The urban world in which most of my students live has become a predominantly visual experience given the surge in exposure to the visual arts in television, cinema and advertising. Even in homes that do not have television, learners are exposed to newspaper images, magazines and advertising billboards in many urban public spaces. A component of media studies, film studies, has become an option in the IEB English syllabus. This is not necessarily an option available in rural areas where recent, government sponsored needs assessments appear to be revealing that most learners in rural areas do not even have access to running water and electricity (Sunday Independent, 7 September 1997). My school's outreach programme, the Education Support Programme, has a network of schools and teachers in several rural communities in the Northern Province, Mpumalanga Province and North West Province and we are first hand witnesses of the conditions written about, conditions which have changed very little in 1999. A number of the learners from my school come from these rural schools but reside in our school's boarding house, where television viewing is a popular recreation. The Dean of Boarding regularly hires videos to supplement the boarders' television experience.

The argument that this study pursued is that if educators begin with the field with which learners appear to have the greatest affinity, the visual media, and then equip them with writing skills through a process of explicit pedagogy and continuous reflection and discussion, as discussed in chapter three, the learners will achieve a greater degree of success and consequently begin to experience the enjoyment derived from executing a well mastered task.

Buckingham explored his theories of teaching aspects of the media by observing the implementation of his theories first hand, in the classroom. He wrote about how the learners' understanding of

media developed through their interaction with simulated media-making projects. He began with a medium which they enjoyed, allowed them to access knowledge about media by engaging with the concepts in a productive manner and allowed them to demonstrate their understanding of this medium through spoken, written and visual forms. By manipulating the medium themselves, they began to develop a critical understanding of the media (1990, 1993 and 1994).

The various activities that Buckingham suggests can be understood in terms of Howard Gardner's theories of "Multiple Intelligences". Gardner has posited that learners have "multiple intelligences"(MI) (1984) and that if we wish our learners to succeed in our education systems, we should adapt our pedagogy so that each learner will be able to access the material we are presenting. A learner may have a more strongly defined intelligence in one area and the varied pedagogical approach's aim is to enable the learner to use that stronger intelligence to develop the other intelligences. Seven "intelligences" were mapped by Gardner, six of which were directly used in my teaching methodology. Briefly summarised from Armstrong they are:

1. **Linguistic Intelligence** - the capacity to use words effectively whether orally or in writing. This includes using metalanguage.

2. **Logical-Mathematical Intelligence** - the capacity to use numbers effectively. This includes categorisation, classification, inference, generalisation, calculation and hypothesis testing.

3. **Spatial Intelligence** - The ability to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately and to perform transformations upon those perceptions. This intelligence involves sensitivity to colour, line, shape, form, space and the relationships that exist between these elements.

4. **Bodily - Kinaesthetic Intelligence** (not used) - expertise in using one's whole body to express ideas and feelings.

5. **Musical Intelligence** - the capacity to perceive, discriminate, transform and express musical forms. This includes sensitivity to rhythm, pitch or melody.

6. **Interpersonal Intelligence** - the ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations and feelings of other people. This includes the ability to influence a group of people to follow a certain line of action.

7. **Intrapersonal Intelligence** - Self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of that knowledge. This includes having an accurate picture of one's strengths and limitations and the capacity for self-discipline, self-understanding and self-esteem.

My teaching methodology is strongly influenced by MI theory. Armstrong's description of a MI teacher is a fair representation of my teaching style:

> The MI teacher may spend part of the time lecturing and writing on the blackboard at the front of the room. This, after all, is a legitimate teaching technique [...]. The MI teacher, however, also draws pictures on the blackboard or shows a videotape to illustrate an idea. She often plays music at some time during the day, either to set the stage for an objective, to make a point, or to provide an environment for study. The MI teacher provides hands-on experiences, whether this involves getting students up and moving about, or passing an artefact around to bring to life the material studied, or having students build something tangible to reveal their understanding. The MI teacher also has students interacting with each other in different ways (e.g. pairs, small groups, or large groups), and she plans time for students to engage in self-reflection, undertake self-paced work or link their personal experiences and feelings to the materials being studied. (Armstrong, 37: 94)

During the course of this research, my learners were presented with a visual (and sound) sequence,

which they were asked to analyse on their own and with their peers. They were then asked to reflect upon the knowledge that they had gained through this analysis and to devise a means for determining its application to the production of another medium. This processing of information generated by the discussion of the visual stimulus (commercial), through group analysis, is an important component in learner development. Learners first verbalised their knowledge before transferring those skills to writing. Ong considers the relationship between the development of one communicative skill (oral) and the development of another (written) in chapter one of <u>Orality and Literacy</u>, (1982). The chapter considers the transference of knowledge and skills to a variety of media.

