ABSTRACT

This paper describes an alternative approach to the teaching of concepts related to the English Curriculum. It combines a shift in the theory of school teaching with psychological theory development. This research was conducted at a private, Catholic Secondary School in Johannesburg over a period of almost six months with a class of twenty Grade Ten students. The research was designed in response to the fact that many traditional, 'rote' teaching methods are not effective in the classroom and that an alternative needs to be found. This research aimed at testing the theories of the Socio-historical school in order to ascertain whether they could provide clues as to methods that might be more conducive to real learning. Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical construct of the Zone of Proximal Development, Hedegaard's (1996) idea of a 'double move' and the ideas posited by Wells (1996, 1999) and Tharp and Gallimore (1988, 1992) form the theoretical basis for these 'alternative' teaching methods. The results shown in this paper indicate that a 'double move' is possible within the context of the English classroom and that the ideas of the Socio-historical school indeed provide an alternative method that is far more successful than those traditionally used in most classrooms.

Socio-historical school / zone of proximal development / Vygotsky / double move / Hedegaard / Wells / Tharp and Gallimore / generative teaching / collaboration / mediation

I hereby declare that this is my own unaided work, and has not been submitted to any other institution.

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Michelle Ann Pinheiro

At _____ on _____

Why Vygotsky? A look at alternative methods of Teaching and Learning in the English Classroom.

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This research report is written in partial fulfillment for the M.Ed degree at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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THE GENERAL AIM OF THIS RESEARCH:

This research – using a case study methodology - aims to test the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development and some of the ideas surrounding Activity Theory proposed by the Russian Socio-historical School - comprising of the initial work of Vygotsky (1978) and the extension of his ideas by his fellow researchers, Leontiev and Luria (1985 - 1987). This research will take place within a classroom environment and will combine school teaching with psychological theory development. This research will utilize the work of Hedegaard and her (1996) idea of a 'double move' as well as the ideas of Wells (1996 and1999) and Tharp and Gallimore (1988 and 1992).

The research detailed below aims to shift the perceptions of twenty students at Grade Ten level – fifteen and sixteen-year-olds - in a number of areas of the English syllabus. It also aims at increasing the enjoyment and confidence of these students in order that they gain competence and improve their skills. The focus of this piece of research will be on the acquisition of the following concepts: Parts of Speech within the Language component of the syllabus; Summary Writing within the Writing / Language component and the writing of a Literature Essay within the Literature component. The aim of this research is to test some of the educational theories of the Socio-historical School and to increase the students' enjoyment and application of English skills. The class involved in this teaching experiment is not streamed according to ability, so there are students who are gifted and able to use language skills with ease and some who struggle with even simple concepts such as basic sentence structure and vocabulary.

LITERATURE SURVEY:

As this research will be conducted with a class of girls, I have used the personal pronouns, 'she' and 'her' throughout this paper for ease of reference. The term may be read as she/he.

Useful theoretical tools:

This research has been designed utilizing the theoretical construct of the Zone of Proximal Development as outlined by Vygotsky (1985 – 1987) as well as the extension of his ideas by his

fellow researchers, Luria and Leontiev (the Russian Socio-historical School) which encompass the notions surrounding Activity Theory. This research design has been greatly influenced by the work of Mariane Hedegaard (1996) whose research with Danish elementary students utilized the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development within a classroom situation. Hedegaard (1996, p 171) states that, "As an analytic tool for evaluation of school children's development in connection with schooling, this concept [of the Zone of Proximal Development] is of great value." Hedegaard (1996) proposes that a 'double move' is possible in helping students to explore scientific concepts and help them apply these in their everyday conceptions. This research will attempt to verify that a 'double move' is possible with the teaching of English Language, Writing and Literature concepts. A further refinement of the ideas posited by Hedegaard (1996) are those put forward by Wells (1999) where groups are formed within a class and their activities are monitored and adapted according to the progress each group makes. Both the ideas of Hedegaard (1996) and Wells (1999) will be used in the design of this research. The work of Tharp and Gallimore (1992 and 1988) in the area of 'assisted performance' will also be referred to in great detail as many of their ideas reflect my own practice and complement the ideas of Wells (1996 and 1999) and Hedegaard (1996).

I have attempted to link each idea posited below to the work of the key researchers used in support of the ideas outlined in this paper. There are, therefore, many quotations and references to the work of Hedegaard (1996), Tharp and Gallimore (1992 and 1998), Wells (1999) in particular, especially in the Literature Review.

Some ideas about education

The literature surveyed for this paper seems to support the claim that 'traditional' methods of pedagogy do not seem to lead to effective learning and that such 'traditional' methods of teaching are not effective. Many of the ideas posited by the Vygotskian theorists consulted for this literature review support the claim that an alternative approach needs to be adopted within classrooms in order to halt the 'ossification' of both students and teachers involved in the process of 'education'. The literature review below is an attempt to assemble evidence in support of such an approach.

Two ideas that are closely linked in this regard, are those of a 'generative' approach to teaching as outlined in the teaching model later in this research report, as well as those of the theoretical construct of the Zone of Proximal Development and other ideas concerning pedagogy, developed by Vygotsky (1978) and his 'collaborators' of the Socio-historical School, Leontiev and Luria (1968). Moll (1990, p 15) states that,

> "[V]ygotsky's primary contribution was in developing a general approach that brought education, as a fundamental human activity, fully into a theory of psychological development. Human pedagogy, in all its forms, is the defining characteristic of his approach, the central concept in his system."

Wertsch (1990, p 113) agrees with Moll (1990) and makes the further claim that Vygotsky's 'sociocultural' approach to mind can be characterized according to three areas:

> "[1] a reliance on genetic (i.e. , developmental) analysis; (2) the claim that higher mental functions in the individual have their origins in social life; and (3) the claim that an essential key to understanding human social and psychological processes is the tools and signs used to mediate them."

This research will not delve into the area of genetic analysis, but it will examine closely, the last two areas outlined by Wertsch (1990) as these have particular relevance to the proposed shift that will be attempted with the students in my classroom.

The second point made by Wertsch (1990) concerning the importance of the social will be one that is discussed in great detail in this literature review. Moll (1990, p ix) maintains that modern education neglects the, "[P]aramount importance of contextual factors to thinking" and the fact that very few teachers seem to recognize that, "[C]ognition is embedded in the social and cultural world." According to Rosa and Montero (1990, p 83), "[C]ognition is a social product that is achieved through interaction." Cole (1990, p 91) makes the claim that,

> "[T]he fundamental postulate of their approach [the Socio-historical school] is that human psychological functions differ from the psychological processes of other animals because they are *culturally mediated, historically developing,* and arise from *practical activity*." (Emphasis in original)

The idea that all knowledge is embedded in a social context is of extreme importance when we as teachers are planning a curriculum, structuring exercises for a class or deciding on the most effective pedagogical methods to use in order to make learning a meaningful and lasting

experience for our students. To isolate the child from her context and to disregard the importance of the social in the learning process is, in my opinion, to make 'learning' a meaningless and fruitless task. Rote methods of pedagogy requiring regurgitation of endless facts by students, serves no purpose except to frustrate and bore them. Wells (1999, p 54) states, that for Vygotsky,

> "[H]uman development is thus not simply a matter of biological maturation; it is immeasurably enriched and extended through the individual's appropriation and mastery of the cultural inheritance as this is encountered in activity and interaction with others. As Vygotsky (1981) put it, the intellectual abilities that make us distinctively human 'are a copy from social interaction; all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships'."

According to Blanck (1990, p 50) who cites the opinion of Azcoaga (1988),

> "[V]ygotsky's most important contribution was to acknowledge children as active agents in the educational process… Children are also conceived of as the objects or receivers of instruction. Pedagogy has usually operated on the supposition that children are 'receivers' of instruction and not, as they certainly are, *elaborators* of the contents presented to them." (Emphasis in original)

Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 19) concur with the views outlined above.

> "[V]ygotsky argued that a child's development cannot be understood by a study of the individual; one must also examine the external social world in which that individual life has developed. In schools, we can understand the child's developing mind by studying the social interactions of teaching and learning."

Ironically, it seems as if little of what Vygotsky (1978) called 'living knowledge' enters into the domain of most modern classrooms. Tharp and Gallimore (1989) as cited in Moll (1990, p 11) refer to the kind of 'learning' that occurs in most classrooms as a,

> "[R]ecitation script. Students generally sit silently, follow directions, read assigned texts, fill out work sheets and take tests. Little dialogue or interactive teaching, as would characterize a zone of proximal development, forms part of the routines of schooling."

Wertsch, (1990, p 121) concurs with the claim made by Tharp and Gallimore (1989) above. He terms the discourse that happens within most classrooms as 'Decontextualised'. Wertsch (1990) claims that, "[A] great deal of the activity of formal instruction focuses on encouraging children to master discourse grounded in decontextualised forms of representation." It seems to me, that

the discourse of formal schooling needs to change in order that learning experiences become meaningful and accessible to the students engaged with it. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p14) add to their definition of a 'recitation script' by stating that,

> "[I]t consists of a series of unrelated teacher questions that require convergent factual answers and student display of (presumably) known information. Recitation questioning seeks predictable, correct answers."

Wells (1999) argues strongly that teachers are often constrained by external circumstances which they perceive of as being beyond their control and which 'forces' them into a certain type of role in the classroom. Many teachers are afraid of change. They are well-established within their comfort zones and 'new' ideas make them nervous. They are afraid to deviate from the 'syllabus' because of the 'examination' and they teach to a prescription in order to achieve a certain set of desired 'results' from their students.

> "[A]s Edwards and Mercer (1987) have argued, when there is a conflict between espoused beliefs and perceived external requirements, teacher's actual practices are likely to be swayed by the latter. It is difficult for them to adopt innovative practices when these practices are not supported by educational administrators and by the wider community of parents and other interested stakeholders." (Wells, 1999, p 52)

Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 21) state that in order to move towards a system that is more conducive to real, meaningful learning,

> "[*T*]*eaching must be redefined as assisted performance. Teaching consists in assisting performance. Teaching is occurring when performance is achieved with assistance.*" (Emphasis in original)

Teaching as "assisted performance" is an extremely appealing notion which will be outlined in greater detail below. It opens up a wide scope of possibilities within a classroom and I can see that it has the potential to be of great value. I plan to use this idea posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) extensively during the lessons conducted for this research paper. Wells (1999, p 59) supports the claims made here about the type of education that is not conducive to learning:

> "[L]earning is not dependent on teaching; still less is it dependent on participation in the activity system found in most contemporary schools. Indeed, as it is increasingly being recognized, with their emphasis on transmitting cultural knowledge and skills through the delivery of curricula designed independently of the needs and aspirations of the

> recipients, these institutions often impede rather than facilitate learning by mistakenly conceptualizing and evaluating learning as the product, or outcome of instruction."

Vygotsky (1987, p 169 as cited in Moll, 1990 p 2) wrote about the importance of the social organization of instruction and called it the,

> "[U]nique form of cooperation between the child and the adult that is the central element of the educational process… knowledge is transferred to the child in a definite system."

According to the surveyed literature and outlined above, classrooms are places where a specific mode of discourse is practiced – 'scientific' discourse, and it is up to the teacher to help the student make and negotiate meaning of that discourse and turn it into 'everyday' language. If the teacher does not help the child to achieve this shift, then in my opinion, she has not fulfilled her role as an educator. Effective teaching – assisted performance - only seems to happen when the teacher has achieved a high level of competence in her subject matter and she is unafraid of moving in any direction that either the subject matter or the students move her. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 17) claim the following in this regard, "[T]o do more than manage activities and allow students to learn on their own, teachers must command the knowledge and skills they seek to impart."

Hedegaard (1996) uses this notion of extreme teacher competence as one of the cornerstones of her research because as she claims, the teacher has to have the knowledge in order to 'move' the students to the desired outcome. Hedegaard's (1996) ideas will be discussed in greater detail below. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 18) claim that subject competence is not enough. In order that a teacher is effective, she must have a thorough knowledge of pedagogical methods to complement her subject knowledge. Among the various methods listed by Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 18) are,

> "[U]se of instructional objectives, positive and efficient classroom and behaviour management, provision of effective and varied activities, properly conducted recitation and drill, orderly monitoring and assessment of progress, checking for comprehension, and any number of other expert practices. The fully professional teacher will command all of these useful and desirable practices and learn to apply them to those aspects of the curricula for which they are most efficient."

Minick (1987b as cited in Moll 1990 p 10) writes that Vygotsky ,

> ”[F]elt that formal instruction in writing and grammar, for instance, by refocusing attention from the content of communication to the means of communication, provided the foundations for the development of conscious awareness of important aspects of speech and language.”

The fact is that the discourse practiced in schools is a totally different form of communication, where the words themselves are, “[T]he object of study.” (Moll, 1990, p 10) It is up to the teacher to enable students to make meaning of the discourse and to make learning meaningful. It seems to me, that the child will not achieve self-regulation (see more below) if the discourse of the classroom is not made meaningful. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 16) support the claim about self-regulation not being achieved by most students, even in ‘more effective’ classrooms because,

> “[T]eachers spend most of their time assigning activities, monitoring to be sure the pupils are on task, directing recitation sessions to assess how well children are doing and providing corrective feedback in response to pupil errors. Seldom does one observe … teaching in which a teacher presents a skill, a strategy or a process to pupils, shows them how to do it, provides assistance as they make initial attempts to perform the task and assures that they can be successful.”

According to Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 193),

> “[A]ll concepts develop through language use accompanying joint activity. Everyday concepts are closely tied to the specific objects and conditions that their names represent. The word for that object is a part of the object, an attribute of the object as integral as its colour, smell or size. Words, in the everyday realm, cannot be detached and manipulated in the young child’s mind separately from the image the phenomenon represented.”

This is a key factor overlooked in most classrooms where ‘real life’ is banned and where children are not allowed to link their knowledge with their everyday conceptions. The more children talk about their learning, the more they are challenged to explore ideas and make and negotiate their own meaning the more successful their ‘learning’ will be. Why is it then, that so few teachers are using collaboration as an integral part of their practice? I plan, as a part of this research to conduct a survey with my students, asking them about effective teaching styles and methods and to highlight which types of ‘learning’ they find to be most successful (Appendix 1). I am convinced that the evidence will be overwhelmingly in favour of successfully structured, teacher – assisted, collaborative learning situations.

An extension of Vygotsky's ideas – the Socio-historical school's notion of 'activity settings'

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 189) make the claim that where collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity and assisted performance occur, "[W]hen *teaching* occurs – [such settings] are referred to as *activity settings.*" (Emphasis in original) An activity setting, according to Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 190),

> "[I]ncorporates the two essential features: the cognitive and motoric action itself (activity); and the external, environmental, and objective features of the occasion (setting). They are the who, what, where, when, where and why, the small recurrent dramas of everyday life, played on the stages of home, community, and workplace."

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 192) explain further that, "[F]or each of the [three] legs of Vygotsky's theory of education, there is a crucial concept. For the theory of teaching, the zone of proximal development is the cornerstone. For the theory of schooling, activity settings are the key. For a theory of literacy, the most important Vygotskian concept is *word meaning.*" The end-product of any activity is the achievement of a goal towards which all participants involved in the activity should move. All three of these areas will be addressed within this research paper and this quotation has particular relevance when it is noted that the area of the curriculum that will be addressed, is English.

There will be a number of references to 'activity settings' in this Literature review. In all instances, it is the definition outlined above that is to be used as the point of reference.

The potential for learning – the idea of the zone of proximal development

Hedegaard (1996, page 171) maintains that, "[V]ygotsky's zone of proximal development connects a general psychological perspective on child development with a pedagogical perspective on instruction." Bruner (1987) as cited in Moll (1990, p 3) makes the claim that the zone of proximal development, "[S]erves to give connectedness to a wide range of Vygotsky's thought." According to Wells (1999, p 313), Vygotsky defines the zone of proximal development as,

> "[T]he 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, p 86)

Moll (1990, p 3) puts this very succinctly when he maintains that the zone of proximal development allows for, "[P]erformance before competence." The theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development is one which is of vital importance because it allows the individual to advance within her own context and capabilities. It attributes significance to communication and collaboration and allows for 'real life' to happen at the same time as 'learning'. The theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development should, in my opinion, be used as the basis for all lesson design and 'teaching'.

The zone of proximal development therefore, seems to encompass each person's range of potential for learning. An extension of the idea of individual learning is one that has been used in the design of the lessons for this research paper: where the task itself encompasses the range of the zone of proximal development and the class as a whole or the groups within a class can move through the stages that are necessary in order to achieve competence in the set task. Each individual child will move through a generic, set activity and achieve her *own* level of competence for that particular task. An extremely important fact when considering the construct of the zone of proximal development is that *each individual task has its own unique zone of proximal development.* Each series of lessons designed by a teacher has to formulate a new zone of proximal development for that task.

The teacher has to be aware of the capabilities of her students and set activities that allow each student to achieve her maximum potential by the completion of the set activity. This is an extremely complex and time-consuming exercise for the teacher and as stated previously, the teacher has to be highly competent and exceptionally knowledgeable as to the range and ability of her students. The series of lessons designed for this research paper aimed to meet this criteria operating within the zone of proximal development. Each series of lessons is different and uses various means in order to move students through the stages of the zone of proximal development for that specific task. It is vital that the teacher has the understanding that the zone of proximal development is never a generic concept that can be applied across any aspect of the syllabus –

meticulous planning and care has to be taken so that the task is designed in order that movement through the stages of the zone of proximal development is incorporated into the proposed lessons.

