order to be able to manage his/her own learning activities within set time frames and according to a higher level of standards than what the learners were used to in the school environment. This can be seen as an inability to adapt to situational change.

### **5.2.3 Conclusions regarding research methodology**

During the literature study regarding the research methodology that should be used in this project, a gap was identified in the types of interviews to be used in a qualitative action research project. The types of interviews that are most frequently discussed are structured- and semi-structured interviews, which are planned and based on a pre-defined topic. Informal discussion interviews which are usually lengthy and hard to analyse, are also mentioned. The type of interview which was most often used in this project wasn't discussed or mentioned in any of the sources that were studied. The spontaneous interview, as I would like to call it, lies between the semi-structured interview and the informal discussion interview. The characteristics of this type of interview are mainly that it is unplanned and the topic is determined on the spot. Although it is unplanned it is still topic related once it started. It happens spontaneously at an unplanned time, it is very short and it takes place between the researcher and only one respondent while the other members of the project are just observers if they are present during the interview. Normally interviews are used to collect information on a specific pre-defined topic but during the spontaneous interview, the researcher usually becomes aware of a topic that is related to the current project but which wasn't thought of before. A full discussion of the differentiation between the spontaneous interview and the most often used types of interviews as mentioned above appears in section 3.4.3.

### **5.2.4 Conclusions regarding constructivism, deconstructivism and reconstruction as elements of the learning process**

Constructivism and deconstruction are widely discussed in literature as two different and independent theories. Reconstruction was mentioned on a few occasions as part of either one of these two theories. According to my understanding reconstruction is the final process in the creation of a new knowledge structure.

Once the focus point is moved from the creation of new meaning (knowledge) after new information was received, which is called constructivism, to the process of receiving the new information that will be used in the construction of new meaning, and the influence of the environment on the process, it is referred to as social constructivism. Therefore, it can be concluded that the focus point of the author commenting on and/or discussing constructivism/social constructivism, determines the term used in the publication.

I believe that another shift in the focus point when studying the learning process causes the use of the term deconstruction. This part of the learning process entails the critical questioning and evaluation of the existing knowledge structure after it was influenced by factors in the environment.

If one views the different theories as steps in the learning process, one can say that the chronological order should be as follows: deconstruction of existing frame of knowledge after environmental influences occurred → construction of new knowledge → reconstruction of the new frame of knowledge with an integration of the old with the new knowledge. When the different theories are seen as steps in the learning process, I would like to call the complete process structivism (Section 2.2.4 and Figure 4).

### **5.2.5 Conclusions regarding deconstruction as a learning activity**

Deconstruction as a learning activity was used in two ways during this study. Firstly it focused on the development of the language skills of the learners and secondly it was used in the process of helping the learners to emancipate themselves and therefore to *“get out of their boxes”*.

#### **5.2.5.1 Deconstruction and the understanding of the meaning of words**

The activities where learners had to deconstruct words into smaller parts, then add meaning to the different parts and then reconstruct a new understanding of the meaning of the word were very successful (Section 4.6.2.2 (c)). A significant improvement appeared in the ability of the learners to understand words that they haven't used before.

The same result was experienced with the activity where learners had to identify words that sound the same although they are spelt differently and where the same word has different meanings (Section 4.6.2.2 (b)).

These learning activities proved to be most successful with learners who already had a medium level of language proficiency. The learners who had a low level of English language proficiency struggled with the process of identifying smaller words, prefixes and suffixes which carry meaning, inside the word under discussion. They also couldn't identify words that sound the same and in some instances, they were not even aware that one word can carry two meanings. This can therefore be seen as a limitation for the use of these activities in a learning session as not all learners in the learning session have the same level of language proficiency.

#### **5.2.5.2 Deconstruction as a learning process to achieve emotional growth**

The use of deconstruction as a process to emancipate learners to break down all barriers towards learning and the development of their full potential was far more successful than I could ever have anticipated. This conclusion can be made as some of the learners who have met me coincidentally after graduating and leaving college, have mentioned the success of their actions. In one instance, the mother of a learner indicated that the learner uses the principles, which I have applied to another learner's situation, in order to work on her own through a very sensitive past experience.