When I planned my approach to teaching writing, as examined in this research, I attempted to use the abilities of learners with a greater affinity towards spatial intelligence to enable them to improve their written communication as part of their linguistic intelligence. I did not intentionally use the other intelligences but close analysis of the process revealed that several more had been used. These are discussed in chapter three. This study did not attempt to address all possible intelligences but does acknowledge that such work is necessary.

The value of the reflective process cannot be overstated in this research report. Both the reflection of myself as educator and that of my learners as co-participants in the research. This activity is also encouraged by Armstrong:

> MI theory provides a way for <u>all</u> teachers to reflect upon their best teaching methods and to understand why these methods work (or why they work well for some students and not for others). It also helps teachers expand their current teaching repertoire to include a broader range of methods, materials, and techniques for reaching an ever wider and more diverse

range of learners. (Armstrong, 58: 94)

My research was based on my observations and interactions with the learners in my classroom. My observations and the learners' responses were recorded in journals. My theory was born out of a perceived need in the classroom, implemented in the classroom and developed by the class. I implemented my theory by allowing learners to engage with one medium and then produce another. The first step required them to analyse a visual sequence and then to apply the theory that they had produced in this first step to the production of an entirely different mode. This differs from the procedure used by Buckingham where his learners first produced one mode and then analysed that same mode (1990). The sequence in my learners' work helped them to demonstrate a greater understanding of the medium they were required to produce by engaging in a process of reflection, production and reflection. The responses from my learners showed that the most significant part of the process was the constant reflection on the process itself.

2.1.3 Writing Pedagogy

Past pedagogical practices adopted by myself and my colleagues included teaching learners how to choose subject matter, how to edit their writing through the methodology known as "Process Writing" which essentially emphasises the fact that good writing is the product of several stages or processes from the mind map or brainstorm stage, to the rough draft, to the final draft. (Maybin, 1994) Our learners were traditionally encouraged to find their own voice in their writing through writing conferences with their peers and their teachers as described by Thomas Flynn (1993). Learners were also encouraged to record their writing attitudes and developments in journals so

that they were able to assess their own writing development. (Fulwiler, 1987). All of these approaches were successful in encouraging learners to write and to access their skills. I do not propose that any of these were not successful. However, my research posited that the structural element in learners' writing could be improved through my proposed teaching method.

The work of the Summerfields (1986) explores a large range of approaches to the teaching of creative writing. The particular approach I have chosen is one that finds some of its inspiration in their work, the exposure and stimulus of visual imagery. The understanding of intended audience is an important element examined in their work and that of Peter Elbow (1987), which is directly related to the market targeting of advertising. Understanding the intended consumer is a short step toward understanding the intended audience.

Traditionally, at my school, writing has been taught through exposure to more writing and by requiring the learners to write from their own experiences. This has been a monomodal process, learning one skill through exposure to that skill alone. What we had not taken into account is the learners' innate understanding of visual forms (Messaris, 1994) and how this understanding could be related to the structure and content of their own writing. I have proposed a "transmodal pedagogy"[3] that utilises the transference of skills from one mode to another. The concept of transference of understanding finds resonance in the work of McLuhan: "Any study of one medium helps us understand all others." (Introduction: 70)

2.1.3.1 The Genre Approach

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[3] Newfield, D. R. "Visual Literacy and the Role of Media in Education", Masters in English Education module lectures, University of the Witwatersrand, 1996.

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A genre approach to literacy teaching involves being explicit about the way language works to make meaning. It means engaging students in the role of apprentice with the teacher in role of expert on language system and function. It means an emphasis on content, on structure and on sequence in the steps that a learner goes through to become literate in formal educational setting. (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993)

The explicitness and structured approach of the pedagogy we used has a relationship with the Genre Approach to writing, which has as its aim to improve the writing of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Cope and Kalantzis, 1993). The rationale for this theory of teaching writing was provided by the disparity in the Australian education system where some learners had access to dominant culture and others were marginalised. The explicit teaching of textual features was considered to be the solution to removing obstacles to the access to dominant power. (Cope, Kalantzis, 1993)

In Lave's work, she considered West African apprenticeship customs and drew interesting conclusions from her research. Tailor apprentices were first involved in handling the almost completed garments, and were therefore exposed to the desired end result first. As the skills of the apprentices improved, so they moved closer to the initial stage of dressmaking: cutting the cloth, a stage where no error could be permitted. Conclusions drawn from this were that the learner should somehow become familiar with the end product; be practically involved in every stage of production until full responsibility is carried for the entire garment. (Lave, 1988)