Moll (1990, p 13) proposes the following idea based on his understanding of Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development which I find very appealing. I have based much of my own thinking surrounding the design of the lessons which I will be using to conduct the research for this paper on this notion of a '[D]ifferent perspective of change' suggested by Moll (1990, p 13) where,

> "[T]he focus would be on the appropriation and mastery of mediational means, such as writing, assessed not only or necessarily through independent performance after guided practice but by the ability of children to participate in qualitatively new collaborative activities."

This idea proposed by Moll (1990) seems to me to be closely linked to that of Hedegaard (1996) - whose paper on the use of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school in a classroom environment provided the inspiration for this report; as well as those of Tharp and Gallimore (1996) and Wells (1999).

Moll (1990, p 13) goes on to explain that the focus of such lessons or activities would not concern the 'transferring' of skills from learners who 'know more' to those who 'know less', "[B]ut on the collaborative use of mediational means to create, obtain and negotiate meaning." The role of the adult (in this case the teacher) is to, "[A]ssist children in appropriating or taking control of their own learning." The lessons designed for this research paper will demand this agency from the students. The collaboration with peers and the teacher and the mediation of the texts and materials will also demand active participation from the students. It is hoped that the lessons will indicate the fruitfulness of this approach. Moll (1990, p 14) goes on to argue that such an approach within a classroom is,

> "[C]onsistent with what Vygotsky (1987) felt was the essential characteristic of school instruction: the introduction of conscious awareness into many domains of activity; that is, children acquiring control and mastery of psychological processes through the manipulation of tools of thinking such as reading and writing. As Bruner (1986, p 132) has put it, it is this 'loan of consciousness' that gets children through the zone of proximal development."

The role of instruction

It seems that most of the researchers consulted for this paper (Tharp and Gallimore (1996), Moll (1990), Wertsch (1990), Wells (1999) amongst others) concur that many teachers have been inadequately trained to assist performance or facilitate in collaborative learning situations. It is for this reason, that many classrooms are places where both students and teachers are bored and frustrated. Using the ideas of the Socio-historical school will assist teachers in designing and implementing effective strategies in order that real learning occurs and students are actively engaged in their own learning activities. Preparing lessons that excite and stimulate students is an extremely rewarding experience and highly motivating for the teacher who cares about her practice. Moll (1990, p 12) states that according to Vygotsky, (1978) the use of the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development within a classroom setting must,

> "[N]ot only analyse teaching and learning as part of extant instructional practices but create fundamentally new, advanced instructional activities; in other words, produce learning by facilitating new forms of mediation."

With collaboration between her peers and her teacher and through the exploration of her environment through the materials and tasks she is assigned, the child will be able to move through the stages of the zone of proximal development and create 'everyday' concepts which will make learning experiences meaningful and life-long. This will only be achieved if the teaching methods employed are innovative and designed to create new experiences. The child has to be actively involved in and engaged with the learning process. She needs to be challenged by the materials and the experiences with which she is presented and she needs to feel a sense of responsibility and agency for her own learning.

According to Wells (1999, p 328), there is,

> "[T]he increased understanding among educators that teaching involves much more than appropriately selecting and delivering a standardized curriculum and assessing the extent to which it has been correctly received. Teaching certainly involves preparation, instruction and assessment; but to be truly effective it also involves the ongoing co-construction of each student's zpd and on-the-spot judgments about how best to facilitate his or her learning in the specific activity setting in which he or she is engaged."

Teachers themselves have to move through their own zones of proximal development for each task. They need to consult with their own peers and colleagues and decide on the most appropriate strategies to use within their own classrooms in order that they can then 'move' their students. If an activity does not achieve the desired outcome for a group of learners, then it is the responsibility of the teacher to do a recursion through the zone of proximal development for that task and re-work the process.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 24) claim that,

> "[T]eaching is a complex, humane activity at which a teacher can grow steadily more proficient over the years by means of disciplined curiosity, continuous training and skilful assistance.'

It seems that teachers must be more carefully trained and guided throughout their years of practice in order that they too achieve their maximum performance and potential within their own classrooms. Teachers should, it seems, be trained in collaborative settings and assisted themselves in order that they are confident enough to step back and allow 'real' learning to occur within their classrooms. It seems that many teachers are afraid that they will 'lose control' and that their 'discipline' will be questioned if they allow for collaborative learning situations within their classrooms. This supposed 'loss of control' has been the common perception since the introduction of Outcomes Based Education which, in the misguided opinion of many teachers, simply means arbitrary 'group work'. (These ideas will be explored below.)

According to Hedegaard (1996, p 172) Vygotsky (1978) wrote that it is important to define both levels in the child's development if we want to establish the relation between, "[T]he child's process of development and the possibilities of instruction." The most important characteristic of instruction according to Vygotsky (1978) is that it creates the zone of proximal development. This is why the zone of proximal development is, "[A]n analytic tool necessary to plan instruction and to explain its results." (Hedegaard, 1996 p 172) Instruction is said to create the zone of proximal development because once the teacher has assessed the child's actual level of development she can plan instruction accordingly and 'move' the child to where she achieves her potential level of development, using the tools of mediation at her disposal. This research aimed at utilizing this approach.

Some researchers, it seems, believe that the zone of proximal development has no practical application within a class or group setting. There is much evidence pointing to the fact that such a view might be misguided. Daniels, (2001, p 13) for example, maintains that,

> "[W]e should certainly read Vygotsky's texts and try to understand what he had to say; but, in appropriating his ideas and putting them to use, we should also be willing to transform those ideas so that they can be of greatest use in meeting the demands of our own situations."

The above quotation highlights that it is possible to use and adopt different approaches when utilizing the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development within different contexts. Hedegaard (1996) maintains that it is possible to establish the zone of proximal development of an entire class and modify instruction accordingly. Her 1996 research seems to support this claim, as does the research which is outlined in this paper. The notion of using group work activities to test whether 'more capable others' could help make a shift in perceptions was an integral part of the research design for this unit of study. The notions of Hedegaard (1996) and Wells (1999) were both used during the lessons designed for this research. The teaching of English allows for a great deal of scope and variation in the approach adopted by the teacher and the degree of engagement with which students approach set tasks. It is possible to set a generic question and for students to engage with and answer that question at completely different levels. The level at which students will engage with the material is also different, according to their level of maturity. Moll (1990, p 3) states that, "[M]aturing or developing mental functions must be fostered and assessed through collaborative, not independent or isolated activities." The importance of collaboration will be tested through the lessons designed for this research report.

Scientific and everyday concepts

Moll (1990, p 9) maintains that Vygotsky (1978) placed great emphasis on two characteristics of instruction. "[O]ne was the development of conscious awareness and voluntary control of knowledge, which he thought of primarily as a product of instruction." The second, according to Kozulin (1990, p 223), is that Vygotsky (1978) believed that scientific concepts – only acquired through formal instruction as school-based knowledge - occur in advance of everyday concepts and that through careful instruction these scientific concepts become a part of the child's

everyday knowledge. Vygotsky (1978) called this, his 'General Law of Cultural Development' where:

> "[I]n working its slow way upwards, an everyday concept clears the path for a scientific concept in its downward development. It creates a series of structures necessary for the evolution of a concept's more primitive, elementary aspects, which give it body and vitality. Scientific concepts in turn, supply structures for the upward development of the child's spontaneous concepts towards consciousness and deliberate use."(Kozulin, 1990, p 223).

This 'General Law of Cultural Development' will be discussed in great detail below. The definition cited above is to be used whenever this construct is referred to in this paper.

In order to make learning meaningful and applicable to the life of the child, the child needs to learn to use these scientific concepts voluntarily and manipulate them at will in order to achieve mastery and control over them. It is when the child can achieve mastery over scientific concepts, that scientific knowledge has become deeply embedded and has become a part of the child's 'retrievable system' of everyday knowledge. The child will then be capable of achieving self-regulation – which should be the end-point, according to Vygotsky (1978) of any 'learning' experience. (More on self-regulation below).

Hedegaard (1996 p 179) further argues that while it is the task of the school to pass on knowledge and skills, children often do not necessarily develop a, "[T]heoretical orientation towards reality." According to Daniels (2001, p 50),

> "[F]or Vygotsky scientific concepts are characterized by a high degree of generality and their relationship to objects as mediated through other concepts. By the use of 'scientific concept' Vygotsky referred to concepts introduced by a teacher in school, and spontaneous concepts were those that were acquired by the child outside contexts in which explicit instruction was in place. Scientific concepts were described as those which form a coherent, logical, hierarchical system. According to Vygotsky (1987) children can make deliberate use of scientific concepts, they are constantly aware of them and can reflect on them."

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 193) cite Minick as follows,

> "[T]he Russian *nauchnoe ponyatie* may be translated (Vygotsky, 1987) as *scientific concepts*. It translates equally well as *scholarly concepts*. The kernel of the issue is that

> these concepts, unlike everyday concepts, are schooled and systematic. The most sensitive English term for the concept as we understand it today may be neither *scientific* nor *scholarly* but *schooled."* (Emphasis in original)

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 194) state that,

> "[V]ygotsky argued that the unique route to higher-order verbal thinking is the experience of schooling. *Schooling detaches the word from its designation and attaches it to a generalization.* This shift is of profound importance because *only if the word is freed of its sensory impediments can it be manipulated voluntarily and with conscious awareness.*" (Emphasis in original)

Language is the key to the development of the mastery of 'scientific' concepts. Once the student has achieved a measure of verbal mastery, she needs to explore written discourse and learn to manipulate language on the page. The students involved in the research conducted for this paper are approximately sixteen years old and most have achieved a high level of verbal mastery. The challenge for a secondary school teacher – especially in English as a 'subject' - is to make students as comfortable with writing and manipulating language on the page as what they are comfortable verbally.

Hedegaard (1996, p 172) maintains that,

> "[T]he degree to which the child masters everyday concepts shows his actual level of development, and the degree to which he has acquired scientific concepts shows the zone of his proximal development." (Leontiev 1985, pp 47-48)

The development of these scientific and everyday concepts needs to be mediated by instruction and by speech. Enlisting the help of 'more capable others', seems to be an alternative method to use in order to mediate students' acquisition of concepts. The lessons within this unit of research aim to shift students' acquisition of scientific concepts into everyday concepts. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that it is through the use of everyday concepts that children will come to make sense of scientific concepts and therefore, make sense of their world. "[E]veryday concepts provide the 'living knowledge' for the development of scientific concepts… everyday concepts mediate the acquisition of scientific concepts." (Moll, 1990, p 10)

Vygotsky (1978) criticized the view that instruction must be oriented towards already completed stages of development, which is what rote learning aspires to do. Vygotsky argued instead that,

> "[I]nstruction is good only when it proceeds ahead of development. It then awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development … It is in this way that instruction plays an extremely important role in development." (Vygotsky, 1956 p 278 as cited in Wertsch, 1985 p 251)

The idea that scientific concepts become everyday concepts in order that the child may achieve control over her environment has important implications for what happens in a classroom. The child needs to be able to link, connect and relate school discourse and the language of learning, to the language of life. The sad truth, according to my experience, is that most teachers do not allow students to make these connections and thus their learning remains 'stuck' and of very little actual use. Moll (1990, p 10) states, "[T]o make schooling significant one must go beyond the classroom walls, beyond empty verbalisms; school knowledge grows into the analysis of the everyday."

The utilization of the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development by a teacher in a classroom situation implies that she must have a working knowledge of how the construct operates and functions. She must understand the theoretical ideas surrounding the construct and how it might be used to facilitate lesson design and learning. It appears as if a zone of proximal development can be created for any series of lessons and can be used with any task that has been designed and structured carefully. If the construct is used appropriately according to the way in which Vygotsky (1978) intended, then,

> "[L]earning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalised, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement." (Tharp and Gallimore :1986, p 81)

This is a powerful notion of which all teachers who truly wish to 'teach' their students need to take cognizance.

The four stages of the zone of proximal development

Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 83) outline four main stages which occur in the zone of proximal development and through which the participants of each task have to move in order to reach the stage of 'internalisation' or 'fossilisation'. A brief summary of each stage is outlined below.

Stage 1

Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 83) maintain that before children can function independently they must use the help of adults or more capable peers for outside regulation of task performance:

> "[S]ometimes, it is the task of the adult to direct attention. At other times, the adult holds important information in memory. At still other times, the adult offers simple encouragement." (Griffin and Cole, 1984 p 47 as cited in Tharp and Gallimore 1986 p 84)

When some conception of the overall performance has been acquired through language or other semiotic processes, the child can be assisted by other means – questions, feedback and further cognitive structuring. During stage 1, there should be a steadily declining plane of adult responsibility for task performance and a reciprocal increase in the learner's proportion of responsibility. The developmental task of stage 1 is to transit from other-regulation to self-regulation. At this stage, the 'more capable other' can be an adult, a peer or a group of peers.

Stage II

This occurs when performance is assisted by the self. If we look carefully at the child's statements during this transition, we see that the child,

> "[H]as taken over the rules and responsibilities of both participants in the language-game. These responsibilities were formerly divided between the adult and the child, but they have now been taken over completely by the child. The definitions of situation and the patterns of activity which formerly allowed the child to participate in the problem-solving effort on the interpsychological plane now allows him/her to carry out the task on the intrapsychological plane." (Wertsch, 1979 p 18 as cited in Tharp and Gallimore 1986)

Thus in stage II, the child carries out a task without assistance from others. However, this does not mean that the performance is fully automatised as yet. According to Vygotsky, once children begin to direct or guide behaviour with their own speech, an important stage has been reached in the transition of a skill through the zone of proximal development. A further refinement at this stage is when students 'test' their newly forming knowledge and ideas with their peers and receive affirmation or guidance from them.

Stage III

Where performance is developed, automatised and fossilized. Once all evidence of self-regulation has vanished, the child has emerged from the zone of proximal development into the developmental stage for that task. The task integration is smooth and integrated. It has been internalized and 'automatised'. The student can now perform the task by herself. Self-regulation – the 'end-point' of learning has now been achieved. Assistance from the adult or the self is no longer needed. Indeed, 'assistance' would now be disruptive.

Stage IV

This stage occurs where de-automatisation of performance or the misunderstanding of a task leads to recursion back through the zone of proximal development. If the child does not develop mastery of the task, then the adult or more capable other will have to begin the process again. This process can take place as many times as it takes for the child to achieve self-regulation. The lifelong learning by any individual is made up of these same regulated, developmental sequences – from other-assistance to self-assistance – recurring over and over again for the development of new capacities. For every individual, at any point in time, there will be a mix of other-regulation, self-regulation and automatised processes.

Self -regulation

Mediation and collaboration

Wertsch (1990, p 114) states that,

> "[H]uman activity (on both the interpsychological and the intrapsychological plane) can be understood only if we take into consideration the 'technical tools' and the 'psychological tools' or 'signs' that mediate this activity. These forms of mediation, which are the products of the sociocultural milieu in which they exist, are not viewed as simply facilitating activity that would otherwise take place. Instead, they are viewed as fundamentally shaping and defining it."

According to the surveyed literature, Vygotsky (1978) was particularly interested in the sign systems of human communication – particularly in speech as a human communicative activity- and the implications of this communication for learning and development and how it inter-relates

with other aspects of human activity. Another concern of Vygotsky's (1978), was how speech and communication could be used in problem-solving and collaboration in order to benefit a group, particularly within a formal school environment.

According to the surveyed literature, great emphasis is placed by Vygotsky (1978) in his writings, on the fact that all development happens within a social context and that interaction with and mediation through tools and signs are an integral part of the process. According to Daniels (2001, p 51) Vygotsky argued that it was through communication that, "[S]ocial understanding was made available for individual understanding." Daniels (2001, p 51) goes on to cite Minick (1987) in this regard who argued that,

> "[T]he difference between communication *with* words and communication *about* words marks the significant difference between communication within schooling and communication in everyday life … Communication about words within schooling leads to the development of scientific concepts by the individual. In this way communication performs a mediational function between the society of schooling and the individual." (Emphasis in original)

Wells (1999, p 58) states most eloquently that,

> "[I]t is by attempting to make sense with and for others that we make sense for ourselves."

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 193) support the view of Minick as cited above,

> "[T]he intersubjectivities of activity settings are created through the words in discourse; these signs and symbols take on new and shared meanings, as they are hallowed by use during joint productive activity. The social meanings of words are internalized by individuals through self-directed speech, taken underground and stripped down to the lightning of thought. When we turn our attention to word meaning and a theory of knowledge development and expression, we are merely attending to another facet of the zone of proximal development and the activity setting. But this facet is a vital one; word meanings are the threads by which society weaves itself into one cloth."

The theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development takes into account that mediation happens through the use of tools and signs, but that it also happens through sharing ideas and solving problems with the help of peers or adults. While the child is engaging with a text, discussing a novel, or analyzing a sentence, she is using the signs and tools at her disposal, but if

she is doing these activities with a more capable peer or a teacher, then she is able to do them with greater insight, as well as more efficiently and effectively.