When analysing the situations and contexts in which I have applied the deconstructive principles as described by various authors, one can come to the following conclusions:

##### **5.2.5.2.1 Characteristics of deconstruction as a learning activity**

- The need for the process to start is created by something that needs to be changed in the personal characteristics and emotional conditions of the learner due to changes and influences in the environment;
- The main aim is the emancipation of the learner and improvement of the quality of his/her life;
- It is a prolonged process;
- The learner decides on the pace of the process;

- The pace depends on the emotional condition of the learner;
- It relies on a high level of interaction between the learner, peer learners and the educator;
- It relies heavily on spontaneous, unplanned discussions which are not only questioning sessions but it also include the sharing of feelings and experiences;
- It is firstly a reactive process and the experience of success during this stage changes it to become a proactive process;
- It is mainly based on the principles of narrative therapy (Morgan, 2000);
- It correlates with the process of drug and alcohol rehabilitation as described by Van der Wal (2003: 43 – 44) which includes the following stages:
  - \* Pre-contemplation – the learner is not aware that he/she has a problem although other people are aware of it;
  - \* Contemplation – the learner starts to feel unsure about his situation or feelings;
  - \* Determination – the learner indicates a willingness to become part of the change process;
  - \* Action – the learner actively takes part in the deconstruction process;
  - \* Maintenance stage – the learner should be emotionally supported in order to prevent that he/she falls back into his/her old ways of living if the challenges become too hard to handle;
  - \* Relapse – the learner must be helped to change back to the new way of living if he/she has slipped back into his/her previous oppressing lifestyle.

#### **5.2.5.2.2 Conditions that need to be present to ensure the success of the deconstruction process**

- The learner must experience a personal need to work towards change in his/her life;
- A high level of mutual trust should exist between the learner and the educator;
- A psychic closeness (section 2.2.5) should exist between the learner and the educator;
- The educator should be patient in order to allow the learner to progress at his/her own pace;
- The educator should be willing to share information about his/her own life with the learner;

- A spirit of respect, equality, empathy and support (Ubuntu) should exist between the learners who are involved in the process and those who are merely witnesses of the process.
- The educator must have the ability to realise his/her own limits in the handling of some cases and he/she must have the openness to acknowledge these limits and to seek the help of a specialist such as an educational psychologist.
- The educator must have strongly developed creative- and holistic thinking skills to ensure the success of the process;
- The educator must have well-developed language skills including a large vocabulary in order to identify correlations in words.

#### **5.2.5.2.3 Disadvantages of using deconstruction as a learning activity**

- It is very time consuming for both the learner and the educator as a large amount of discussion time is needed;
- In intense cases most of the discussions happen outside normal class hours as the other learners can develop a feeling that one learner receives privileged treatment in class and that the time spent on this learner may infringe on the progress of the rest of the learners;
- In the case where a learner does not have a large friendship or family circle to act as a support system, the responsibility of the educator stretches even further than that which is usually expected from the educator.

#### **5.2.6 Conclusions based on quantitative data**

In a diagnostic test the percentage of correct term identification that was achieved by the learners at the beginning of the current research project (83.62%) was nearly the same as the percentage of correct term identification (86.04%) that was achieved at the end of the previous similar, but superficial research project in 2000. This correlation proves the validity of the conclusion that the actions that were taken since 2000 were still effective enough to be included in the learning sessions (Section 4.6.2.1).

After analysing the improvement in the marks obtained by Perseverance (the learner who was very actively involved in the deconstructive process) one can conclude that the improvement can be linked to the learner's improved language skills and level of self-efficacy. The improvement between the first two examinations when she

repeated the examinations was not mentionable (4% and 2%). Only after the deconstructive intervention which improved her language skills and her level of self-worth, a drastic improvement in her marks has occurred (18% and 23%), (Figure 10).

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section will be divided in three main sections in each of which recommendations that can be used in the educational environment regarding the most prominent barriers to learning which were identified will be provided.