In his critique of the form of education at that time, Kincheloe provides a suitable theoretical background for the later work of Cope and Kalantzis in that he argues that education simply
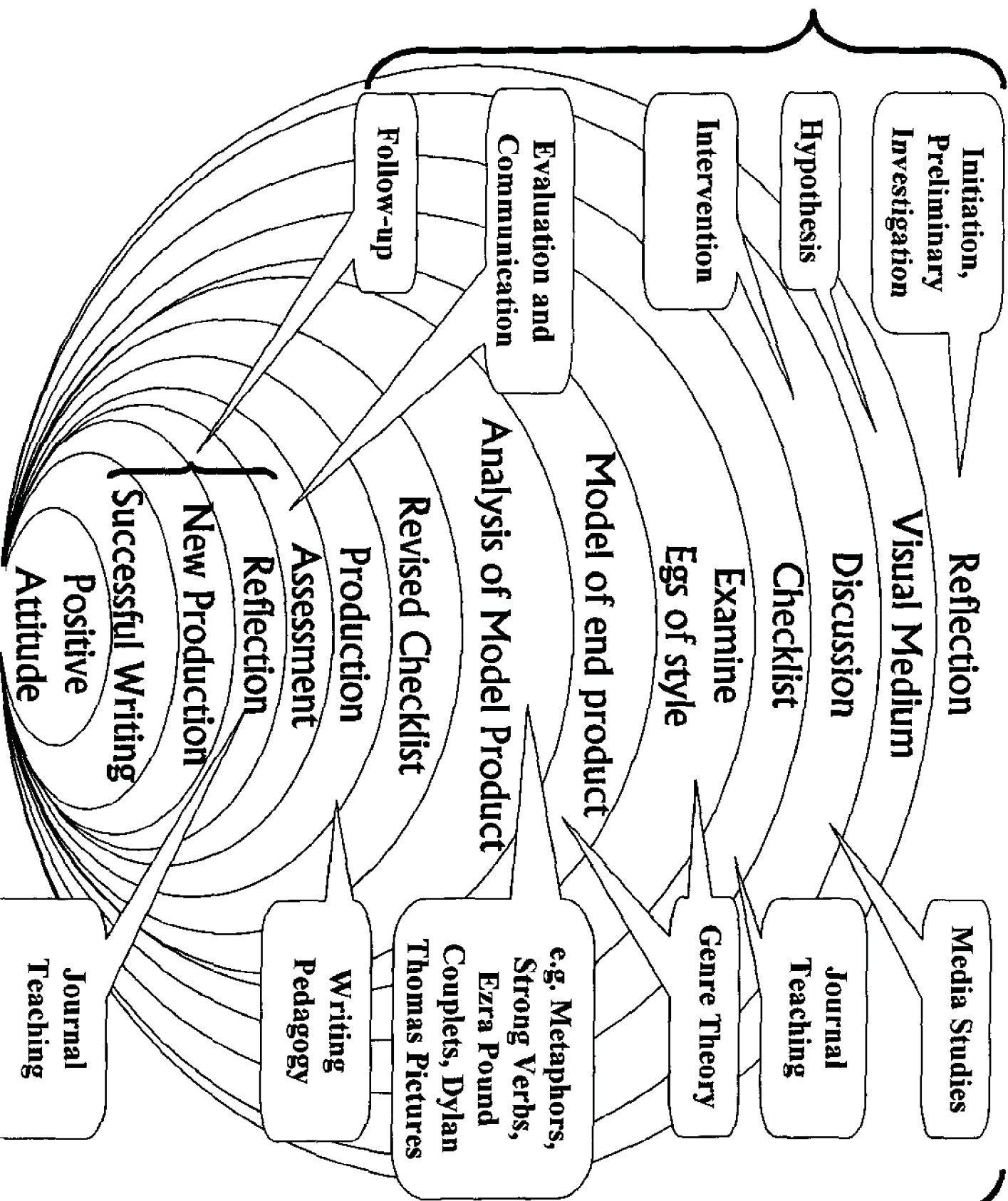
perpetuates privilege for certain classes who already understand successful production modes.

Social Darwinism. Every human is out for himself or herself. The strongest and the most resourceful will gain the rewards and privileges: the weakest will fall by the wayside into demeaning situations. The position is inherently naive as it fails to question the forces which privilege certain groups and impeded others. Success, thus, is founded not simply on one's resourcefulness but on one's initial acquaintance (often attained through socio-economic background) with the forms of knowledge, the attitudes, and the skills required for success, often called "cultural capital". Therefore, undemocratic hierarchical work arrangements are viewed not as anti-humanistic but just. (Kincheloe, 1991: 6)

While I based a substantial portion of my pedagogy on the work of Cope and Kalantzis, I do not believe that in the instance of creative writing a distinction between dominant and marginalised writing ability is drawn along social, class or race lines. Once basic literacy had been mastered, learners from all cultural groups I taught seemed either to understand effective, original writing or not. The few learners who displayed an inherent understanding of the successful mode did not derive from one particular class or grouping. It could be expected that writers that are more successful would come from homes where parent figures shared reading with them at various levels of literacy. My observations did not reflect this assumption, however this is an area for closer study. Some of the more avid readers in my class were not as successful in producing writing as they themselves had expected. In this instance, I believed that an explicit understanding of the desired end product was absent. The genre model had to be presented first, to learners of all backgrounds, before any change in production ability was demonstrated.