Vygotsky (1978) wrote that, "[T]he central fact about our psychology, is the fact of mediation." (1982, p 116, cited in Wertsch, 1985a, p 15) Vygotsky, (1978) felt that mediation was especially important in the interaction between the adult and the child in formal instruction. Vygotsky, (1978) believed that it is only through mediation that knowledge will be 'transferred' to the child. Vygotsky, (1978) stated that education was part of a, "[D]efinite system … which referred to the social organization of instruction and how it provided a special socialization of children's thinking." (as cited in Moll, 1990, p 9). Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 79) maintain that, "[W]e must examine human existence in its social and historical aspects, not only at its current surface." The cognitive and social development of the child moves forward as an unfolding of the child's potential through the symbiotic influences of the child and his social environment. Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 79) posit that,

> "[I]n this manner, higher mental functions that are part of the social and cultural heritage of the child will move from the social plane to the psychological plane, from the intermental to the intramental, from the socially regulated to the self-regulated. The child, through the regulating actions and speech of others, is brought to engage in independent action and speech."

Wells (1999, p 319) supports this view when he claims that,

> "[H]igher psychological processes unique to humans can be acquired only through interaction with others, that is, through *interpsychological* processes that only later will begin to be carried out independently by the individual. When this happens, some of these processes lose their initial, external form and are converted into intrapsychological processes." (Emphasis in original)

It therefore seems necessary to look not only at the individual, but also at the external world in which that individual life has developed. The social world and the context of the students are both of vital importance if teachers are going to construct meaningful learning experiences for their students. Daniels (2001, p 7) goes on to state that Vygotsky, "[D]eveloped a theory within which social, cultural and historical forces play a part in development." It is important to note that the learning in question is shaped by the socio-historical environment – including other people – in which it takes place. The mediating roles of peer groups, the teacher and the resources are of great

importance when consideration is given as to how the structuring of a unit of work within a learning environment is to be accomplished. Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 189) make the following claim,

> "[A] central feature of the interpersonal plane is its intersubjectivity. In joint activity, the signs and symbols developed through language, the development of common understanding of the purpose and meanings of the activity, the joint engagement on cognitive strategies and problem-solving – all these aspects of interaction influence each participant. While the more able member of a joint activity exercises more influence, through providing more assistance, it is one task of the teacher to understand the subjectivity of the learner and – for the task at hand – to share it so as to influence it. As new members coalesce in a new activity, a new intersubjectivity is created, and for all members, it is internalized into a new cognitive development."

It is the teacher's task to design and manage appropriate activity settings within her classroom in order that the learning opportunities created are of maximum benefit to all parties concerned. The lesson design for this unit of research aim to test the ideas of mediation and collaboration outlined in this section of the research report.

Vygotsky (1966, p 72) asserts that, "[R]elations between the higher mental functions were at one time real relations among people." He speaks of a 'prism' where the path of developing higher order mental functions passes from the object and from the child through a 'more capable other'. Vygotsky, (1978, p 126) states,

> "[W]e propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development, that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent development achievement. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions."

Daniels (2001, p 70) maintains that,

> "[T]he concept of cognition as a phenomenon that extends beyond the individual, that arises in shared activity, owes a clear debt to the original Vygotskian understanding that the interpersonal precedes the intrapersonal."

When 'a more capable other' is guiding another student through the stages of the zone of proximal development, a collaboration should be taking place. According to Brown, Metz and Campione, (1996, p 146) Vygotsky asserts that,

> "[W]hat children do with the assistance of others is even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone."

Wells (1999, p 55) states that it is important to see that,

> "[S]ituated activities are the site of potential change and renewal. Every situation is to some degree unique, posing challenges that in some respects require the participants jointly to construct solutions that go beyond their past experiences."

Surely this statement applies more in classrooms or schools than in any other sphere? The activity setting of the classroom is where collaboration will give rise to the most profound changes and potential for growth. It is such a tragedy that in most schools and classrooms this fact is overlooked or simply ignored.

It seems that 'being taught' is not enough. The child has to use the regulating speech of others in order to become capable of self-regulating, independent action and speech. This ability to 'self-regulate',

> "[C]onstitutes the next stage in the passing of assistance from the adult to the child, from the expert to the apprentice … [and] is itself an aspect of cognitive development of the most profound sort." (Tharp and Gallimore, 1986 p 87-88)

Valsiner (1988) as cited in Moll (1990, p 4) pointed out that,

> "[T]he focus of the observations of the child's problem-solving efforts is put on the child's construction of new means that can help to solve the problem and that restructure the whole task situation."

The focus within any learning situation should be on the child's active, creative problem-solving techniques and the use of collaboration in order to accomplish or reorganize the task so that meaning may be negotiated. The lessons designed for use in this research report aim at using this approach.

According to Moll (1990, p 11),

> "[V]ygotsky (1981) claimed that the intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to how they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments. He posited that children internalize and *transform* the help they receive from others and eventually use these same means of guidance to direct their subsequent problem-solving behaviours." (Emphasis in original)

The child needs to engage in collaborative activity within the specific social environment of the classroom. The focus should be on the,

> "[*S*]*ocial system* within which we hope children learn, with the understanding that this social system is mutually and actively created by teacher and students." (Moll, 1990, p 11) (Emphasis in original)

It would seem, therefore, that the major purpose of schooling is to formulate and create social environments where students may use scientific concepts and through the mediatory function of speech and language learn to negotiate and make meaning of 'higher-order' mental functions. Moll (1990, p 12) concurs,

> "[T]hus Vygotskian theory posits a strong, dialectic connection between external (**social**) practical activity mediated by cultural tools, such as speech and writing, and individuals' intellectual activity. As Wertsch (1985a) has written, Vygotsky 'defined external activity in terms of semiotically mediated social processes and argued that the properties of these processes provide the key to understanding the emergence of internal functioning."

The process that will 'move' the students through the lessons in this teaching experiment will be student and resource-driven. Students who do not participate fully in the learning process and who do not assume responsibility for their own learning will not achieve success with the acquisition of the necessary concepts.

Vygotsky (1956, p 450) specified that most forms of joint cognitive activity are internalized to become the structure of the child's independent cognitive functioning:

> "[Instruction] rouses to life, awakens, and sets in motion a variety of internal processes of development in the child. At this point, these processes are still possible for the child only in the sphere of interaction with surrounding people and in the sphere of collaboration with peers. But these processes, which constitute the course of internal development, then

> become the internal property of the child himself or herself." (as cited in Wertsch, 1985, p 251-252)

Joint cognitive activity gives rise to an increase in understanding. Teachers need to pay attention to this fact when planning lessons and deciding on strategies for pedagogy. Salomon (1993) asserts that a,

> "[C]learer understanding of human cognition would be achieved if studies were based on the concept that cognition is distributed among individuals, that knowledge is socially constructed through collaborative efforts to achieve shared objectives in cultural surroundings and that the information is processed between individuals and tools and artifacts provided by the culture." (as cited in Daniels, 2001 p 70)

Social settings, such as those within a classroom, are very important because they create zones of proximal development. These initial social interactions and collaborations cause movement through the zone of proximal development which gradually leads to the child being able to internalize the newly discovered knowledge. This process, according to Vygotsky (1978) is when the 'buds' of development, become the 'fruits' or 'flowers'. According to Wells (1999 p 319) the child's initial 'social speech' or 'speech for others' becomes converted into the "[I]ntrapsychological activity of inner speech… As [Vygotsky] puts it, 'thought is born through words." Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 77) point out that the knowledge that children already have and what they bring into the classroom with them is of extreme importance. Many teachers, it seems, overlook this fact and attempt to isolate 'scientific knowledge'. This could be part of the reason why so many students 'fail to learn'. Teachers need to realise that the conceptual structures of their students cannot be built without a foundation.

> "[L]ong before they enter school, children are learning higher-order cognitive and linguistic skills. Their teaching takes place in the everyday interactions of domestic life. Within these goal-directed activities, opportunities are available for more capable members of the household to assist and regulate child performances. Through these mundane interactions, children learn the accumulated wisdom and the cognitive and communicative tools of their culture. They begin to develop functional cognitive systems; they begin to generalize their new skills to new problems and to novel aspects of familiar situations; they learn how to communicate and think." (Tharp and Gallimore 1986, p 77)

The beginnings of life-long learning are formed during the interpersonal exchanges between the child and various elements of his environment. These exchanges are the precursors of cognitive and communicative functions that will some day be self-regulated by the child. It is through such simple interactions that children learn the cognitive and communicative tools and skills of their culture. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1986 p 77), "[T]his insight from Vygotsky has the most profound implications for how we think about development and teaching." Wells (1999, p 56) concurs with this view and I would like to include the entire paragraph as it is central to my thinking in this regard:

> "[A]s Lave and Wenger (1991) insist, learning is not a separate and independent activity, but an integral aspect of participation in any 'community of practice.' All participants thus continue to learn throughout their lives, as each new situation makes new demands and provides opportunities for further development. Nor is learning dependent on teaching, if teaching is construed as deliberate instruction according to a set of pre-formulated objectives. In joint activity, participants contribute to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties according to their current ability to do so; at the same time, they provide support and assistance for each other in the interests of achieving the goals of the activity as these emerge in the situation."

It is hoped that the results achieved by the students after completing the series of lessons for this teaching experiment will validate the views expressed here.

According to Wells (1999, p 60 – 61) there are a number of important points to note about 'artifact-mediated joint activity' which have important implications for learning and teaching. A brief paraphrase of the points made by Wells (1999) is as follows:

- The participants in joint activity should be considered as a community working towards shared goals.
- Real learning involves the whole person and contributes to the formation of individual identity.
- Each activity is unique and occurs within its own space and time and involves a specific group of people and artifacts.
- The curriculum is not as important as carrying out activities that have social and personal significance. The curriculum should be seen as the means, not the end.
- Outcomes of activities cannot be known completely or planned for in advance. The route taken to achieve a goal may change and this requires flexibility.

- Activities must allow for diversity and originality. There is never one way to solve a problem or reach a solution.

From the points outlined here, it can be seen that the approach that is called for in all classrooms is one where there is both collaboration and exploration. This process is not one that can be hurried because there are time and curriculum constraints. The emphasis should be on the acquisition of skills, not on the covering of content. Significantly, outcomes must allow for open-endedness.

While speech plays the most critical role in the child's learning, it seems important to note that learners can receive assistance in the zone of proximal development from other sources. According to Wells (1999 p 320) "[A]ll artifacts – both material and symbolic – are embodiments of the knowing that was involved in the production." Wells (1999, p 320) goes on to argue that written texts can provide, "[A] powerful means of self-instruction, as the reader appropriates the thoughts of others and makes them his or her own." Texts, when treated 'dialogically' are extremely productive as they form a device used to generate ideas and negotiate meanings. Cole (1990, p 91) makes the claim that,

> "[C]ultural artifacts are simultaneously ideal (conceptual) and material. They are ideal in that they contain in coded form the interactions of which they were previously a part. They exist only as they are embodied in material. This applies to the language/speech as well as the more usually noted form of artifact."

Because artifacts mediate interaction with the child and her environment and they have the capacity to generate meaning, they are considered to be necessary tools. In the classroom situation, texts, visual materials and student's own constructions of the various assigned tasks become the tools of learning and conceptualizing. Vygotsky, according to Cole (1990, p 91) called this the 'cultural method' of thinking:

> "[H]uman psychology is concerned with the activity of concrete individuals, which takes place either in a collective or in a situation in which the subject deals directly with the surrounding world of objects – ie. at the potter's wheel or the writer's desk … if we removed human activity from the system of social relationships, it would not exist … the human individual's activity is a system in the system of social relations. *It does not exist without these relations.* (Own emphasis) (Leontiev, 1981, pp 46-47)

Learning could not take place without the use of tools and signs (texts and speech) and the interpretation of these by a group of students within a social setting. Wells (1999, p 77) cites Lotman (1988) who argues that, "[A] text can serve a dialogic function, becoming a 'thinking device' and a 'generator of meaning."

In this series of lessons, many of the texts will become the 'teacher' – the tool that will mediate a large part of the instruction. According to Carpay and van Oers (1999, p 307)

> "[L]earning activity, then, is in essence a text-composing activity. Students should be encouraged to compose their own (written or oral) "scientific" texts (utterances) according to a particular body of knowledge as embodied in didactic models. Moreover, they should learn to feel obliged to defend their text against other public texts on the same topic. As such, didactic models should never be introduced into the learning process as 'models to copy', but only as 'learning models'. The ultimate goal of any learning activity should be to establish *a new personalized* mode of speaking about the world." (Emphasis in original)

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 195) claim that,

> "[C]omprehending text means the weaving of new, schooled concepts with those of everyday life, a process that Wittrock (1974) described as generative. In Wittrock's conception, comprehension is, 'a function of the abstract and distinctive, concrete associations which the learner generates between his prior experience, as it is stored in long-term memory, and the stimuli. Text becomes meaningful because it has been woven into the student's *system* of meanings and understandings… School-based instruction in comprehension of written text is our basic system for establishing the discourse meanings that create both the intermental and intramental capacity for verbal thinking." (Emphasis in original)

This idea posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1992) above, is central to the creation of the lessons and use of texts in the lesson design for this research paper. The lessons have been designed according to a generative model (more below) and it is through collaboration, that students will make and negotiate meaning and increase their level of comprehension and understanding. Schools are places where conversations among students should be created and supported. Students should not be forced to simply sit passively and listen to the 'teacher'.

The model of the dialectic within text (see Figure 1 below) shows that the constructs within a text cannot exist without each other and that they are inseparable, interlinked and intertwined. This point is extremely important to remember when assisting students towards developing an understanding of the text and what is being asked in an activity or a test. The lessons designed for this research paper relied heavily on texts and how they could be used to assist students in negotiating and making their own meanings and constructions.

The lessons within this unit of research rely on collaboration between the students and the teacher. It seems as if in many school environments, teachers assume that they are the 'ultimate authority' and they use a rote style of teaching to enforce this view. In a collaborative situation, all parties concerned have to assume agency for the process. It involves a shift in mind-set from the teacher and then co-operation from the students. The goals of all parties concerned have to be

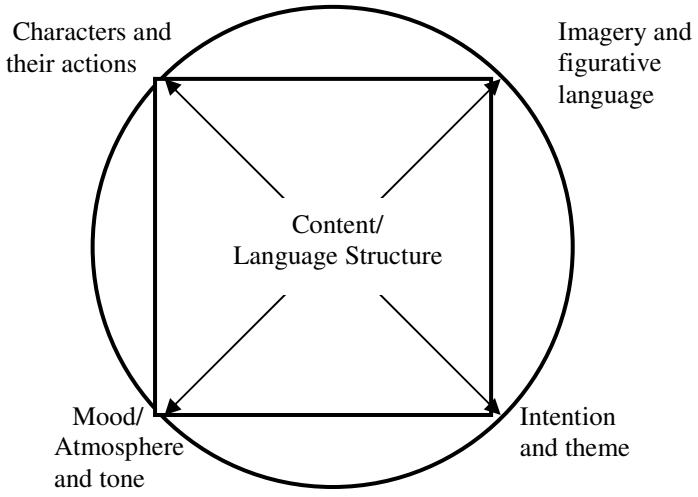


Figure 1: ***Implicit Model of Dialectics in a text***

addressed and the classroom dynamic has to shift. Wells (1999, p 65) maintains that the role of the teacher is crucial. The teacher needs to be involved,

> "[A]s a co-enquirer with the students in the topics that they have chosen to investigate. To be able honestly to say, in response to a student's question, 'I don't know. How could we find out?' is probably more important, in creating an ethos of collaborative enquiry in the classroom, than always being able to supply a ready-made answer."

Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 92) concur that roles within the teaching dialectic need to be re-examined and re-defined in order that learning becomes more beneficial.

> "[T]he assistor must be in close touch with the learner's relationship to the task. Sensitive and accurate assistance that challenges but does not dismay the learner cannot be achieved in the absence of information. Opportunities for this knowledge, conditions in which the teacher can be sufficiently aware of the child's actual, inflight performing, simply are not available in classrooms equipped and staffed in the typical pattern. There are too many children for each teacher. And even if there is time to assess each child's zone of proximal development for each task, more time is needed – time for interaction, for conversation, for joint activity between teachers and children. There is still too large a gap between the conditions of home and school. Most parents do not need to be trained to assist performance; most teachers do."

While I concur with the initial statement posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 92) outlined above, the lessons designed for this research paper indicate clearly that it *is* possible to utilize the zone of proximal development successfully within a classroom dynamic as posited by Hedegaard (1996). While these lessons will be time-consuming, their value, educationally, will far outweigh the time constraints imposed by having to complete the syllabus. There will be ample time allowed for conversation and for joint activity. The groups will not so large that I will not be able to assist each one. I will ensure that I am aware of the student's 'inflight performing' and I will adjust the process where necessary. Because the lessons will move the students from a very broad, general level of understanding and will narrow their focus as they move further forward, the desired results should be achieved. This series of lessons has been meticulously planned and should there be a need for modification during the process, I will ensure that it happens.