#### **5.3.1 Language proficiency**

The curriculum content of the courses in further and/or higher education institutions does not allow time for the teaching of English other than in the language and communication subject offerings. Therefore, the language problem should be solved at an earlier stage of the child's life. This can be attempted by the following actions:

- The value and importance of the ability to communicate in English, especially in the economic and business environments of the country, should be explained to the learners as early as primary school level. Authors discussing the hermeneutic metatheory indicate that human beings are more motivated to do something if they understand the pragmatic value of the task (Higgs, 2004: 3; Möller, et al. 2003: 114). This understanding can be created with the use of puppet shows or theatre in order to make it attractive for the children. It can be organised as a part of the practical tasks of the learners in the education faculty of the different universities, offering it on a road show basis, especially in the rural areas.
- During the selection process of educators who want to teach English as a subject, the verbal skills of the educator should also be taken into consideration. The educator should be able to speak English with as little accent of another language as possible.
- Local authorities, especially in rural areas, should act more seriously in the fulfilment of their social responsibility towards the community, by implementing libraries on wheels which can take the library to the community on a weekly or fortnightly basis. Industry as partners in education can also be asked to sponsor these mobile libraries as part of their contributions towards social responsibility.

- Holiday programmes can be offered by the libraries in which the children of the community can get the opportunity to use the language through playing. This can also be done in partnership with the education faculties of different universities.

Remedial action that can be taken to improve the language skills of the learners in the FET colleges can include the following:

- Diagnostic testing regarding the level of language skills of the learners can be done as part of the admission criteria. These tests should not be used for exclusion purposes. It should be used in order to determine whether the learner should also be enrolled for remedial English language classes which can be offered as compulsory extra curricular learning. This practice shouldn't be seen as discriminatory as the learners will benefit from this for the entire duration of their studies as well as holistically in their lives, as it will improve the learners' communication skills and therefore also their employability.
- Educators should not ignore the pronunciation errors made by the learners. They should correct these errors as part of the discussions during the daily learning sessions.
- An open and cooperative spirit should exist between colleagues in order that they can feel free to make their colleagues aware of mispronunciations without creating a situation that one party will feel degraded. This will prevent the situation where the learners hear the wrong pronunciation of words in the classroom.
- Staff development sessions should be organised for all staff members to improve their pronunciation when using English as communication medium. Even English speaking educators can benefit from these sessions as influences such as group language and geographical based jargon and accents can also be eliminated in these sessions.
- Short message text (SMS-language) should never be allowed when learners answer the questions in tests and/or examinations. It should also not be used by the educator while using teaching aids such as the whiteboard. The learners need to be able to use the correct spelling of words as currently most of the communication inside or outside a business happens through the use of e-mail. Incorrect spelling and language errors always create a negative image of the person or organisation from where the mail was originated. A negative image creates the situation that a business loses its competitive edge.

### 5.3.2 Low self-efficacy

Recommendations for the improvement of the efficacy level of learners are:

- The curriculum of the fundamental subject Life Orientation at Grade 9 level should include the differences between rural and urban life. The learners will then not experience the difference between these two environments as shocking as they will be more prepared when they move from a rural school to a FET college in an urban area or vice versa.
- The constitutional rights of the individual as well as the democratic presuppositions of democracy, e.g. equality and morality, should be included in the curricula for the fundamental subject Life Orientation already on the lower educational levels. This will empower the learners to stand up for their rights in their living environments. Even young learners can be emancipated from the negative effects of abuse by adults or their peers. This recommendation is not aimed at breaking down the cultural values of the learners. The main aim is to make them aware of their rights, which are contained in the Constitutional Statement of South Africa. They should also be made aware of the responsibilities, which go hand in hand with their democratic and constitutional rights. This will assist in the creation of a future generation of learners who can live more freely with a natural higher level of self-efficacy.
- Cultural diversity should be included in the curricula of the fundamental subject Life Orientation at different levels. Not only the differences between the Western, Eastern and African cultures should be included but also the differences between the different African cultures as well as the different Western and Eastern cultures.
- Staff development sessions should be offered as many educators do not always take cognisance of the influences of the different cultural, environmental and demographic influences on their learners. It should be clearly stated that it is not because the educators do not care, but they might not be aware of the real situations of their learners as these might fall outside their own experiential world and therefore they can't imagine the real conditions in which their learners are living.
- Educators should also be motivated to have a closer and equal relationship with their learners in order for the learners to feel free to communicate with them regarding their situational problems without having a sense of low self-efficacy.