My methodology required the explicit approach of Genre teaching combined with the "facilitative

Action Research

Initiation, Preliminary Investigation

Hypothesis

Intervention

Follow-up

Evaluation and Communication

Reflection

Visual Medium

Discussion

Checklist

Examine Egs of style

Model of end product

Analysis of Model Product

Revised Checklist

Production Assessment

Reflection

New Production

Successful Writing

Positive Attitude

Journal Teaching

Writing Pedagogy

e.g. Metaphors, Strong Verbs, Ezra Pound Couplets, Dylan Thomas Pictures

Genre Theory

Journal Teaching

Media Studies

Multiliteracies

environment", Freedman (1994) requires learners to have: an environment filled with exposure to various genres of texts. Freedman was only referring to written texts though. This study proposed the inclusion of visual texts both in the understanding of structure and in the development of style.

2.1.4 Multiliteracies

The New London Group (1996) has advocated the inculcation of responsible and participative citizenship in our learners by enabling them to access the various literacies, which comprise our modern world. These literacies have a dynamic relationship with personal and social culture responding to oppressive or supportive forces within those literacies. Not only do we expose our learners to the variety of media experiences we encounter in our daily lives, we also instil a critical understanding of the functioning of these experiences and how learners can successfully participate in a modern world through manipulating these various media themselves.

"Our learners understand themselves in our modern context through talking about their mediated experiences, through writing about their mediated experiences. They learn about themselves by writing about themselves". (Emig, 1977)

My hypothesis was that if we examine the structure of a pervasive media product, a filmed advertisement, and then parallel the structure of that medium with the structure of a now less popular learning process, that of writing, through the mediation of orality, we should be able to lead the learners from a position of enthusiasm towards a popular entertainment to a position of enthusiasm for writing.

Masterman (1984) argues that educators will not succeed in their task of encouraging learners to think critically about the media if their approach to the media is one of critical disapproval. He advocates equipping learners with the skills and technical vocabulary whereby they will be able to analyse the various influences of the media in an informed manner thereby understanding the nature of their own "mediated experiences" (Storey, 1994).

The work of Buckingham and Sefton-Green (1994) shows that children come into a classroom with an emotional investment in their own media experiences. My research initially considered how the learners accessed their own understanding of the structure of media, particularly that of a visual advertisement and related that structure to their own understanding of the structure of their writing.

2.1.5 Conclusion

The process of writing is a complex one, given the features of the modern, visual and media-saturated world. Learners resist modes, which alienate them and deprive them of success. The world is saturated with the media, learners have low resistance to media exposure, and they do not consider media exposure to constitute "work". Educators who wish to intervene in the learning practices of their learners need to consider ways of yoking the interests of their learners to the skills they wish their learners to acquire. The model in Figure 1 summarises the process that I have described. I chose a spiral (side view), to show the concept of destination. The rings of the spiral are solid and touch their neighbours, reflecting the influence all steps of the process have on one another. The spiral itself may have a destination but it is not a terminus. It leads to a

new spiral in the tradition of Action Research. The research methodology and the pedagogy are two complementary parts of an entire learning process.

Chapter Two Part Two: Theoretical Framework for the Research Methodology.

2.2   Introduction

I chose the following theoretical framework for my research methodology because of the close

relationship it has with my political ideals, which include the development of learners as empowered

individuals. I believe that learners have a sense of their knowledge and ability but lack the

metacognition to access and articulate that ability. This type of research invited them to begin the

process of acquiring that metacognition.

Another important reason for my choice is the fact that I cannot separate myself from my identity as

a teacher, it is an integral part of who I am. Reflecting about my own teaching practice is part of

what I do as a teacher, it is a natural extension of my teaching process. This research has served to

concretise some of my reflections.

2.2.1 The teacher as researcher

John Dewey well understood the relationship between teaching as democratic work and the teacher

as researcher. He argued that one of the most important roles of a teacher was to investigate

pedagogical problems through inquiry. Writing of the "the teacher as investigator", Dewey saw

teachers as the most important enquirers into the successes and failures of the school - he did not

see how viable educational research could be produced in any other way. Not only did Dewey's

teacher investigations lead to knowledge about the school, but also they led to good teaching.