According to Hedegaard (1996, p 175) when children enter school,

> "[T]he teacher confronts them with the zone of proximal development through the tasks of school activity, in order to guide their progress toward the stage of formal learning. These tasks help children acquire motives and methods for mastery of the adult world, as mediated by the teacher."

The teacher's role in this regard is to construct meaningful activity and to direct students on the path towards self-discovery. The teacher is central to this process because her frame of reference,

her theories guiding her pedagogy and her choice of content will be what drives the process. If the focus is on the child and the way in which the child constructs knowledge, then successful learning becomes a possibility. Wells (1999, p331) maintains that the teacher,

> "[R]ather than being a dispenser of knowledge and assigner of grades … sees him or herself as a fellow learner whose prime responsibility is to act as leader of a community committed to the co-construction of knowledge."

At this point, it seems important to clarify what constitutes effective group work. For many teachers, group work simply means placing students in groups with a vague question to 'answer' and then opting out of the process. This is not the way effective group work is supposed to function. Group work activities need to be designed and implemented with extreme care. Groups themselves have to be monitored and sometimes chosen by the teacher in order that they function effectively. Within each group, especially with younger students, actual roles have to be assigned in order that groups meet their full potential. The teacher has to monitor and guide groups as they move through the learning process. This may even mean re-assigning roles or re-working the parameters of the question under discussion if the process is not running smoothly. The teacher has to ensure that all members of the group are participating and that group members are committed fully to the process. This requires meticulous organization and commitment on the part of all participants in the process. Extreme care has been taken in the planning of group work strategies for the series of lessons in order that the aims of the research will be achieved. Wells (1999, p 318) maintains that the zone of proximal development in a group setting is,

> "[T]reated as an attribute, not of the student alone, but of the student in relation to the specifics of a particular activity setting. In other words, the zone of proximal development is *created in the interaction* between the student and the co-participants in the activity, including the available tools and the selected practices, and depends on the nature and quality of that interaction as much as on the upper limit of the learner's capacity." (Emphasis in original)

It seems to me, that the teacher needs to have clear aims for both the activity and the learners she is directing in that activity and that it is only through a collaboration with all parties concerned that a shift in the perceptions and understandings of the students can occur.

Wells (1999, p323) maintains that it has become apparent from a range of studies which he cites, that, "[I]t is not necessary for there to be a group member who is in all respects more capable than

the others." Wells (1999, p324) explains that by working through a problem together, the group is able to construct a solution,

> "[T]hat none could have achieved alone. In other words, each is 'forced to rise above himself' and, by building on the contributions of its individual members, the group collectively constructs an outcome that no single member envisaged at the outset of the collaboration."

The group work structure designed for the lessons in this research paper will take into account the various academic levels of the students. In most instances groups will be assigned in order to ensure that effective collaboration occurs. Through the use of 'jigsaw' methods and co-teaching, students will be encouraged to participate and co-operate.

Wells (1999, p 324) concludes this alternative idea of possible group work activities with the following thought, "[I]t seems, therefore, for learning to occur in the zone of proximal development, it is not so much a more capable other that is required as a willingness on the part of all participants to learn with and from each other." This extremely appealing notion will hopefully be proved by the research conducted for this paper.

Motivation

I have often heard my colleagues bemoan the fact that their students do not seem to be 'motivated' to 'learn'. Increasing the motivation of students is probably, the most important task of an educator. If students are excited and stimulated then the teacher merely has to steer them towards the end-point of the task. Rosa and Montero (1990, p 80) posit that motivation is a key factor in the learning process that is often overlooked by educators and quote Vygotsky as stating that,

> "[I]f we ignore the child's needs, the incentives which are effective in getting him to act, we will never be able to understand his advance from one developmental stage to the next, because every advance is connected with a marked change in motives, inclinations and incentives." (Vygotsky, 1978, p 92)

This is where collaboration performs a vital role. The motivation gained from peers and the desire to participate actively and gain maximum benefit from the learning process can be considerably enhanced by interaction. Communication in the learning process and the 'pushing' of students by

one another can greatly aid the learning process. Rosa and Montero (1990, p 80) go on to state that,

"[T]his theme [of motivation] is fully integrated in Leontiev's activity theory (1978). Research recently undertaken in Spain (Pardo, 1988) shows not only how the development of more adaptive motivational patterns depends on how the activity is presented but that such patterns are better learned in a cooperative work context than in an individual one."

One of the easiest ways of motivating students is to set them topics in which they are interested. In this way, the 'content' will virtually take care of itself as it will become a natural product of the inquiry or 'guided investigation' as termed by Hedegaard (1996). In this kind of activity, the focus will be the making of meaning and the full attention of each student will be focused on the task at hand. Learning occurs naturally in such activities. Wells (1999, p 63) claims that,

> "[T]he choice of experiences that provide the topics for investigation is critical. They must be such as to arouse students' interest, engaging their feelings and values as well as their cognition. In addition, they must be sufficiently open-ended to allow alternative possibilities for consideration, thus providing challenges appropriate to individual students' capabilities while at the same time encouraging them to collaborate with others in constructing shared understanding that is both practical and theoretical. In other words, they need to be experiences that generate real questions."

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 125) claim that teachers have to use various means of "contingency management" as a means of assisting performance within a classroom. There are a number of ways in which a teacher can motivate her students. Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 180) also claim that "feedback" is an important motivational tool. When students are praised and encouraged and assisted in finding solutions to set tasks while the process is under construction, it gives the students a feeling of security and confidence and makes them 'want' to continue. Tharp and Gallimore make the following, crucial statement about 'feedback':

> "[I]nstructions, like other forms of assistance, can be expected to occur only when teachers assume responsibility for assisting performance rather than expecting students to learn on their own."

A further effective motivational 'tool' teachers can use is to ask the 'right' kinds of questions that 'assist', not merely 'assess'. I would like to add, that such a question, coupled with a statement of

praise about a student's or a group's progress is even more effective. Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 182) state that,

> "[H]owever, most teachers do not distinguish questions that assess from those that assist. This results in the teacher assuming that a request for information constitutes teaching. It does not. Though necessary to teaching, assessment is not itself a means for directly assisting performance. The *assistance question*, on the other hand, inquires in order to produce a mental operation that the pupil cannot or would not produce alone. The assistance provided by the question is the prompting of that mental operation." (Emphasis in original)

Wells (1999, p 327) claims that the use of the zone of proximal development with its end-point of internalization has a number of implications or "multiple transformations".

> "[F]irstly, there is a transformation in the individual in terms of his or her capacity to participate more effectively in future actions of a related kind and, hence, a transformation of his or her identity; second, where the problem demands a novel solution, the invention of new tools and practices or the modification of existing ones transforms the culture's tool-kit and its repertoire for problem-solving; and third, there is the transformation in the activity setting brought about by the problem-solving action which, in turn, opens up further possibilities for action."

In a collaborative setting, the students learn to deal with different personalities within a group. They will also learn social skills which will aid them later in the work-place and they will appreciate the value of sharing and pooling knowledge. The world with which they will have to engage once they leave school will demand that they are flexible and that they can co-operate and work with all sorts of different people and ideas. It is the duty of schools to prepare these students for life.

The Double Move

The work of Mariane Hedegaard forms the basis of my own research, so this section will be presented in detail and will encompass and re-state many of the ideas already outlined above.

Hedegaard (1996) maintains that it is the task of the school to pass on knowledge and skills**,** but that often, students do not seem to be able to transfer this knowledge or these skills into their

everyday conceptions. Hedegaard (1996) goes on to argue that the reason for this is that most of the knowledge imparted within the school environment is empirical knowledge – factual or text knowledge. As such, this knowledge has very little use in the everyday lives of the students. In order to make this theoretical knowledge of 'use' to the child, Hedegaard (1996, p176) claims that,

> "[T]heoretical knowledge must be acquired through exploratory activity. In school, this activity is controlled activity, consisting of the exploration of problems that contain the fundamental conflicts of the phenomenon. A prerequisite for theoretical knowledge acquisition is teaching activity built on tasks that illuminate the contrasts found in a phenomenon's fundamental relations. Through this exploration it becomes possible to gain insight into the development of the phenomenon."

I would like to make the further claim that part of the problem with children's acquisition of knowledge seems to be the way in which students are expected to acquire this knowledge. Most 'teaching' within the school environment is conducted through rote methods. Students have very few opportunities to explore the material, engage with the concepts or make assumptions about the surrounding issues or discover 'new' knowledge for themselves. The claim made by Hedegaard (1996) as well as my own findings over more than twenty years of teaching, will hopefully be confirmed by the research conducted for this paper. Most students, despite having being 'taught' Grammar skills, Summary writing skills, Literature skills or Poetry skills cannot apply or use these skills effectively. Many students can not provide verbal answers to questions concerning the concepts on which this research is based during class discussions, especially with regards to the Grammar component. Most teachers of English, acquiring a class at Grade Ten level would assume that students would 'know' these concepts. My preliminary investigations have proved otherwise. Hedegaard (1996, p 180) maintains that,

> "[T]eaching should create zones of proximal development through involving children in new kinds of activity. By relating scientific concepts to everyday concepts, teaching provided children with new skills and possibilities for action."

Hedegaard (1996 p 180) claims that the zone of proximal development can be used to guide students, "[F]rom the learned and understood scientific concepts [school-based knowledge] to the spontaneously applied everyday concepts through a method of teaching [Hedegaard] has called a *double move.*" According to Hedegaard (1996 p 181), knowledge should be acquired by students

through a process of 'guided investigations'. Through these investigations, planned by the teacher and based on the curriculum, students will come to their own understandings and constructions of the relevant concepts. Because these constructions are of their own making, they will become embedded in the child's memory and they will be able to be recalled and applied whenever the child needs to draw on them. According to Hedegaard (1996, p 173), "[V]ygotsky's methodology is based on the application of the Marxist historical societal approach. In psychology this approach emphasizes the concept of work activity: the relation between human beings and the world as mediated through tools." (Leontiev, 1985, p 33)

These 'psychic' tools such as 'spoken language', systems of notation', 'works of art', 'written language', 'schemata', 'diagrams', 'maps' and 'drawings' are produced through social activity. This notion is an extremely important one for the purposes of this research. The students within my classroom are going to be constructing their own knowledge, in co-operation with one another and with very little 'visible' assistance from me. The 'assistance' from the teacher here, will be in the form of the structuring of the relevant lessons and the 'suggestions' during the process. Hedegaard (1996, p 175) cites Elkonin's (1971) stages of development through which a child passes. The students involved in this research are between stages four and five,

> "[K]indergarten and school are the institutionalized traditions for determining the dominant activities for the following two stages: development of motives and development of skill and knowledge for relating theoretically and reflectively to the world. The fifth stage is characterized by traditions for peer activities institutionalized in different forms of after-school activities."

Because the students involved in this research are already quite emotionally and developmentally mature, the lessons will have to be structured and pitched in a very careful way. The students will have to be motivated and challenged or they will not take the lessons seriously and this will hamper their learning. It must be stressed once again, that my role will simply be that of a mediator. Hedegaard, (1996, p 175) makes this quite clear,

> "[T]he teacher's role is to direct action within school activity in a manner appropriate to the child's present level of development, the cultural and social context, and the teacher's theories of what central subject matter is."

The main issue here seems to be the "linguistic relations" (Hedegaard, 1996, p 180) that are formed during the exploration of the given topic. It is through using and manipulating language

that the child will be able to 'internalise' the scientific knowledge and use it in her everyday conceptions.

Hedegaard (1996, p 180) further maintains that there should be a number of external stimuli that are used in order that the students are able to link 'scientific' knowledge to 'everyday' concepts. "[T]his is why practical research activities with objects, films and museum visits are such an important part of instruction." The learners in the class involved in this research will visit the Apartheid museum, the Hector Petersen Memorial, Constitution Hill and a number of informal settlements this year. These trips will help them understand many of the texts and visuals with which they will engage - as the focus within my classroom at Grade Ten level is on South African Literature and Poetry. Brescia House allows its teachers to take students on day trips after the June Examinations, during the last two weeks of term. The school views these trips as an essential part of the student's general knowledge and development. The novel used for the Literature Essay component is 'The Killing Bottle' (1999) by Jane Fox. We have approached Jane Fox and she will host a workshop with the students at the end of the first term during which time she will discuss themes, issues and ideas surrounding her novel and its conception. This should prove to be of immense value to the students.

Hedegaard (1996), states that teaching should create zones of proximal development through involving students in different and new kinds of activity. These activities should be 'social' in nature because of Vygotsky's (1976) position that "[P]sychological development and instruction are socially embedded." (Hedegaard, 1996, p 171) In this way, teaching will provide students with new concepts and possibilities for action which will allow scientific concepts to become a part of these student's everyday concepts. Hedegaard (1996), claims to be able to accomplish this shift from the 'intermental' to the 'intramental' through her idea of the 'double move'. In order to accomplish this 'double move', Hedegaard (1996) maintains that the teacher, when she is planning her lessons, must have a deep and thorough understanding of the general laws and concepts of the subject. The lessons must be planned in such a way that they advance from,

> "[T]he general laws to the surrounding reality in all its complexity. In order to explain these laws the teacher must choose concrete examples that demonstrate the general concepts and laws in the most transparent form." (Hedegaard 1996, p 190).

Hedegaard (1996) goes further to explain that while the teacher's planning must move from the 'general' to the 'concrete', the student's learning must develop from their 'pre-conceived actions' to a concrete application of the knowledge they obtain through their research. The final step is that they are able to formulate and discuss their findings and show their understanding of the 'new' concept. Hedegaard (1996) posits that the basis for instruction should be the division of the learning activity into three different types of actions:

1) *Delineation of the problem.*
2) *Problem solution and problem construction.*
3) *Evaluation and control*

Hedegaard (196, p184) outlines the following 'primary principles' which guided the structure of the research: (This is a paraphrase with links to my own research methodology)

1) Each child must be considered when planning for the class as a whole. This is because children's development takes place through their relation to their class and to the groups in the class. Group work activities tend to develop a zone of proximal development for the class as a whole, where each child acquires personal knowledge through the activities shared between the teacher and among the children themselves. This notion of Hedegaard's (1996) is central to the design of the lessons used in my research.
2) The general content of the teaching must be related to the children's experiences. The various texts, visuals and class experiences must all be relevant to the concepts under construction. The teacher must plan and give direction to the activities.
3) The content of instruction must be clearly related as a whole to the general themes. This aspect, in terms of my research, will link more to the idea of the development of concepts because my students are a lot older than those of Hedegaard (1996) and I will not use a 'theme', but rather a series of lessons designed to produce a shift in the students' understanding.
4) Motivation and interest in the content of teaching must be developed in the children. This will be attempted through the careful choice of texts as well as the detailed planning and structuring of the proposed lessons. It is hoped, that the students will become excited by the fact that they are learning and discovering for themselves. Teenagers value, in particular, their independence and I hope, that once they realise how much 'fun' it is to 'learn' in this way, they will become 'hooked' on the idea and that they will embrace it.

5) Hedegaard (1996) made extensive use of a 'germ cell model' as the basis for her lessons. My research is dealing with a completely different aspect of the syllabus and my students do not need one specific or generic 'model'. Where model answers are needed (as in the Literature Essay and Summary writing section) they have been designed according to the perceived needs of the students.

6) Knowledge must be integrated with performance in the children's acquisition of various aspects of the syllabus. This integration of knowledge and performance will be made possible through the children's modeling of their knowledge and later, their use of this model for analyzing and producing questions. Once this integration has been achieved, children have 'internalised' their knowledge and it becomes a part of their everyday lives.

Hedegaard (1996, p 181) claims that,

> "[C]hildren acquire the concepts as active concepts … when they are able to relate themselves to their own learning activity as well as to the sphere of application to the concepts they have worked with. The scientific concepts will have become everyday concepts, allowing the children to orient themselves theoretically to the surrounding world."

The outline and planning of the lessons to be used in this research supports the structure posited by Hedegaard (1996) as outlined above.

My double move posits that my students will be able to acquire the scientific concepts necessary to understand the outlined sections of the English syllabus and apply these concepts to their everyday conceptions. Furthermore, I posit that my students will be able to acquire these scientific concepts successfully if they are allowed to construct their own knowledge and make use of Hedegaard's (1996) notion of a 'guided investigation'. My double move will use effective planning and external stimuli to aid the process. The constructing of collages, the engagement with various texts and visuals and the designed activities will aid the students in this regard.
Hedegaard (1996, p 192) claims that,

> "[T]he zone of proximal development *must* (own emphasis) be used as a tool for class instruction. In our teaching experiment, we saw that it is actually possible to make a class function actively as a whole through class dialogue, group work, and task solutions. The teaching experiment differed from traditional instruction in that the children were constantly and deliberately forced to act. The children's research activity was central in

these guided actions, which gradually led the children to critical evaluations of the concepts."