- Learners should be motivated to take part in sports and cultural events in order to become aware that there is more to life than just going to school/college and “*suffering at home*”. Educational institutions should establish internal sports clubs and cultural clubs such as drama societies.
- Although social projects are included in the curriculum for Life Orientation on National Curriculum (Vocational) level 2, the learners should have the opportunity to become part of projects aimed at the uplifting of their communities as part of their personal responsibilities, and not only because it is included in their educational responsibilities. The appreciation that they will receive for their part in social support projects will increase their level of self-efficacy. For this reason, educational institutions should associate with organisations such as HIV and AIDS clinics, old age homes and orphanages.

### **5.3.3 Inability to use creative thinking and imagination**

- A drama society, which is mainly functioning on an improvising manner, can be established at educational institutions in order to allow the learners to develop their creative skills by creating their own texts.
- An art society can be established where learners can teach their peers and educators artistic skills such as beadwork, material painting, stone and wood carving and African dancing. This association between learners and educators will also improve the psychic closeness between the learners and the educators. It will also create a feeling that their cultures are still appreciated although their education is mainly based on the Western values according to which global businesses are managed. This will also improve their self-efficacy levels, as they will experience that their educators can also learn something from them.
- Learning experiences, which entail that the learners use more of their senses than just their visual and hearing senses should be created.
- The learners themselves should create the visual aids that are used in the learning sessions in order to stimulate their creative and imaginative skills.
- Learners can present parts of the curriculum to their peer learners by using creative methods such as role play, puppet shows, simulations and presentations for which they had to prepare the materials themselves.

## 5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

- Empirical research can be done to test the effectiveness of the recommendations in this section, which can be implemented on micro level.
- A wider study can be done by involving other further education and training colleges in both rural and urban areas to determine the differences and/or similarities in the experiences of the learners in the different geographic and socio-economic segmented areas.
- The effectiveness of the deconstructive methods used in this project can be tested in another further education and training environment with learners of the same age group. It can also be tested with samples focusing on different age groups to determine if it can be applied effectively to learners of all age groups.
- Research regarding the use of whole-brain development to improve the learners' holistic thinking skills can be done.
- One interesting question is: If imagination is based on the recall of visual images already in the memory of a person, what then does a blind person who was born blind and doesn't have any visual images which can be recalled from his/her memory, use to imagine things? People who have strong imaginary skills also use their other senses like smell, touch and hearing when they imagine things or situations, but this is still in combination with visual images. This can be a field for further research for the improvement of the learners' imaginative and creative thinking skills as well as for improvements in the field of special educational needs.
- A study aimed at business people can be done to determine whether there is a relation between the level of success in the business environment and the language abilities of a businessperson.
- A qualitative study can be done to determine how business people who don't have a high English language proficiency level prevent and/or overcome the problems that can have a negative influence on the success of their business as a result of their poor language skills.

## 5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

- The learners who were part of this project were in their final semester of learning at the college and I would have had a problem to make contact with them after

the final report was compiled as most of these learners are originally from Limpopo Province and were living in Gauteng only for the duration of their studies. For this reason, the report was created in fragments as I have used both member checking and participant review to ensure the validity of my interpretations. Unfortunately, I will not be able to provide the full completed report to the participants. This creates an emotional feeling of disappointment as the learners were largely involved in the creation of this project and now I can't share the excitement of the final product with them.