(Dewey, 1929:46-48, as quoted by Kincheloe, 1991: 12)

Kincheloe compares teachers to workers when he emphasises the value of their participation in the processes, which directly affect their work

> *The principle of the job as a place of learning.* Workers \ teachers who are encouraged to set their own goals by necessity must view the workplace as a laboratory. Workers are equal partners in research and development, as their "shop-level" experiences are valued as unique insights to the production process. In schools, teachers with their "child level" experiences are viewed similarly. (Kincheloe, 91:4)

As a teacher thoroughly immersed in the daily task of teaching, thinking about how I teach, why I teach what I teach and talking to my learners about the entire process, I believe that my voice is crucial to this research. How can an outside "expert" begin to understand the complex range of ratios that developed between my learners and myself and the learning process in my classroom?

My research must influence my praxis, as stated by Held,

> "Viewing research as praxis, we use our research to help participants (ourselves included) understand and change their situations." (1980: 191 as quoted by Kincheloe, 1991: 57)

The interest that I have in the educational process extends beyond being a better teacher, beyond hoping to create an environment in which my learners experience personal growth and success. I believe that good work must be shared with other like-minded educators. Kincheloe supports this opinion:

> When the teacher as researcher connects with other teachers as researchers and with college

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of education faculty interested in these ambiguities, contradictions, and tensions, a dynamic
process ensues. This is the basis of educational change, of critical pedagogy, of a
democratic workplace. (Kincheloe, 1991: 17)

Shor and Freire hold an even stronger view in this regard. If the teacher is not part of the "production of new knowledge" through participation in the research procedure,

> teachers lose the indispensable qualities that are mandated by knowledge production: critical reflection, a desire to act, discomfort, uncertainty, restless inquiry, etc. When such qualities disappear from teachers, schools become places where knowledge which supports dominant interests is stored and delivered... the symbiotic ties between teaching and research are not seen (Shor and Freire, 1987: 8).

The research in which I engage becomes a tool of empowerment for my learners, other educators and myself. In line with the ideals of the New London Group, my participation in my own research begins to contribute to the maintenance of critical democratic ideals because my voice is not subsumed by the "expert". Furthermore the voices of my learner are heard.

> One of the quickest ways to apply teacher research to the pursuit of good teaching, involves, simply, teachers listening to students. This "research on students" is a cardinal tenet of good teaching, as the teacher details his or her observations of the student as well as his or her reactions to the learner... As teachers come to understand how they themselves and their students construct understandings of the educational process, they can move themselves and turn their students into unknown territory, new frontiers of thinking. In this way teacher research revolutionises traditional conceptions of staff development, making it

a democratic, teacher-directed activity rather than a manifestation of the hierarchicalised imposition of the bad workplace. It promotes good work by assuming that teachers are knowledgeable and entitled to make decisions about their profession. (Wood 1988, 148-9).

This view is supported by Kincheloe

"The words of students are the core of teacher research. From this ore the teacher as researcher extracts valuable insights into the students' cognitive levels, their pedagogical intuitions, their political predispositions, and the themes they consider urgent." (Kincheloe, 1991: 22)

Extending Giroux's work into the realm of action research, Kincheloe argues that teachers are obligated to become researchers of themselves, revealing the interests implicit in their own teaching.

Our emancipatory system of meaning will alert teachers to the need to cultivate and listen to the voices of students, understanding from the beginning that student voices encompass complex and contradictory relationships between students and the world. Teachers operating on the basis of an emancipatory system of meaning will find the need to incorporate a variety of qualitative research strategies into their teaching repertoire. Making use of such strategies, teachers can uncover those often-concealed social constructions that shape particular curriculum structures, curriculum materials, and eventually the consciousness of students, teachers, administrators and community members.

Thus, teachers as researchers become active producers of meanings - not simply consumers. (Kincheloe, 1991: 34)

Teachers who participate in the research process themselves, are in the crucial position of affecting change in their own profession for reasons which they themselves have identified.

The principle of individual work as a contribution to social welfare. When workers/teachers employ this principle, they reconceptualise their work so that it serves the social good. If work is not socially ameliorative then it must be made so. Workers in a factory who produce items that are ecologically harmful contribute to the redesign of the product. Teachers who are faced with school policies, which serve to limit children's potential and or reproduce socio-economic inequality, change the policies. Teachers who are researchers are much more likely to recognise the socially deleterious effect certain educational strategies than non-researching teachers are. (Emery and Thorsrud, 1976: 159)

Having found a suitable model of research for myself as a teacher, I still felt that an important element had been omitted. I was loath to use my learners as subjects of scientific research. I needed to involve them in the process of this research if it was to come close to reflecting their development. The voice of my learners had to be heard. Therefore I adapted Action Research, which traditionally features teachers working collaboratively, and used my own students as part of the collaborative work. I still included my colleagues but their voices came second to those of the learners because this research is about the writing process of learners.