Concluding thoughts on design

Wells, (1999, p 331- 333) draws the following conclusions concerning the relevance of the use of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school in the context of education. The points below are a paraphrase:

- The zone of proximal development constitutes a potential for learning that is created through the interaction between participants as they engage in a particular activity together. The end-point of the learning process is essentially unknown because each learner will achieve competence at his or her own level. Often, the end-point shifts as the activity progresses and new directions and opportunities are created that were not initially envisaged.
- As an opportunity for learning with and from others, the zone of proximal development is available to all participants, not only those who are more competent or struggling. Each learner's goals and current stage of development are important when designing materials and lessons, as well as a consideration of the end-point of the set task.
- The sources of guidance and assistance for learning are not limited to human interaction. Texts and visual materials provide other forms of mediation.
- Learning in the zone of proximal development involves all aspects of the learner – acting, thinking and feeling. It has the potential to transform the learner's identity and ultimately, the community as a whole. The classroom, therefore, as a microcosm of the broader society, has to be representative of all that is positive – a commitment to sharing, collaboration, participation, as well as individual excellence.
- Learning in the zone of proximal development involves all aspects of the learner and leads to the development of identity as well as of skills and knowledge. There must be an environment created of trust, mutual respect and concern. Students will learn to develop the skills necessary to act responsibly, creatively and ultimately be able to reflect on their own practice if they are allowed the opportunities for meaningful interaction.

There are many reasons as to why the use of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school are of importance within a classroom environment. The zone of proximal development, with its emphasis on the social activity involved in learning, the obvious importance of bringing the world of the child into the classroom, the key role played by mediation of tools and signs and the role of the teacher in the process of learning are all elements that indicate that this research report should have validity for teachers involved in all stages of the curriculum. There is a definite need within education to find pedagogical methods that facilitate and aid learning. It seems to me, that there needs to be a shift within most classrooms, and that note needs to be taken of the fact that 'rote' teaching and learning styles are not effective. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 200),

> "[T]he purpose of schooling is teaching students to be literate in the most general sense of the word – capable of reading, writing, speaking computing, reasoning and manipulating visual as well as verbal symbols and concepts. Literacy is achieved through the creation of opportunities for students to be assisted in the use of word meanings, conceptual structures, and discourse itself – so that signs and symbols take on new and shared meanings as they are hallowed by use during joint productive activity, taken underground, and stripped to the lightning of thought."

Perhaps looking at classroom practice from a Socio-historical perspective will give teachers insight into their practice and will allow more effective teaching and learning to take place. Wells (1999, p 53) sums up the usefulness of a Vygotskian approach in the classroom when he states,

> "[T]oday, under the descriptors *sociocultural* and *social constructivist*, the theory that [Vygotsky] originated is coming to have a growing influence on those who are trying to envision and enact a form of education better suited to the increasingly diverse and changing world in which we live compared to the one that we inherited from the Industrial Age of the 19th and early 20th centuries."

RATIONALE:

ABOUT MY BACKGROUND:

I am 44 years old. I teach English, First Language at Brescia House School, a private, Catholic Convent in Bryanston where students write the IEB (Independent Examination Board) Examinations. I am married to Tino, who is currently Deputy Principal and Head of the English

Department at Redhill School, also private. We have two children, a daughter, Gabriela (12 years old) and a son, Fabio (8 years old). They attend Redhill school.

I am currently involved in the NSC (National Senior Certificate) phase of the curriculum, teaching Grades Ten, Eleven and Twelve. Brescia House aims to educate students from the age of three (Grade 00) to Grade Twelve. The school buildings at Brescia House are being re-organised at the moment to accommodate the phase structure imposed by the new curriculum and by the end of 2006, there will be distinct areas in the school designed to fulfill the needs of particular students involved in a specific stage of their schooling career. There are approximately 350 students in the high school, of which I teach about 100. The school has a Convent and a Catholic Church on the property and the girls attend mass regularly. The Catholic Calendar is followed and religious holidays are observed.

The ethos of the school encourages very strong boundaries concerning many aspects of life which I firmly believe young people need. The motto of the school is 'Serviam' and the girls are encouraged to give back to the community on a regular basis. There is an outreach programme where students visit Aids homes, the elderly, animal shelters and contribute financially to those who are less fortunate. The facilities at the school are wonderful. There is a fully-equipped resource and media centre with access to 40 computers, links to the Internet, e-mail and trained assistants. This centre is open from 7am to 4.30pm. Most classrooms are equipped with audio-visual equipment and there are Smart Boards available which the staff have been trained to use. The students are afforded every opportunity possible to ensure their academic success.

The academic standard at the school is high – according to the parameters of the present Independent Examination Board's (IEB) curriculum - and the girls are encouraged to participate fully in all aspects of school life. There is an emphasis on community and school spirit. The staff seems to be highly competent and the school achieves excellent results in the Matriculation Examinations.

ABOUT MY TEACHING CAREER:

I became convinced that I should enter the teaching profession when I was in Grade Twelve. During my matriculation year, I was fortunate enough to be placed in the care of a teacher who

was passionate about the teaching of English. It became my desire to nurture and motivate my students, the way he did for me.

I enrolled at the then Johannesburg College of Education where I completed, in 1983, a Secondary School Teaching Diploma spanning four years of study. English was my first major. During my fourth year of study, I was privileged to have David Brindley as my 'Methodology' lecturer. What an awe-inspiring educator he was! He challenged and encouraged me to go beyond the confines of the curriculum and the constraints imposed by the Apartheid Government. He was a man who was ahead of his time. He shaped much of my 'constructivist' approach without formalizing it in words.

During my first two years of teaching, I was fortunate enough to be mentored by one of the finest English teachers I have ever known, Joan Browne. This ex-nun, then in her late fifties, was a product of the mission schooling system and was exceptionally knowledgeable. She taught me all the practical basics of classroom management and practice that are needed by a teacher on a daily basis. She laid down my understanding of Grammar (never touched on during my four year course), my insights into the teaching of Literature and Poetry, she helped me with classroom management and administration and showed me how to be organized, efficient and effective. I still use many of the things I learned all those years ago, in my classroom today.

I decided during 2003 that I wanted to improve my qualifications. I realized, when the curriculum changed in 1996 and Outcomes-Based Education became a reality, that I needed to upgrade my skills. Teaching is my chosen profession and I do not wish to pursue alternatives. It was with these ideas in mind that I approached the University of the Witwatersrand and was offered a place in the B.Ed Honours Programme at the start of 2004. The work that I have completed over the past eighteen months in the M.Ed Programme has been extremely affirming. I have come to understand that much of my instinctual feeling about what I do in the classroom is based on sound theory. My confidence and enthusiasm have both been lifted through this course. I am once more enthused and eager to teach and am happy to embrace all that I have discovered through my studies.

As a teacher, I have always adopted the philosophy that I teach the child first and then the syllabus. The child cannot be an effective learner if she is unhappy, distressed or in any way compromised. I believe that students 'work' for and respond to someone to whom they can relate. This means that I am unafraid to let them see me as a real person who is a mother, a wife, a working woman, nowadays a student (!) and as someone who has issues and concerns beyond the classroom.

I have very strong ideas about discipline. For me, it is not a group process, but an individual one. If a child is disruptive, I believe that the child should be dealt with and not the group. Occasionally, I will admonish an entire class, but usually, I will call the culprit aside and speak to her about respect and maintaining respect. This usually has far more effect than sarcasm, humiliation or ridicule. I do not have many 'discipline' problems because I treat my students with respect and dignity. I never call out marks or issue tests in rank order. I tend to call individual students and discuss things with them in private. Two years ago, for instance, one of my Grade Eleven learners was consistently late for school. She was not submitting work on time and her general attitude was poor. I left her alone for a week or two, but one morning I called her to my room and raised my concerns. She admitted that she was extremely tired as her mom had just given birth to a baby brother and she was torn between helping at home and her school commitments. We worked out a schedule together, negotiated some new parameters and in her subsequent examinations, she raised her term results by five percent.

Throughout 2005, I tried to identify areas of weakness in my students at various levels. I became interested in whether or not the ideas posed by the Socio-Historical School could be put into practice in order to help my students achieve their full potential. My aim this year is to design lessons which will test the theoretical constructs I have studied over the past eighteen months, and improve both my teaching methods and the learning of my students. The level of understanding required by students at an IEB school, studying English as a first language, is extremely demanding. My students are expected to be able to think critically, to formulate and substantiate their own opinions and display reasoning and logic skills. My students are expected to engage with different genres of texts and develop competency in a range of skills. No rote regurgitation is required.

As teaching is my chosen profession and the thing I am most passionate about, it makes complete sense to me, that I pursue a research component that will improve my practice and enhance the learning of my students. It is with this goal in mind, that I have designed this unit of research. I have become particularly interested in testing the theories of Vygotsky and the Russian Socio-historical School – particularly notions surrounding the zone of proximal development and those relating to activity theory - and how these ideas relate to classroom practice. The work of Mariaan Hedegaard is of particular interest to me as she has utilized the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development in a classroom situation. I would like to look at my own role as a mediator within the context of my classroom as well as the potential mediational role of some of my more capable students. My research aims to help and improve existing skills and enable my students to cope better with the demands of their English Syllabus. I hope that some of my colleagues will be intrigued by these 'new' methods and perhaps adopt some of these ideas in their own classrooms.

RELEVANCE OF THIS RESEARCH TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN CURRICULUM:

This research is aimed at improving methods of pedagogy as well as the accompanying learning experiences for the students involved. Because of the fact that this research is classroom-based, it seems necessary that, as a teacher in South Africa, cognizance is taken of the Education policies outlined for schools by the Government as these apply to both Private and Government Schools. Outcomes Based Education (OBE) has many positive things to offer both students and teachers and it seems to me to be necessary to link this research to the guidelines issued by the Department of Education and to make the planned lessons and strategies conform to the requirements outlined in the relevant policy documents. As I am currently only involved with the NSC Phase (National Senior Certificate) of the curriculum, I shall link my ideas solely to this area of the syllabus.

All references in this section have been taken from the National Curriculum Statement for English Home Language issued by the National Department of Education. A copy of this document is attached in Appendix 2.

The adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) provided a basis for curriculum transformation and development. The Preamble states that the aims of the Constitution are to:

- heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights;
- improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person;
- lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is protected by law; and
- build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

The Constitution further states that, "everyone has the right … to further education which the State, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible." According to the policies outlined by the Government, social transformation in education is aimed at ensuring that that equal educational opportunities are provided for all sections of our population. OBE strives to enable all learners to reach their maximum learning potential by setting the learning outcomes to be achieved by the end of the education process. OBE encourages a learner-centered and activity-based approach to education. The critical outcomes relevant to my research are outlined below.

Note: The Critical Outcomes and Learning Outcomes discussed below will all be touched on by the learners in the lessons outlined in my research. However, these Outcomes do not constitute the aims of my research. They are simply areas that will be addressed because of the nature and scope of the proposed lessons and the guidelines of OBE. These Outcomes are meant to be addressed over a three-year period and improved upon gradually until the student achieves competence.

1 : Critical Outcomes:

The Critical Outcomes listed below are all relevant to my lesson planning and research and the lesson design will aim to encompass as many of these outcomes as possible.

The twelve critical outcomes maintain that learners will be able to:

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;

- work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organization and community;
- organize and manage themselves and their activities responsibility and effectively;
- collect, analyse, organize and critically evaluate information;
- communicate effectively using visual, symbolic and/or language skills in various modes;
- use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environment and the health of others; and
- demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognizing that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Relevant Developmental Outcomes relating to my research would encompass the following:

Learners will be able to:

- reflect on and explore a variety of strategies to learn more effectively;
- participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities;
- be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts.

A further area of vital importance to the new NSC syllabus is that of, "Human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice". The policy document states the following:

"The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 -12 (General) seeks to promote human rights, inclusivity and social justice. All newly-developed Subject Statements are infused with the practices of social and environmental justice and human rights as defined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In particular, the National Curriculum Statement Grades 10 – 12 (General) is sensitive to issues of diversity such as poverty, inequality, race, gender, language, age, disability and other factors."

The multi-faceted and layered approach to the proposed lessons (outline included below) encompasses the tenets outlined above. The subject matter is particularly appropriate to fostering a deeper understanding and unity amongst the students who come from diverse cultural and economic backgrounds.

Besides the critical outcomes listed above, the four Learning Outcomes will be addressed by my research. (Appendix 3 Tables 1 - 4)

METHODOLOGY AND LESSON DESIGN:

The students participating in this teaching experiment:

I have decided to enlist my Grade Ten learners for the purposes of this teaching experiment. The NSC phase spans three years and I will probably teach these students English for the remainder of their school career. It will be extremely interesting to track the development of these students and their ability to acquire concepts over a three-year period. The time-scale is of particular significance because it will allow for 'recursion' through the zone of proximal development with any students who need to repeat the learning process in any given area used for the purposes of this research. These students are between fifteen and sixteen years of age. There are 20 students in the class. The girls are of mixed academic ability. There are five students within the class who have tremendous potential and who display outstanding ability to use and manipulate language. These five students will form the core of my ability groupings and will act as the 'more capable other' as we move through the learning process. I have not taught this class of students prior to this year.

Adopting a more 'learner-centered' approach in the classroom:

It is my experience that most students, especially in the NSC phase are 'taught' using a rote method. This is especially true where students are being taught by teachers who were trained under the previous system of Christian National Education and who are over forty years of age. The parameters outlined here, encompass a vast number of teachers who, because of their 'age' and 'experience' are still highly sought after by many educational institutions. Part of the reason for this 'rote' style of pedagogy, is the fact that for many years, these teachers have been aiming their students towards the writing of their Matriculation Examinations and they have been teaching towards the completion of a syllabus. Many of these teachers seem to feel that students should be like sponges and that if they are supposedly 'quiet and attentive', then they are

'learning'. In my opinion, many classrooms in which these pedagogical methods are practised are sterile environments, staffed by authority figures who are not interested in much besides completing the syllabus. Such classrooms are places not conducive to any kind of 'real' learning. Now that I have accomplished a shift in my own pedagogy, it has become clear to me why many teachers felt (and still continue to feel) so threatened by Outcomes-Based Education. Group work and collaborative learning are both terrifying prospects if one has always expected students to sit passively without questioning and if one has only ever used a purely rote teaching style in one's classroom. The movement of the teacher away from 'authority figure' to that of mediator and facilitator is a foreign concept which many teachers find almost impossible to envisage. I have often heard my colleagues who adopt this rote style of teaching complain that students do not 'remember what they have been taught'.

The most effective teaching, in my opinion, happens when children are allowed to construct their own knowledge and develop their own understanding of the concepts under review. This must happen under the guidance of a teacher, who must enable the process but essentially, that person should adopt more the role of a mediator and trouble-shooter than the person who 'delivers' knowledge. Much of my teaching has changed to adopt this approach. There has to be a certain amount of teacher input, but it has become my view that the students have to do most of the thinking and conceptualizing for themselves in order that their learning is effective. The key to this type of teaching is communication. The teacher 'other' allows the child to explore the 'self'. The best methods to accomplish this process are through collaborative learning and group work.

LESSON DESIGN AND PLANNING:

I have decided to use three quite diverse sections of the English syllabus to test the validity of the theoretical constructs outlined in this research proposal. I have prepared a series of lessons encompassing a section of the Grammar syllabus – Parts of Speech; a section of the Writing syllabus - Summary Writing and a section of the Literature syllabus – the writing of a Literature Essay. These are areas in which students find it very difficult to gain competency and they are a real 'test' for most teachers.

Towards a 'generative' teaching model

As stated above, it seems necessary, for the purposes of this research, to ensure that the lesson design itself moves away from a 'rote' model, to one that is more 'generative' in nature. While this research aims to focus on the work of Vygotsky (1978) and the Russian Socio-historical School, it seems to me, to be important that the actual lessons are planned according to a generative model. The ideas surrounding generative teaching have a vital place in the thoughts surrounding my pedagogical methods and indeed, it is my opinion that the theoretical constructs of the zone of proximal development or the ideas of Activity Theory could not operate without a 'generative' approach.

A rote style of teaching denies students the opportunity of using and enhancing their existing knowledge. The lessons themselves, because they are 'delivered' to the students, pre-suppose that all students within the classroom are at the same place within their learning for that particular task. This style of teaching takes away the agency that should be invested in the child. It is my view that such lessons, taught in a 'rote' manner are totally without benefit to the students. English skills are difficult to master. English itself is an extremely complicated, involved language, demanding enthusiasm and engagement in order that the development of necessary skills occurs. In my experience, within a 'rote' classroom, grammar skills, for example, would probably be taught in 'sections'. One week nouns would be taught; the next week adjectives and so on for at least the duration of the first term. These lessons would probably involve the use of arbitrary worksheets, which would be completed at home and 'marked' in class, during which time the students will have to listen to the teacher and attempt to synthesise the information that the teacher will 'explain' as she moves through the marking process. A Literature essay would be taught with a set of 'rules' which students would have to apply. In all areas, a piece of summative assessment such as the completion of a worksheet, the writing of a test or the writing of an essay would follow. A 'generative' method will involve the students at every stage of the process. They will have to take responsibility for much of their own learning and will have to conceptualise for themselves. There will also be pieces used for assessment, but these will aim at checking what the students *do know* rather than what they do not.