- The largest limitation was the fact that I can't speak an African language. It wouldn't have been necessary to use an interpreter if I could have spoken the learners' language. Social constructivism depends largely on interpretations that are based on words and texts that are used during the learning process. Apart from the fact that most of the learners who took part in this project are not fluent in English, some of these learners are also not able to speak all the African languages that are used by their peers. Mistakes could be made during direct translations done by the peers, and I wouldn't have been able to correct the mistakes created during translation, as I can't understand any one of the languages that were used. Wrong spoken or incorrect pronounced English used by the translators, together with the participants' reluctance to speak English, created the possibility that different interpretations than that which was intended could be created. Some of the important information needed to create the correct constructs could also be omitted during translation. This created the situation that lots of time was wasted, as I had to explain the correct viewpoints and indicating the incorrect interpretations that were regularly displayed by learners who were previously in my learning sessions.

## **5.6 SUCCESSES OF THIS STUDY**

This part will be used to reflect on the main aim of this project to determine whether the objectives have been reached or not. The objectives were:

- Identify the reasons why the learners do not acquire the ability to use existing skills and knowledge (referred to as their existing frame of reference) across the curriculum, which in turn prevented their ability to identify similarities in problem situations across the curriculum.

- Language barriers were identified as the biggest cause of the problem;
  - Low self-efficacy and shyness had an effect on the learners participation during learning sessions;
  - The learners do not use their imagination and creative thinking skills to their fullest ability;
  - In some instances a false impression that the learners can't use their knowledge in an inter-curricular manner were identified.
- 
- Identify methods that can be used to develop the conceptualising, reflective, and critical thinking skills of the learners.
    - Deconstructive methods based on the principles of narrative therapy proved to be successful;
- 
- Experiment with different lecturing actions and methods in order to identify the most effective actions and methods that can be used by the lecturer, to motivate and lead the learners through the learning process of identifying similarities between situations and to use their existing frame of reference across the curriculum, as well as holistically in their lives.
    - Diagnostic tests to determine the effectiveness of facilitation methods used before this research project started showed results that correlate with the results of a previous similar study of which the main aim was to test facilitation methods;
    - Incidents were recorded where learners have used knowledge obtained in a previous level of their course. In some instances it was used in a relaxed informal humoristic way. This indicated that they didn't have to be in a formal learning environment in order to use the knowledge.
- 
- Assess the actions and methods in my own practice to determine which of my actions are the most effective in stimulating the learning process.
    - Diagnostic testing indicated that the facilitation methods that were used since an earlier similar study are still effective;
    - Enough evidence was found to state that the closeness that exists between the learners and myself had a positive effect on their willingness

to communicate with me during learning sessions and to trust me with their personal problems.

## 5.7 CLOSING REMARKS

I couldn't put my last thoughts in better words than those that were used by Muriel Saville-Troike (1978) when talking about socio-cultural influences on learning and teaching. She stated that

*Our educational goals are not limited to instructional objectives, but include the enculturation or socialization of children to values and expectations as well. This involves a weighty responsibility and requires careful thought, because, for good or ill, we often succeed. For example, accepting the goal 'success in school' often requires alienation from home, family, friends, and cultural heritage, and this is a terrible price to ask students to pay. We must learn to understand both the medium and the content of what we are teaching, and learn to be sensitive to the differences between what we are teaching and what the student brings to the classroom, so that our teaching becomes an aid and not a hindrance to the full realization of the student's potential as a human being.*

I would like to end this project with a message to educators. Knowledge is seen as important enough to be mentioned in the same chapter of the Bible as that in which love is discussed (1 Corinthians 13). However, it is mentioned that knowledge will perish but that love will always be important. Taubman stated that an educator should not become a *fortress of knowledge*. The walls around a fortress keep people at a distance. To be able to show our love we need to embrace that which is loved. You can't embrace something at a distance - you need to be close to it. We must open our minds and our hearts as wide as the Lord's mercy towards humankind. We must allow the learners to become close to us and we must become *family* for them. With love we must share the knowledge that we have received as a gift from God with as many others as possible, in ways that they will understand both the knowledge as well as the love and the mercy of God.

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