2.2.2 Action Research

The definition for the research model, which I have used, is best supplied by Kemmis and

McTaggart who have been credited with the revival of this research method

> Action research is participatory, collaborative research, which typically arises from the clarification of some concerns generally shared by a group. People describe their concerns, explore what others think, and probe to find what it might be possible to do. In the discussion, they decide what it is that would be feasible to work on - a group project. The group identifies a thematic concern. The thematic concern defines the substantive area in which the group decides to focus its improvement strategies. Group members plan action together, act and observe individually or collectively, and reflect together. They reformulate more critically informed plans deliberately - as the group consciously constructs its own understanding and history. (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)

Action research is by its definition not quantitative but qualitative as defined by Kincheloe in which he argues for the recognition of human beings as intelligent and emotional beings.

> *Efficiency as maximum productivity.* The productivity of humans and their machines can be measured only one way - quantitatively. Only in a social context where human beings and nature could be viewed in anyway other than intrinsically valuable could this assumption exist... The notion of efficiency becomes deified in bad work. Worshipping this false god, school supervisors in the school work place encourage modes of learning which answer to the goal of efficiency rather than the goal of human nurturing. Methods of evaluation are adopted on the basis of efficiency rather than on an appreciation of the attempt to learn about the learner, the forces which move him or her, and the possible pathways which might be taken to help them realise their potential. The subtle emotional forces, which move teachers and other workers to pursue excellence, are crushed by the search for efficiency.

(Kincheloe, 1991: 8)

Kincheloe provides a precise distinction between qualitative and quantitative research

> Qualitative research is distinguished from quantitative research in that quantitative research is concerned with frequency while qualitative research is concerned with abstract characteristics of events. Qualitative research maintains that many natural properties cannot be expressed in quantitative terms - indeed, they lose their reality if expressed simply in terms of frequency. Knowledge of human beings involves the understanding of qualities, which cannot be described through the exclusive use of numbers. As qualitative researchers direct their attention to the meanings given to events by participants, they come to understand more than what a list of descriptions or a table of statistics could support.
> (Kincheloe, 1991: 143)

My research required qualitative methods of assessment as I was dealing with the process of writing in my learners' development. I was not attempting to measure an improvement in their grades. The nature of my research called for a method that would consider emotional development and value that as substantially important. The use of learning logs in which my learners recorded the process of their development has proved to be an essential instrument in monitoring their development.

> Critical social science promotes self-reflection, which results in attitudinal changes. The basis of these changes rests on insights into causalities in the past. Individuals, as Habermas argues, thus come to know themselves by bringing to consciousness the process by which their perspectives were formed. Action which is to be taken by individuals to correct social and thus individual pathologies can be *negotiated* once self reflection has taken place...teachers who engage in critical research are never certain of the exact path of action

they will take as a result of their inquiry (Popkewitz, 1981 a: 15-16).

The definition of Action Research provided by Cohen and Manion, complements the desire for change that prompted my research cycle. They describe action research as being primarily situational, being concerned with the identification of specific issues in a described context. The goal of action research is stated to be the improvement of the status quo, within the educational context of the research. (1985)

The problem that I had identified was one, which concerned all my colleagues in the English department. More importantly, it also concerned my learners. Change was introduced through the consent and co-operation of the learners, who were immediately affected by this research. A partnership was entered into between the learners and the teachers. The learning experience was removed from the isolation of a laboratory and into the lives of real people. As envisioned by the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988)

> Action research can be seen as an approach for groups of educational practitioners, students' parents and others to live with the complexity of real experience while, at the same time, striving for concrete improvement. It is a way of managing complex situations critically and practically... in its developed form, it offers all participants in the work of education a flexible approach to school improvement through critically informed action and reflection which is appropriate to the real, complex and often confusing circumstances and constraints of the modern school.

2.2.3 Why Action Research?

Questions about non-measurable outcomes such as the dignity of the labourer in the workplace or student happiness in the educational workplace are irrelevant in systems analysis. Questions concerning the tacit professional knowledge of teachers and the subtle actions they take to connect learning to life, to ground learning in humane and ethical concerns, or to make students feel secure, are suppressed by the [systems efficiency and cost benefit analysis] research model. Questions about teacher happiness, control of the conceptualisation of their work, and their dignity, as professionals are deemed trivial and unscientific. (House, 1978: 394, 401)

The primary reason that I had for adopting this research model is that I respect my learners and I believe that their voices should be heard and that they should contribute to a *collective* understanding of their writing skills. I believe that they are able to produce insights into their own learning processes, which are of great value to the educator. The learners are participants in determining the nature of the learning and research spiral. They determine the course of action in collaboration with the teacher. I also believe that by giving my learners participation rights in their educative process, I am encouraging them to begin to function as citizens in a true democracy, where nothing is accepted without thorough scrutiny, where authority is held in the critical will of the people.