In light of the fact that this research aims at positing a more generative approach to the teaching of English Skills, it seems useful to include the work of Harlen and Osborne (1985) who examined Primary School Science and some of the possible reasons why students experience

difficulties with basic concepts in this area of the curriculum. Much of what they reveal regarding Primary School Science applies to other subjects across the curriculum. Harlen and Osborne (1985, p 313) maintain that,

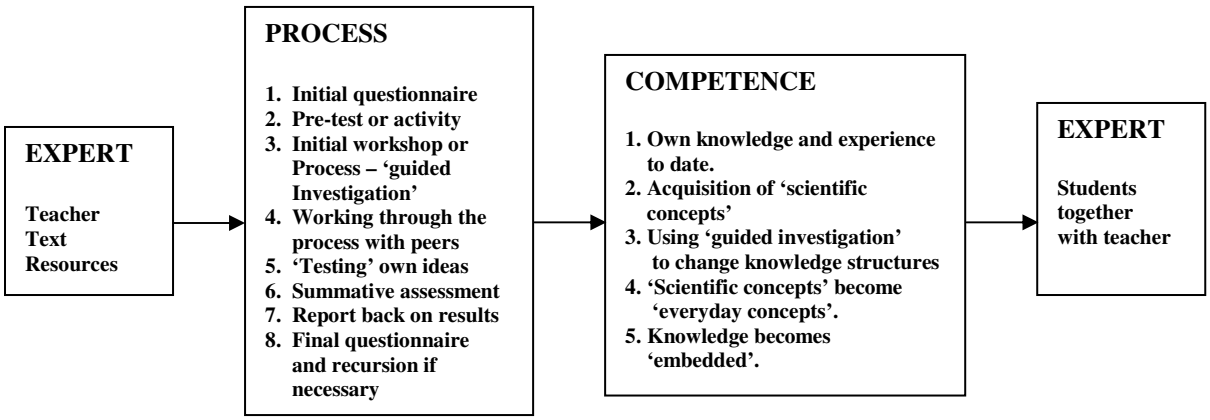
> "[W]hat is required is a rationale … which provides a basis for decisions as to the teacher's role, class organization, content and types of activities … this rationale can be provided by starting, not from some general aims … but from a vision of the way in which we want children to learn and the kind of learning we wish to promote."

(See pg 54 for diagram of model)

A generative teaching model aims to acknowledge the experiences and existing knowledge that students bring into the classroom. This model aims to avoid rote-learning and concentrates on developing children's processing skills and their ways of displaying these skills. This method of teaching aims to develop children's conceptual structures in such a way that these structures become a part of the child's everyday knowledge systems. A generative model aims to enable students to discover for themselves, along with their peers and under the guidance of their teachers. It aims at placing the responsibility for learning with the student. This is exactly what Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical contruct of the zone of proximal development aims to achieve.

The lessons designed for this research report aim to move students through the zones of proximal development for the various tasks as shown in the diagram below:

Figure 2: ***Diagrammatic representation of the movement through the zones of proximal development***



The unit of research designed for this study aims at shifting student's perceptions of specific, difficult sections of the syllabus. Students have been 'taught' Writing, Grammar and Literature skills from Grade Seven and yet many find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to interpret and negotiate meanings from a given text. Designing and using a Generative Model as the basis for the approach to these lessons will allow students to assume agency for their own learning. The Generative model proposed by Harlen and Osborne (1985) for Primary School Science, but adapted to meet the purposes of this series of lessons in the English classroom, seems to meet most of the required criteria. The Generative model for this unit is research is included below (Figure 3).

THE PROPOSED SERIES OF LESSONS:

Lesson series One – Grammar (Parts of Speech)

1: Pre-questionnaire (Appendix 4). Ascertaining how students have been taught grammar previously, as well as their perceptions about their present understanding of this section of the syllabus.

2: A 'pre-test' consisting of 25 sentences (50 marks) (Appendix 5) asking students to identify parts of speech. Students will receive no prior 'warning' of this test. It will simply be written 'cold'. This will be structured as an 'exercise' rather than a 'test' to make it less 'threatening'.

3: A discussion about this 'pre-test' and their perceptions as to how they think they coped. Marks for this test will not be issued at this stage. They will be told the class average and given a small breakdown of the range of marks.

4: A class discussion surrounding the concept of the eight parts of speech and the acronym "NAPPIVAC" (Nouns, Adjectives, Pronouns, Prepositions, Interjections, Verbs, Adverbs and Conjunctions). The acronym will be placed on the board and broken down by the class, firstly in groups and then as a whole class.

5: A group work exercise unpacking each section of the acronym "NAPPIVAC" using their two English Handbooks: 'English Handbook and Study Guide : A Comprehensive English Reference Book' by Lutrin and Pincus (2002)and the 'X-Kit: The definitive exam preparation kit' by Gosher (2000). They will compile their own notes at this stage. Once each group has unpacked the concepts, they will 'Jigsaw' and each 'new'

group member will 'teach' one of the areas to her group. They will not be told which area they are 'teaching' until they are in their new groups. This process ensures that they pay attention and participate fully in the process.

6: Class discussion re-affirming the concepts unpacked in groups. At this stage I will use overhead transparencies and confirm what the students already 'know'.

7: Looking at 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll (Appendix 6). This 'nonsense poem' does not contain 'recognisable' words. The idea here is for students to realize that these 'building blocks' have established places within a sentence and can be recognized by their position and placement within a sentence as well as by 'indicator' words that precede them. Students will decode three stanzas in groups and then three stanzas individually. These final stanzas will be marked in groups in order that answers may be negotiated.

8: Unit of exercises completed at home (Appendix 7). Handbooks are allowed.

9: Group work negotiation of the answers to the exercises. Handbooks are allowed.

10: Administration of a 'post-test' (Appendix 8) consisting of almost the same sentences used in the 'pre-test' – just shuffled around (50 marks) and a questionnaire (Appendix 9) checking how far perceptions have shifted. No handbooks allowed.

11. Handing back both the pre- and post-tests and discussing the shift that has occurred in their understanding.

12: A class discussion about the process and how meaningful or meaningless it was.

13: An interview with two of the students involved in the process,

Lesson Series Two – Literature Essay Writing

1: Students will have completed a reading and discussion of the entire text ('The Killing Bottle' (1999) – Jane Fox) by the time that these lessons begin.

The first lessons will encompass the completion of collages in groups. Each group will be allocated a theme or a relationship occurring within the novel and be asked to complete a collage depicting the aspect. A breakdown of the topics and the task is included. (Appendix 10)

The students will be asked to write a motivation which will explain the thinking behind the collage as well as specific references to the text itself which have meaning to their ideas.

2: Once these collages and motivations have been completed, groups will 'jigsaw' and discuss one another's collages. They will hear each other's motivations and discuss their validity and relevance. This activity will serve the dual purpose of re-visiting the text as well as preparing the students for the next step in the process. (Appendix 11)

3: Original groups will re-form. The groups will use their original 'motivations' and write a long paragraph about their topic, making no reference to the collage this time. They will then have to use their texts and find supporting evidence for each point that they have raised in their paragraphs. (Appendix 11)

4: Groups will now be given a number of 'model' paragraphs (Appendix 12). They will have to look at these paragraphs and decide on a set of generic rules which they will use when they write a paragraph about a text. Groups will compare notes and we will draw up a class set of notes, which will be typed and issued to the girls. These notes will then be used to proof and fix their group's paragraphs.

5: The final stage in the process is to discuss effective introductions and conclusions. The girls will write their own in groups and then discuss them as a class. (Appendix 12)

6: Literature essay topics will be issued (Appendix 13). Groups will re-form. Each group will be given a topic. Flip chart paper will be used and plans for essays completed on this paper. These will be put up around the classroom and students will be afforded the opportunity to walk around and compile their own notes for each topic.

7: Students will write one of these essays that will be submitted for assessment.
One or two of the most effective essays will be read to the class.

8: A class discussion about the process.

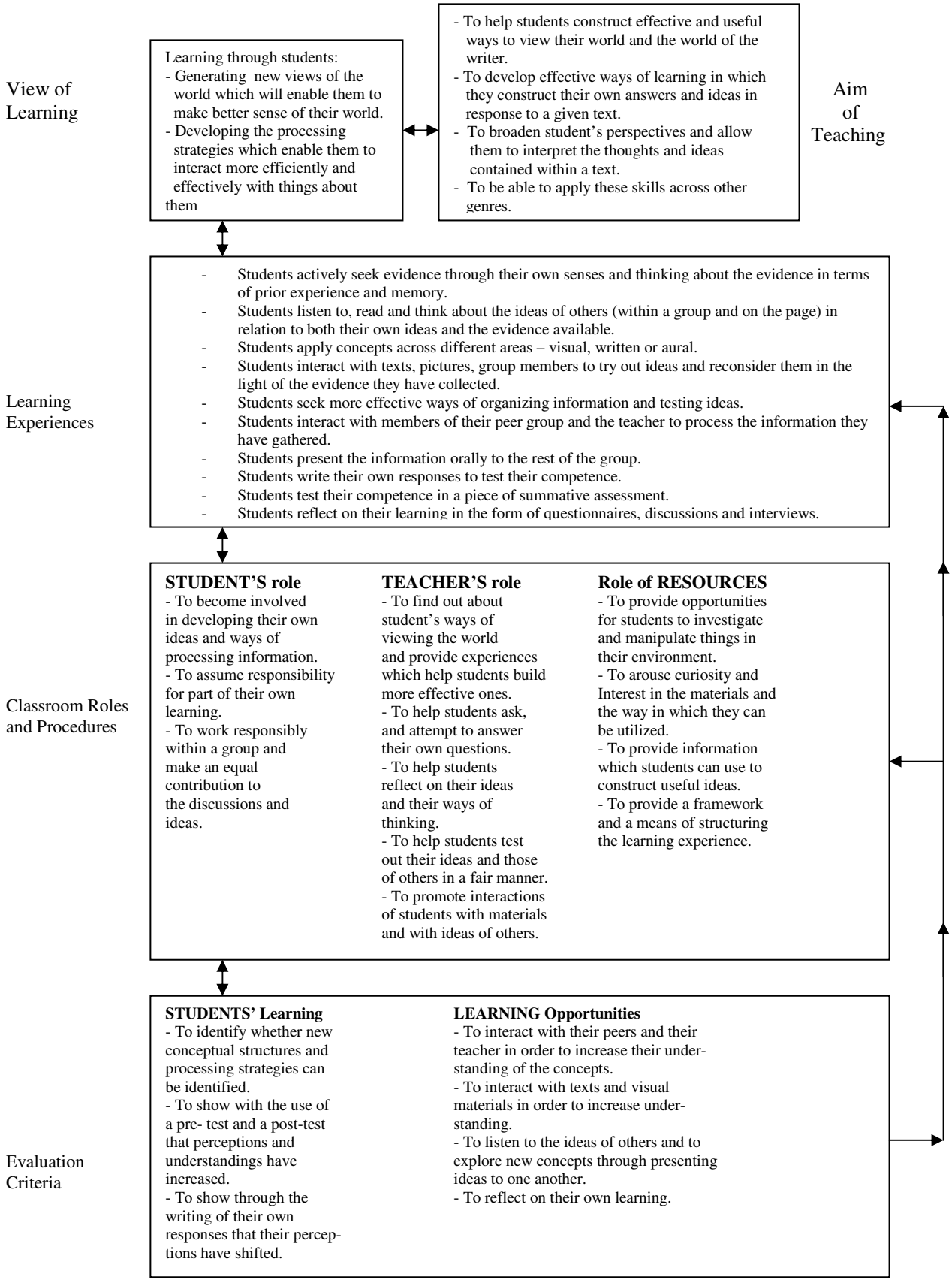
9: A post-experience questionnaire. (Appendix 14)

10: Interviews with two of the students about the process.

Lesson Series Three – Summary Writing Skills

1: Students will be issued with a lesson plan and outline of the process, including the groups they are to form. (Appendix 15) This outline will contain their first summary passage. The procedure they will follow is to work in groups and negotiate how they will complete a summary of the given passage. No help or guidance will be offered at this stage of the process.

Figure 3 : ***A Generative Model for Learning in the English Classroom*** **Page 54**



2: Students will be asked to draw up rules for the writing of a summary from the passages they have been given as well as a summary writing checklist as they move through the process of writing their summary. They will be given no guidelines or ideas as to how they are meant to do this.

3: Students will be given a 'model' summary (Appendix 16) and asked to check their 'answers'. They will be asked to modify their checklists and the summary method they have drawn up while they look at the 'model'.

4: Groups will Jigsaw (Appendix 16) and test the four possible checklists and methods that were generated. Each group will be given a 'new' text to summarise (Appendix 16), using their method and their checklist. The group will then explain to the class how their method operates and how well it worked using the 'test' text. A class discussion will follow as to the methods which might be the most effective. The method chosen will be formalized by the teacher and typed for the class.

5: A summary will be completed by each student (Appendix 16) and the class method for summary writing will be tested. Students will be allowed to use an alternative method if they find that it works better for them.

6: A questionnaire examining student's perceptions of the process and the effectiveness of the methods and the resulting learning (Appendix 17).

7: A class discussion about the effectiveness of the learning process.

8: Interviews with two students involved in the process.

METHODOLOGY:

The most appropriate methodology to use for this piece of research would seem to be a case study, as it is a method that is perceived to be, according to Stake (1998, p 255) "[P]articularly useful in educational research." Stake (1998, p 255) goes on to state that "[A] case study that portrays an educational problem in all its personal and social complexity is a precious discovery." The process of immersion into a specific environment or life of a person gives the researcher, "[A]n intimate familiarity with people's lives and culture. He or she looks for patterns in the lives, actions and words of people in the context of the complete case as a whole. (Neuman, 1991, p 331)

Each case study is different because each researcher will view his or her 'problem' from a particular perspective and with a specific approach. Because case studies deal with human beings, nothing can be predicted with any certainty. Goode and Hatt (1952) as cited in Shulman (1998, p 255) define the case study as follows:

> "[T]he case study then is not a specific technique; it is a way of organizing social data so as to preserve the unitary character of the social object being studied."

MacDonald and Walker (1977) as cited in Hook and Colini (1981, p 252) claim that, "[A] case study is an investigation in depth of an individual case, an examination of an instance in action." This research will focus on a single classroom environment and will undertake to examine the collaborative learning process of twenty students in three specific areas of the English syllabus. This will be a focused study which will make use of planned observations in a 'natural' setting. The research will make use of interviewing techniques, qualitative analysis and the writing of narrative reports. Use will also be made of statistics and this data will give a quite impersonal, 'technical' analysis of the learning process under review.

Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976) as cited in Hook and Colini (1981, p 252) emphasise the eclectic nature of the case study approach.

> "[C]ase study researchers employ whatever methods they consider appropriate and what the circumstances suggest or dictate. The choice of methods, whether direct observation, interviewing, questionnaire, field notes, tape recordings, documents or photographs, is guided by the aims of the enquiry."

This research report will make use of all of all of the methods outlined above as indicated in the research design.

Establishing validity within a case study relies on the processes of triangulation and progressive focusing. The methods of data collection and the multiple research methods used to report on this research will ensure that triangulation occurs. According to Stake (1998, p 263),

> "[O]ne of the primary ways of increasing validity is by triangulation. The technique is one of trying to arrive at the same meaning by at least three independent approaches. Naturally a finding that has been triangulated with several independent data-holdings is usually more credible than one that has not."

There seem to be different ways of achieving this 'triangulation' – direct observation, interviews, keeping a teacher's log and from additional sources. Hook and Colini (1981, p 253) state that,

> "[T]his cross-checking on the convergence or divergence of evidence enables the researcher to examine in greater detail the hypothesized relationships, to confirm or reject them, to draw conclusions and to formulate alternative interpretations. The triangulation principle assists the researcher to grasp the multiple realities involved in examining an event in depth."

Progressive focusing is another technique which will be used in order to validate and direct this case study. The process of progressive focusing demands that the research, through observation and enquiry becomes more directed, systematic and selective. The teacher as researcher is concerned with understanding the processes taking place in the classroom setting. Progressive focusing seeks to overcome the seeming lack of structure in case study research and attempts to increase the objectivity which many opponents to this type of research claim is lacking. Progressive focusing and triangulation when used together are considered as powerful tools which help the researcher achieve validity and credibility.

After reviewing the surveyed literature for this section of this research report, it seems to me, that it is of extreme importance that the parameters defining a case study question are clearly defined and that the research design itself is extremely clear, otherwise the researcher might lose focus and clarity as to the question that has been posed. Great care has been taken with the planning of the lessons to be covered by the students in these three sections of the syllabus. Because case study methodology is basically one that relies on enquiry, the researcher must look for evidence to describe, explain and understand. Through this process of inquiry, various ideas and theories will be generated which should be used by the researcher as a guide as to how to continue the research process. Hook and Colini (1981, p 253) state that,

> "[A]n essential quality of the case study worker is the ability to integrate the assorted bits of information, look for commonalities and idiosyncrasies, and provide a unified description and interpretation."

Careful attention will be give to the integration of the various types of data that will be collected during the research process.