The serious caution given against this research model must be given careful consideration.

Teachers are being trained to view action research in schools as a form of inquiry into the best techniques to produce pre-specified curriculum objectives or increases in standardised test scores... it is only a matter of time before action research will be promoted as the newest strategy to help teachers improve pupil achievement in order to meet national

curriculum targets. (Elliott, 1989 a: 6)

I believe that the process that I adopted had as its secondary goal, the improvement of the written communication skills of my learners, however, the main goal of my research was to bring the learners to a point where they understood their own development and gained their own voice through a new medium. Creative writing is not about meeting a curricular target; it is about expressing the individualistic self.

Action Research allowed me, as observer-participant, the opportunity to consider themes and issues that arose as the work progressed. I consider writing, and teaching writing, to be subjective processes and therefore a quantitative methodology may show a difference in marks, which could be influenced merely by the learners' developing maturity, the personality of the teacher or the novelty of their participation in research work, but would not sufficiently serve to record the changes within the learners' attitudes towards their own writing abilities. In this way, the aims of Cohen and Manion (1985) would be achieved.

Action Research offered me the opportunity to observe how the learning community with which I worked reacted and responded. It allowed me to note cognitive changes as well as affective responses. I believe that statistical data cannot effectively reflect this level of development. While the level of enjoyment may appear to be high or low, this could simply be the learners' attempts at guessing what the teacher is looking for and providing imagined desirable responses without actually engaging in the work at the level hoped for by the educator, which is why the learners' work will also be considered as part of the data study.

The research was not only about subjective attitudes, but also about an enhanced ability to write

creatively. For the interpretation of this data, the comments of my colleagues formed part of my research as they too noted different changes in their learners' work and referred that to past experiences with learners and creative writing.

A further advantage of this research approach was that it allowed me to take into account the media experiences of the learners outside of their classrooms; the writing experiences of learners outside the classroom and in their previous creative writing experiences and attitudes. All of these factors could be considered influences on their creative writing practice.

Finally, Action Research by its cyclical nature reflects more realistically the nature of the classroom and the teacher. The learning environment is not a closed, static environment. The learners and teachers constantly negotiate new meaning and new ways of accessing and expressing their understanding of that meaning. The cycle is not finite. Learning is never a completed process.

2.2.4 The research process

The research process I used is adapted from the procedure of Action Research as described by Nunan (92: 19) because it provides a logical development of the cyclical process that is an integral part of Action Research. I prefer to use the term "Communication" for step 6. Some of the steps have not yet been completed in great detail such as steps 6 and 7 but that is because this is part of a longer process of which this report itself is a part, especially of step 6.

Step 1: Initiation

Step 2: Preliminary investigation

Step 3: Hypothesis (Premises)

Step 4: Intervention

Step 5: Evaluation

Step 6: Dissemination (Communication)

Step 7: Follow up

Chapter three: The Action Research Cycle

3.1 Introduction

The formal process of this cycle of research, which would examine the attitudes and abilities of learners as writers, began close to the beginning of this year (1999) and extended until May. (The idea had been in germination since 1996). As the study progressed, it became clear to me that the responses and reflections of the learners were showing a level of sophistication not entirely evident in their formal written work. It appeared that the genre of reflective writing, commenting about their learning, was easier to master than the genre of the more poetic descriptive writing. This meant that metacognition was easier to access than production of descriptive writing.

3.2 Initiation

The problem, which was discussed with my colleagues, concerned the difficulties learners were experiencing in expressing themselves in writing, as discussed in the introduction. Their inability to achieve success in this field had led to a lack of motivation and a loss of self-esteem.

Discussions with learners and teachers, as discussed in chapter one, indicated that a number of issues contributed to this condition. The first issue was that learners and teachers felt that the requirements for successful creative writing were uncertain and generally subjective. Some guidelines for assessing creative writing had been circulated (see Table 1) but these guidelines only assisted teachers in channelling their gut responses or their instincts into marks.

The guidelines produced did not assist the learners in producing writing with which they and their teachers were satisfied. Their attitude towards their writing did not change at all.

3.3 Preliminary investigation

Observation notes were compiled from the following sources: notes of the learners' attitudes towards their own writing which were derived from informal classroom discussions with learners, consultations between teachers and learners and learners' learning logs. Notes were made commenting on classroom interaction between the students and the teacher. Notes were made in the teacher journal in which reflections on the creative writing process and issues, which were problematic in this field, had been recorded. Comments were collected from teachers who have taught and assessed creative writing. These comments reflect their own difficulties and successes.

Learners were involved in several discussions around issues, which would assist them in producing writing with which they would feel comfortable and successful and which would prove to be successful in the assessment process.

Colleagues were consulted regularly to consider possible options for alternative methods to make creative writing explicit.

3.4 Premises (Hypothesis)

Several premises formed the basis of this inquiry.

The first premise was that there is no division between different kinds of literacy skills. In other words, the ability to understand a visual sequence and its structure is not that different from the ability to read a piece of prose writing and to understand its structure. This premise asserts that a modal leap is possible.

The second premise built on the notion of a modal leap by asserting that the skill acquired and exercised in analysing one mode should complement the development of the skill of production in another mode.

The third premise was that the process of making skills and goals explicit to the learners in the genre model is an essential step to be taken in changing learners' abilities and attitudes.

The final premise was that there is an interaction between the understanding of theory and implementation of theory in practice; because the desired result has been made explicit, the desired product is produced.

3.5 Intervention

The strategy that was developed to counter the problems identified in steps one and two was as follows:

The learners were asked to record their attitudes to their own writing in a learning log. They were then shown a video of an advertisement. After the viewing, the structure of the commercial was analysed and carefully discussed. Learners were then required to compile checklist features, which should be apparent in creative writing. Their final step was to produce their own writing and reflect on their new position.

I decided to use an advertisement that was given to me by a representative of the advertising company, Lindsay Smithers FCB, for the purpose of teaching English. This particular commercial was also featured on television as part of the Cannes 1995 advertising awards. (See the description in the introduction.)

I had a number of reasons for this choice: the advertisement is short, 1:24 minutes, making a thorough scrutiny of its structure practical within the constraints of class time.

The advertisement appeals to the age group of my learners. While it has a risqué component, the advertisement is found acceptable by myself as Head of Department as the issue of safe sex is one that features prominently in our education programme.

An advertisement contains all the elements of a film in a reduced format; most of the writing learners do is on a reduced scale. They do not write theses or novels, they write short essays, usually never longer than two and half foolscap pages.

Learners enjoy watching advertisements for pleasure. I have often engaged in casual conversations with my learners about some or other exciting new advertisement. Seldom is the conversation about the product being sold, it is usually about the wit, pleasure, shock value of this visual experience.

The particular advertisement I chose was designed to appeal to the youth market, associating attitude, style, rebellion and sex appeal with their product. It is also composed like a short story, containing enough elements to create the sense of a complete story.

I wanted to improve the learners' ability to write creatively through a focus on their reflective and analytic skills. One of the arguments in favour of this approach is the impending implementation of Outcomes Based Education, which requires focus to be placed on knowledge, skills and attitudes rather than the simple assessment of knowledge.

I hoped that this approach would give the learners a "portable" skill, one that they could transfer to any field of learning. This skill was the ability to critically analyse a mode of media.

The intervention was structured around an initial cycle of sixteen steps. These steps were taken over the period already indicated above. All three grade ten teachers followed these steps as we share our planning and work towards a common scheme. In weekly meetings we discussed progress, problems and consolidated work done to date. This ensured consistent pedagogical practice.

Step 1: This took place mainly outside of the scope of the research because it drew the learners'

attention to work which they had done in the previous grade. This was work around imagery, strong verbs and rhythm. Three 40-minute periods were spent revising this knowledge and discussing the interactive new notes.

Step 2: The learners were asked to make a note of their current attitude towards their own creative writing and to keep a journal, reflecting their ongoing attitude towards creative writing. They were also asked to write down briefly what they knew about creative writing. Learners were asked to indicate whether the marking of creative writing was merely a subjective process or whether there were specific criteria for which examiners allocate marks. This took place during one 40-minute lesson and further written responses were done for homework.

Step 3: Steps 3-5 took place in the same lesson. At this stage, the learners were asked to indicate what constituted a good television or film advertisement. They were told that their response should not be with reference to the selling power of the advertisement, but rather the enjoyability of the viewing experience. The Levi's commercial was then watched in a joint session with all the grade ten learners. This took place during a double period of 80 minutes in total. The viewing was guided and a discussion followed this input.

Step 4: The advertisement was critically analysed by means of the following guiding questions: (This took place during step 2.)

1.   Briefly, summarise the plot of the advertisement

2.   How has period been established/ contrasted?

3.   Discuss how conventional story line ideas have been used and how they have been subverted.