The term 'case study' seems to be synonymous with the idea of a *'bounded system.*' (Stake, 1998, p 255) The main idea here is that the study will involve, "[S]ome conception of the unity or

totality of a system with some kind of outline or boundaries." A case study is a 'bounded system' because,

> "[I]t can focus on a single participant, a single classroom, a single institution or a single enterprise – usually under natural conditions – so as to understand it in its own habitat. . . the case is something deemed worthy of close watch. It has character, it has a totality, it has boundaries. It is not something we want to represent by a score. It is not something we want to represent only by an array of scores. It is a complex, dynamic system. We want to understand its complexity." (Stake, 1998, p 256)

The Grade Ten class and the classroom in which the lessons occur is the bounded system in this case. What is being studied within this bounded system is whether a generative style of teaching, using the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development as well as the ideas surrounding activity theory can be tested and validated within this environment. In this study some peripheral, descriptive scores are included.

Stake (1998, p 257) maintains the following:

> "[A case study] is highly personalized because teaching and learning are highly personalized. The case study honours people because people are so important in a teaching-learning situation. The system boundaries are not the skins of people, but are the boundaries around a particular experience."

The findings of case studies also depend on the use to which the findings are put. Stake (1998, p 263) maintains that, "[A] case study is valid to the reader to whom it gives an accurate and useful representation of the bounded system." Observations are extremely personal and observers have different vantage points. It seems to be up to the reader to determine the validity of the researcher's observations.

In reporting a case study, the researcher has to make decisions about the presentation of the information,

> "[W]hether to provide what may be regarded as no more than an organized or structured description, leaving the reader to make judgements or draw conclusions, or to write an explicit account of the goals and objectives of the study, the research methods employed, the evidence collected and the interpretations, conclusions and reflections formed." (Hook and Colini, 1981, p 255)

Bassey, (1999) shows the following breakdown of what an educational case study should aim towards. The following is a paraphrase of these ideas:

An educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

- conducted within a localized boundary of space and time
- into interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system
- mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons
- in order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policy-makers
- or of theoreticians who are working to these ends
- in such a way that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able:
  a) to explore significant features of the case
  b) to create plausible interpretations of what is found
  c) to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations
  d) to construct a worthwhile argument or story
  e) to relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature
  f) to convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story
  g) to provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments.

Stake (1998, p 273) offers the following valuable advice to a researcher embarking on a case study:

- Time management is very important. The possible problems associated with this particular case study will most likely occur in this area. Generative teaching is time consuming and cannot be rushed. There are three teachers teaching the Grade Ten phase at Brescia House this year and the other two teachers will be teaching a lot more 'quickly' than what I will be because their pedagogical methods are essentially 'rote'. I shall have to guard against rushing the process in order to 'keep up' with my colleagues.
- Classrooms and other school spaces are the living spaces of people. Most, by definition, are public, but private by common law. Observation studies can be an unwarranted intrusion into the privacy of people. Seldom should the researcher presume to be the "guardian of rationality, efficiency and morality". I will discuss my purposes and aims with the various stakeholders involved in this study and ensure that my students and the management of the school are comfortable with what I am planning.

- If a reader wants to challenge the validity of a piece of work and claim that it is subjective, arbitrary, non-representative or inconclusive, the study is not invalidated. The counter to these charges is a good description of the methodological and conceptual reasoning that took place, including efforts at verification and disconfirmation. The literature review and meticulous planning of this research experiment will attempt to ensure that the research has validity and credibility.

RESULTS:

This section of the paper will record the results of this unit of research. The results will be analysed according to each section of the syllabus covered as part of the research design. Much of the reporting will be through the words of the students themselves. This is after all, a reflection on their learning and so it seems fitting that their 'voices' are heard.

The questionnaire on 'Teaching Styles':

As I stated earlier in the Literature Survey, it has become my belief that 'traditional' or 'rote' teaching methods are not effective and do not lead to real and lasting 'learning'. As a part of this research report, I decided, at the end of the process, to ask the students about their views of what constitutes 'effective teaching'. The views of my students concur with and in some cases, exceed my own. While the students were extremely specific in their answers, I am going to report general trends and ideas posited by the students. I will include relevant quotations from the students where they are applicable. I realize that this information is extremely sensitive and I trust that it will be treated as highly confidential by any readers of this research paper. I wish to state also, that I believe that the concerns highlighted here are not confined to the school at which I teach, but that they are generic concerns plaguing many schools throughout the country.

1. **Question 1:** ***You have now been exposed to many different styles of teaching and learning within my classroom. Describe the lessons you have enjoyed the most, which have been most successful in terms of what you have learnt and which ones made an impression on you – if any. Please provide a detailed answer.***

   Most of the students were extremely positive about their learning experiences in my classroom. Many expressed the fact that they had enjoyed their lessons

because they were so 'different' and that they had grown both in confidence and competence during the term. One student put it this way: "All the lessons in English so far this year have been extremely successful for me and I know others have said so too. This is because the lessons were different and loads of fun. I can finally say that learning is fun." Many enjoyed the fact that I force them to think and I do not simply 'give' them the answers. One student shared the following view, "I love lessons in which you start us off with a topic and you let us finish together which gets our minds going." Many students appreciated the fact that my lessons were extremely carefully prepared and that I have a clear plan of where I want them to 'be' by the end of a series of lessons or by the end of a term. Many of the girls picked up my own confidence and enthusiasm and remarked that it made all the difference to the way in which they approached the tasks assigned to them. One student expressed the following thought, "I love coming because it's away from all the other teachers who are all the same, never something different. It's fun because it's never just about English. Life outside this flippin school is also included and its fun to learn with a teacher who does not act like the real world is not out there." Another stated the following, "I strongly believe that your teaching is successful because you believe that we should be 'spoken to' not, 'spoken at'. You treat us like adults and we respond in that way. If I had a problem, I think I would come to you."

2. **Question 2:** ***Define what makes a 'good' teacher. You may use examples from your own experience. Include things such as their organization, their conduct / behaviour, their treatment of you, their respect for themselves and others, their commitment and dedication to their jobs etc.***

Almost all the students answered this question by stating what they did not value or appreciate. Most students expressed the wish that their teachers respond in a sympathetic manner to their circumstances. Many students felt that for many teachers, work took preference over everything else. Many expressed the view that they wanted their teachers to be passionate about their teaching and committed to doing the very best job that they could. Some students felt concerned by the fact that some of their teachers seemed disorganized and unprepared and then reprimanded the students for their lack of time-

management or organization skills. Most students commented on the fact that some teachers imposed deadlines and set tests with which they as students were forced to comply, but then the teachers would not return marked work for weeks. The students felt that they needed their teachers to be flexible. Students also felt that they wanted more than just a 'textbook' or 'traditional' type of teaching. They generally expressed boredom and frustration at they way in which they were being taught. Most students voiced their disapproval of teachers who screamed and shouted as a way of maintaining discipline. It was felt that a calm, firm and fair approach worked far more successfully. Students valued teachers who were patient with them. Students respected staff who took pride in their personal appearance.

3. Question 3: ***Describe one or two of your favourite teachers and why they deserve their place of honour in your affections.***

The teachers described in this question were ones who met the requirements outlined in the other questions of this section.

4. Question 4: ***Which type of teacher does not gain your respect? You need to be specific, please.***

I will use the words of the students here.

'Teachers that make us feel stupid."

"Teachers who make you feel like they are doing you a huge favour if they offer to give you extra help."

"A teacher who shouts at you all the time."

"A teacher who rules through fear."

"Teachers who are rude."

"Teachers who teach with notes or the overhead, day after day."

"Teachers who put you down."

"Teachers who have favourites."

"Teachers who just give you work to keep you busy."

"Teachers who don't let you do anything except work in silence."

"Teachers who just talk at you all the time."

5. **Question 5:** ***If you had to suggest a teaching style to Ms Bothma and Mrs Benning, (the Headmistress and Principal) what would you tell them about how you like to learn?***

Overall, students expressed the view that they would like lessons to be varied. They appreciated classes where there was some group work, some visual learning, some peer activities, some opportunities for discussion, some individual tasks and some 'traditional' teaching. The 'best teachers' and classes they enjoyed were the ones where teaching styles and methods were varied. The students also felt that there has to be a 'fun' element to the class. They also felt that sometimes it was necessary to have a discussion or watch a video or just play Scrabble.

6. **Question 6:** ***If you had the opportunity to give one vital piece of information to your teachers, what would it be?***

I will quote some of the comments made by the students here:
"Don't just expect us to understand."
"Tests are not the only form of assessment."
"Don't sweat the small stuff."
"Be creative."
"We are human beings first."
"Be reasonable."
"As students we need to be recognized as individuals."

7. **Question 7:** ***Any concluding thoughts or ideas that I have not covered here?***

No further comments were recorded.

Section A : Grammar Skills

Questionnaire 1: (Appendix 4)

This 'pre-questionnaire' was designed in order to ascertain how students have been taught grammar previously, as well as their perceptions about their present understanding of this section of the syllabus.

1. **Question 1:** ***Do you think there is any relevance to the studying of Grammar? Why do you think we have to study it at all?***

   Eighteen out of the twenty students who completed the survey agreed that it was extremely necessary to study Grammar. Many of the girls claimed that as English is their home language, it is of vital importance that they understand its 'building blocks'. Many expressed the view that an understanding of Grammar would improve their writing skills as well as increase their understanding of word usage and sentence construction.
   Two students stated that it was not necessary because technology (spell check etc) took care of most 'Grammar' issues.

2. **Question 2:** ***How do you feel personally about studying and using English Grammar? Do you feel confident that you know what is required of you in this area of the syllabus? Please provide reasons for your answer.***

   Fourteen of the students did not feel at all confident when using Grammar skills. Six students felt that they were 'fine' but that they would not mind honing their skills.

3. **Question 3:** ***How have you been taught Grammar thus far in high school?***

   Eighteen of the students stated that they had not really ever been 'taught' Grammar. They were given exercises to complete and they had to use their English Handbooks in order to check their understanding of the concepts. The methods used were only rote.

4. **Question 4:** ***Do you feel confident in your ability to identify and discuss the different parts of speech in tests and examinations? Please give reasons for your answer.***

   Five of the students had an excellent teacher in Grade 7 and they are the ones who felt more confident than the other fifteen who expressed concern in this area.

5. **Question 5:** ***What kinds of lessons do you find help you to learn the best? Do you like group work and learning with your peers, lessons where the teacher just explains something, or a combination of the two methods? Provide a reason for your answer.***

   Nineteen students prefer a combination of the two methods. The students expressed the need to 'learn' from their peers, but stated that they valued the input of the teacher because then they had validation for what they had discussed. At least seven students made the point that the teacher needs to be involved and that groups only 'work' if everyone is 'forced' to participate. It is interesting to note that the students felt that they 'learnt' best from their peers. One student's response was as follows: "Both methods because the teacher teaches us about it, gives us the facts and the methods, then we can practice the methods with our peers, having fun and learning together. This lets us learn more easily and get more into our brains instead of just doing it all with the teacher."

6. **Question 6:** ***Are there any other comments you would like to make concerning the teaching and utilizing of Grammar skills that have not been covered in the questions above?***

   Most students expressed the need for constant practice and reinforcement.

7. **Question 7:** ***Is there a Grammar lesson you can remember that made an impression on you and that helped you to 'learn' the work better? Describe the lesson.***

   Not one student could remember a Grammar lesson from either their Grade Eight or Nine year.

After the test, I asked the students how well they thought they had achieved in this test. They claimed that they had coped quite well and that they did not foresee any major upsets. I marked the test and told them the class average. I did not issue individual marks because I wanted their full attention focused on the process they were about to begin and I did not want them to become despondent and believe that they could not cope. They were worried when they learned about the low average, but I assured them that this would change as we moved through the process.

The pre-test (See Appendix 5) :

Consisting of 25 sentences (50 marks) asking students to identify parts of speech.

The results are detailed as follows:

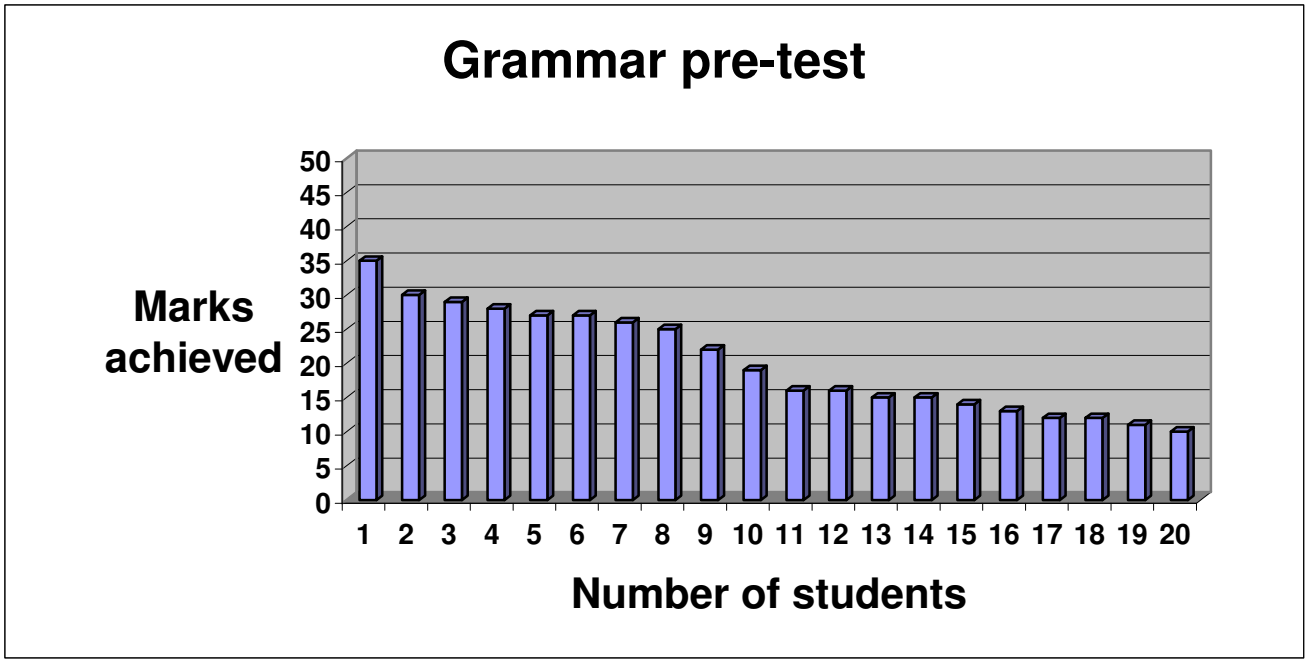


Figure 3: Pretest Results

The class average for this test was 40 %. 11 students out of 20 achieved below 40%.

Moving through the process:

The girls were placed into groups. I appointed group leaders (the most capable students) and allowed the rest of the girls to choose where they wanted to work. There were five groups of four students. We unpacked the acronym NAPPIVAC (nouns, adjectives, pronouns, prepositions, interjections, verbs, adverbs and conjunctions) firstly in groups and then as a class. The groups were then allocated specific parts of speech to discuss – nouns, adjectives and pronouns; prepositions and interjections; verbs; adverbs; conjunctions. The groups used their handbooks and discussed and compiled notes about the various areas they were assigned. I moved between groups and facilitated their discussion at this stage.

Once the groups had reached an understanding about the concepts they were unpacking, I asked them to 'jigsaw' and discuss 'NAPPIVAC' as a whole. It was very interesting because at this stage, the girls started 'seeing' that the parts of speech were related and that they all fit into a sentence like a puzzle. They began speaking about the relationships between the words and how an adjective, for example, can only ever be placed next to a noun. We looked at 'descriptors' such as articles and how these always indicate adjectives and nouns. One of the students asked the question why parts of speech are always taught in isolation, when really, one needs to look at all of them in order to understand how these building blocks function. This was a 'breakthrough' moment. Another student realized that different words can function as different parts of speech depending on where they are used within a sentence. All of a sudden the girls were excited and animated about their new understanding. When I consolidated their 'new' knowledge on the board and overhead, they 'knew' the answers. They were confident when they answered questions and were suddenly 'enjoying' a 'boring' thing like grammar.

In order to reinforce the concepts, the girls were then issued with a copy of the poem 'Jabberwocky' by Lewis Carroll (Appendix 6) and asked to work in their 'Jigsaw' groups. This is a 'nonsense' poem and does not contain many 'recognisable' words. The students were asked to identify the function of each word in the poem. This section of the process was extremely rewarding to watch. The girls were debating, reasoning, justifying and 'sedimenting' their knowledge. It was almost unnecessary to work through the answers, because they 'knew' what was correct. They were delighted with their progress. I issued exercises to be completed at home (Appendix 7) and told them that we would write a test the following week.

The post – test (See Appendix 8)

Consisting of 25 sentences (50 marks) asking students to identify parts of speech. This test used the same sentences as those in the 'pre-test'. I simply shuffled the sentences around.

The results are detailed as follows:

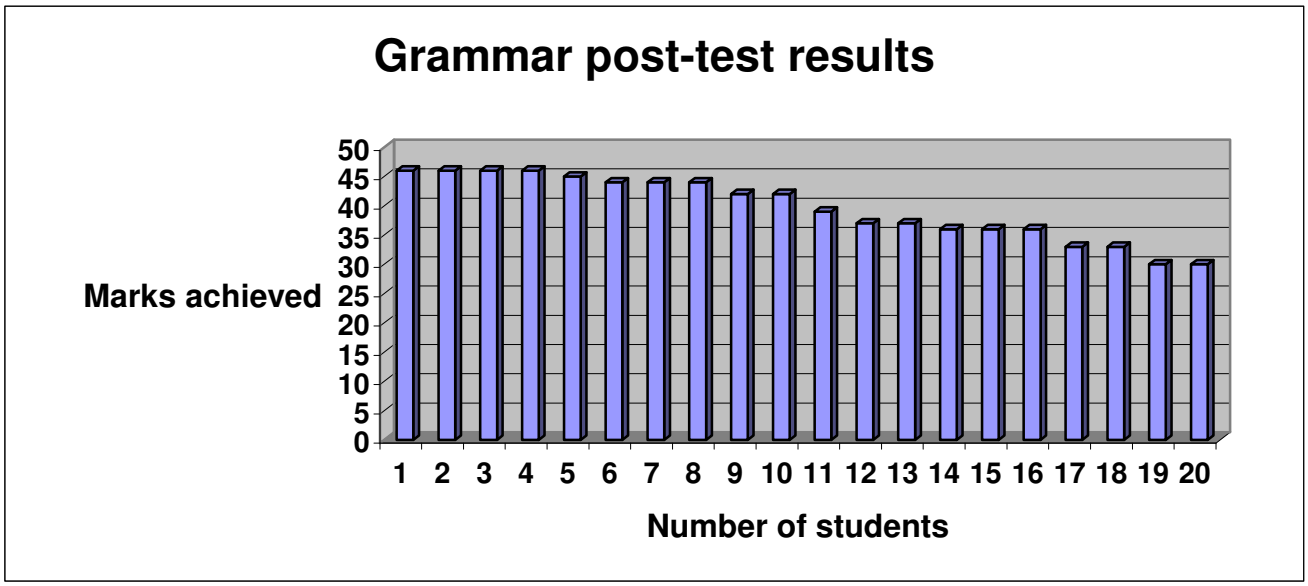


Figure 5: Post-test Results

The class average for this test was 80%. Every student passed and most achieved over 60%

The final questionnaire (Appendix 9):

1. **Question 1:** ***How do you think you coped with the grammar test (parts of speech) that you wrote? Provide a detailed explanation as to why you think you coped as you did.***

   Sixteen students reported that they felt that they had coped very well in the test. They stated that their confidence had increased and that they understood what they were being asked to do. One student responded as follows: "I coped much better than in the last one. I was very nervous at first but as soon as I started, I calmed down as I realized I could manage and it was amazing to be looking at each question, and for most of them, just 'knowing the answer. I feel that the lessons during class and the practice I have been getting have really helped me."

   Four students struggle with tests in general. They lack self-confidence and as one of the students stated, she 'second-guessed' herself and this led to confusion. These students will receive some extra help and extension work – recursion through the zone of proximal development, but I am confident that they will master this area of the syllabus.

2. **Question 2:** ***When your test was returned to you, were your 'fears' justified? Explain your feelings at this point.***

I would like to quote this response here: "I was in shock. All my life English Teachers have rated me as a 'C' student because I had remedial lessons when I was younger. Now, for once I am able to say to people that I am good at English, when I learn it in a different way. I am still shocked." This response echoes the feelings of many of the students.

3. **Question 3:** ***Has your understanding of this section of the syllabus changed after the grammar lessons you have had? Provide reasons for your answer.***

All twenty students indicated a resounding 'yes' in response to this question. Among the reasons cited were, "When I learnt it in Grade 7, it was more of a parrot thing … but now I actually understand it." "I understand how the whole thing works." "On first being told we were going to be doing grammar I honestly felt like 'heading for the hills', but recently I've become more comfortable with it and am confident." "The lessons were fun as we got to interact with each other and Mrs P, which helps me not to be bored and thus I can concentrate better and learn more." "I don't get scared anymore."

4. **Question 4:** ***Has your confidence in identifying parts of speech grown at all from these lessons? What is the most important thing that you gained from these lessons?***

Eighteen students answered 'yes' in response to this question. Among the reasons cited were, "I learnt to differentiate between parts of speech with confidence because I know now." "Discussing grammar like this instead of learning notes makes it easier to learn." "I have gained enthusiasm for learning English and trying to understand it." "Grammar isn't such a slog anymore … it is less stressful."

5. **Question 5:** ***Do you think that you need more practice to improve these skills, or are you sure of yourself in this area?***

Most students felt that they would like regular revision work in order to keep their skills fresh. I will ensure that we do regular revision exercises especially for those students who are not yet confident.

Concluding thoughts on Grammar:

The last part of this process involved the handing back of the pre and post-tests, a class discussion about the process and interviews with two of the students. A paraphrase of the class discussion and the interviews is as follows:

Initially, the students felt that the idea of providing the 'answers' for themselves and the fact that they had to come to grips with the concepts independently, quite daunting. Up to this point, they had been familiar with dealing with Grammar concepts in isolated units. They would look at 'nouns', for example, in isolation and then in a week or two, 'adjectives'. They did not have much of an idea how the different parts of speech complemented each other and how they all fit together like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. They did not know that words can perform the function of different parts of speech depending on where they are placed in a sentence. They were fascinated. All of a sudden they realized the interdependence of words on one another. One of the students remarked that when she 'saw' how they fit – during the 'Jabberwocky' exercise – she suddenly felt as if she 'had' it. "All of a sudden I knew that I understood. No-one has ever 'taught' us Grammar like this before. Why?" I could not answer her because for many years I too was 'guilty' of 'teaching' Grammar in the same way – as isolated units without any kind of link. This conversation brought home to me the importance of English as a living, breathing entity with a life and a character that cannot be 'compartmentalised'. One of the other girls said, "I was scared of Grammar, now I don't know why I was. It is not actually difficult or complicated." Another student said, "I found the acronym, 'NAPPIVAC' very useful because when I wrote the test, I wrote it on the top of my paper and it made me focus as I wrote."

Another made the observation, "It is much more fun learning like this because we don't even realize that we are working hard. The bell seemed to go as soon as we sat down. We really liked working like this." I asked what they thought my role was and one student said,

> "Mrs P, we couldn't do this without you. We wouldn't know if we were right or not and we wouldn't know how to move on. You have to be there to guide us and tell us if we are going in the right direction. We can do some of the work, but we need you to tell us what we need to focus on. The lessons have to be planned by you. It is because you make us work so carefully that we 'get' what we are supposed to 'get'."

Many of the students liked the fact that the questionnaires were anonymous and that this allowed them space and freedom to be extremely honest. They also expressed their appreciation of the fact that I had been open with them and had told them that we were embarking on an 'experiment' together in order to test some theories about teaching. They were excited about the jump in the class average and wanted to know when we were "going to do more stuff like this." This exercise was extremely rewarding because most students really dislike Grammar and these girls managed not only to shift their perceptions, but also their attitudes. This shift in both areas was one of the initial aims of my research.

Section B : Literature Skills

The reporting on this section of the research will mostly be narrative because there was no way of 'testing' for results besides summative assessment which took the form of a completed Literature Essay.

A breakdown of the 'marks' achieved in the final Literature Essay is included below. It is interesting to note that the students achieved results according to their ability. This proves that each student achieved her potential for the process and that the collaboration allowed each student to achieve her best performance for that task. This section of the research, more so than the other two, illustrated beautifully the 'double move'. The students began with a wide focus and moved gradually towards a specific outcome while the planning for the lessons was extremely detailed and precise.

The collage activity worked exceptionally well. The girls were well-prepared – as per Appendix 10 – and they arrived in class for the relevant lesson with words and pictures already trimmed. They completed their collages within the required number of lessons – which meant that they had to work extremely quickly and efficiently. I was very impressed by their adherence to my detailed instructions. They spent one lesson writing their motivations and they elected one group member to type that group's motivation for the following day. Every group had their motivation ready and typed for lesson four. Photographs of two completed collages are included below.

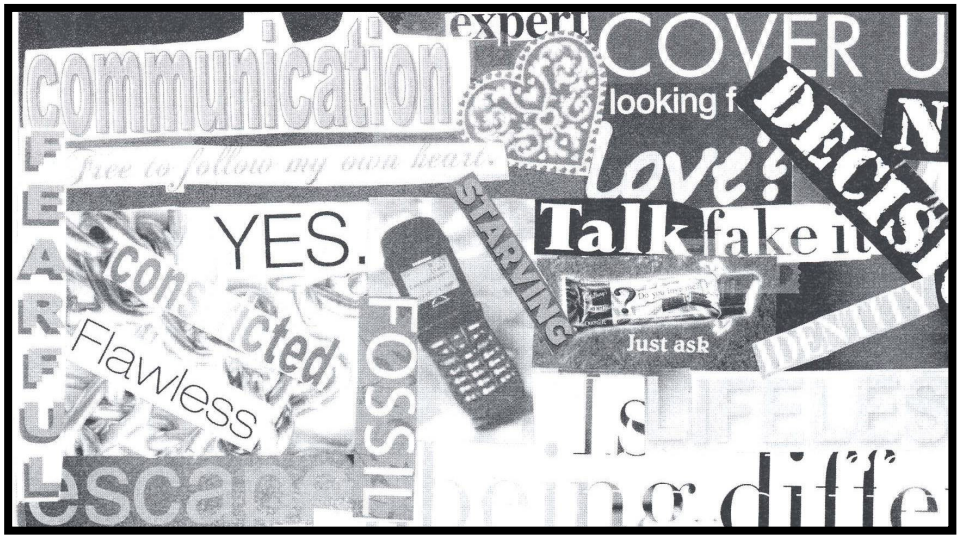


Figure 6: Completed collage

Figure 7: Completed collage

Copies of two of the motivations are included as Appendix 19. An extract from one of the motivations will illustrate how focused the groups were during this process. The words in bold in the motivation appear on the collage.

This side shows us how different their relationship became after Puni's accident. The word, ***why*** shows us Mott's view about what happened on Rooikop. Puni was always looking for ***the truth*** trying to understand what had happened. ***Lies*** poured from young Mott who was scared and didn't know how to come to terms with everything.

The group process was extremely rewarding here. Dr Macdonald and I were amazed at the dedication and commitment of the students towards this task. The activity was so focused that at times there was almost no talking. There was a 'hush' and a 'hum' of productivity. The groups used their collages beautifully and were very organized. One person took notes, two girls looked for quotations and the rest organized the information as it was generated. In two lessons, the students managed to construct a group essay, which was then checked against the 'model'. Group essays are included as Appendix 20. Introductions and conclusions were constructed with relative ease and a checklist was compiled by each group. One of the students who types quickly and efficiently was placed at the computer in my classroom and compiled the checklist as we had a class discussion about the process. The checklist is included as Appendix 21. I issued the students with a checklist that I had prepared in advance (Appendix 22) and we compared the two.

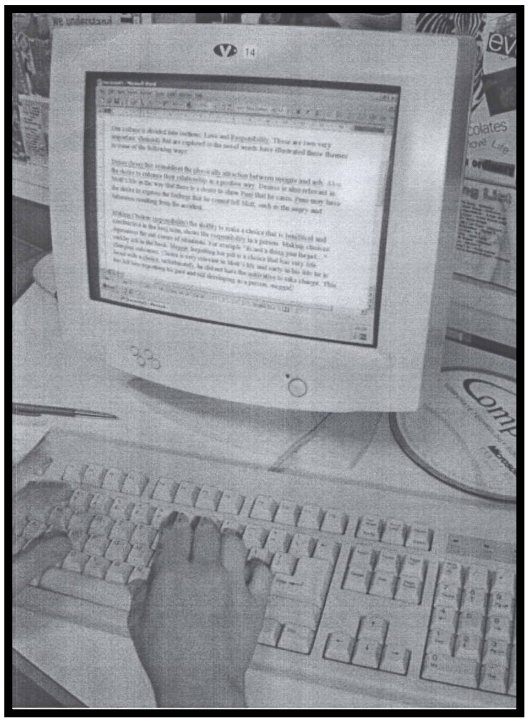


Figure 8: Working through the process

There is very little difference. I was astonished with what they had produced.

Some of the points contained in the checklist are detailed below:

Style
Formal
No colloquial language
Well structured
Concise
Sentences simple and to the point
Logical order
State your opinion with facts to back it up
Do not use contractions
Avoid using the first person
Be convincing in your argument
Give explanations for your quotes
Be sophisticated, but understandable
No underlining, exclamation marks or rhetorical questions
Do not tell the story

One member of each group typed the group essays and each person received a pack with five essays to use as a reference. The level of sophistication (register) of the language used by the students was remarkable. They were instructed to use formal register, but were not given any initial guidelines. Paragraph from two different essays are highlighted below. The complete essays are to be found as Appendix 20.

Mapunye is very angry with Mott, and cannot express his anger in words. He uses actions to express his feelings. "Mapunye suddenly thrust past him ad ripped off the bedcover, scrunching it in his arms and throwing it down. He pounded at the pillows with his good hand and hurled them at the floor. Then he was round the room, sweeping flat the objects on the dressing table, overturning the little velvet stool, pulling the curtains savagely back and forth until they hung askew." By making a mess of the room Mott had tidied and prepared, he portrays his feelings of anger, which sets him on his path to redemption.

Meggie is extremely nervous to tell Ash about her pregnancy. Her feelings about this issue are illustrated when she thinks, "It was more of a question of having to tell herself that she was not going to be sick." This also provides us with the feeling that Meggie, herself, does not think Ash is ready for a baby. When she eventually releases the news to Ash he takes it in quite a negative way, "Christ, Meggie. I trusted you. We had an agreement." This is not a fair statement to make as Ash blames Meggie for the baby and in fact, it is both their responsibility to prevent this sort of incident.

The groups re-formed and were each allocated a topic from Appendix 13. They were issued with a piece of newsprint and asked to prepare a plan for the essay including an introduction and a conclusion. These plans were put up at various points in my classroom and they were given one lesson to walk around and make notes from them. Two copies of completed group plans are included under Appendix 23. Each student was asked to write her own essay for homework. They were given a week in which to complete it. During this week the essay plans were left pinned up on the walls as a reference if needed. Examples of two final essays are included under Appendix 24. The essays were extremely rewarding to assess. It was clear that the students had grasped the concept and that with practice they would have no trouble writing essays for examinations and in their future studies.

A paragraph from one of the essays is included below:

> Mapunye simply wants William to leave him alone. By now he feels it is too late for forgiveness. All William's efforts are met with anger. "Intending to help, he had been greeted with a flung stone," literally and figuratively. William is warned to keep his distance and grows used to living alone. When Mapunye disappears to the town, "two days of complete solitude went by before [William] had woken up to the situation." William is also in denial of the injustice that took place. It becomes obvious when he asks, "There's a hole in your boot, Puni ... How did it get there?" After all, William knows perfectly well that because of the disaster at Rooikop, Mapunye walks with his foot turned in, and that this wears away the boot. The fact that William has to be drunk before he can face up to his guilt and think about the subject is not a particularly reassuring sign.

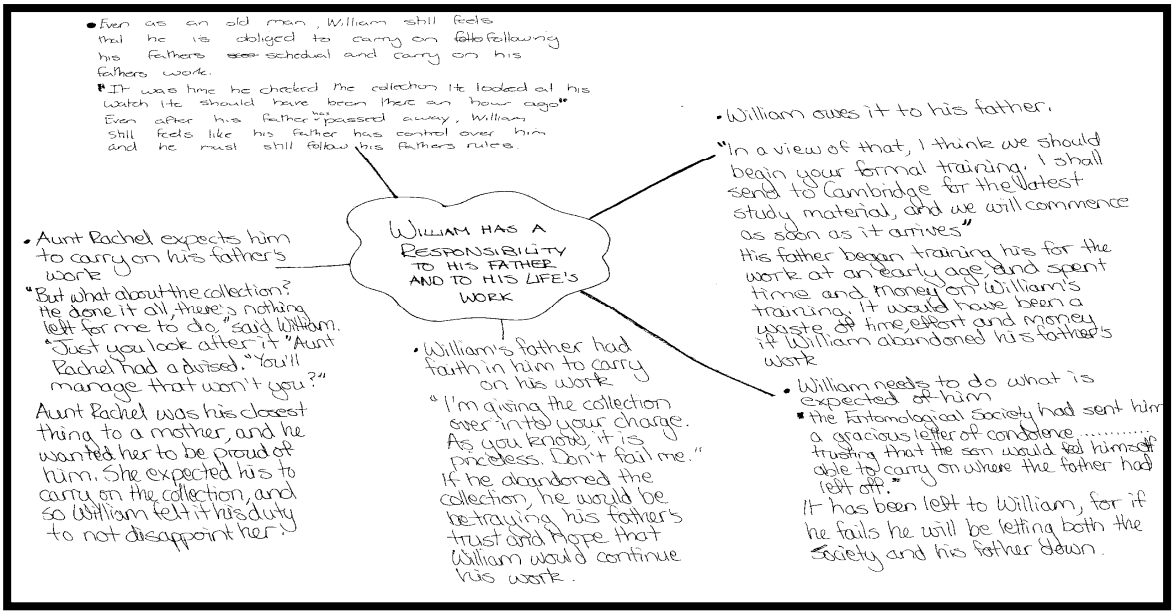


Figure 9: A completed essay plan

Marks achieved for the Literature Essays:

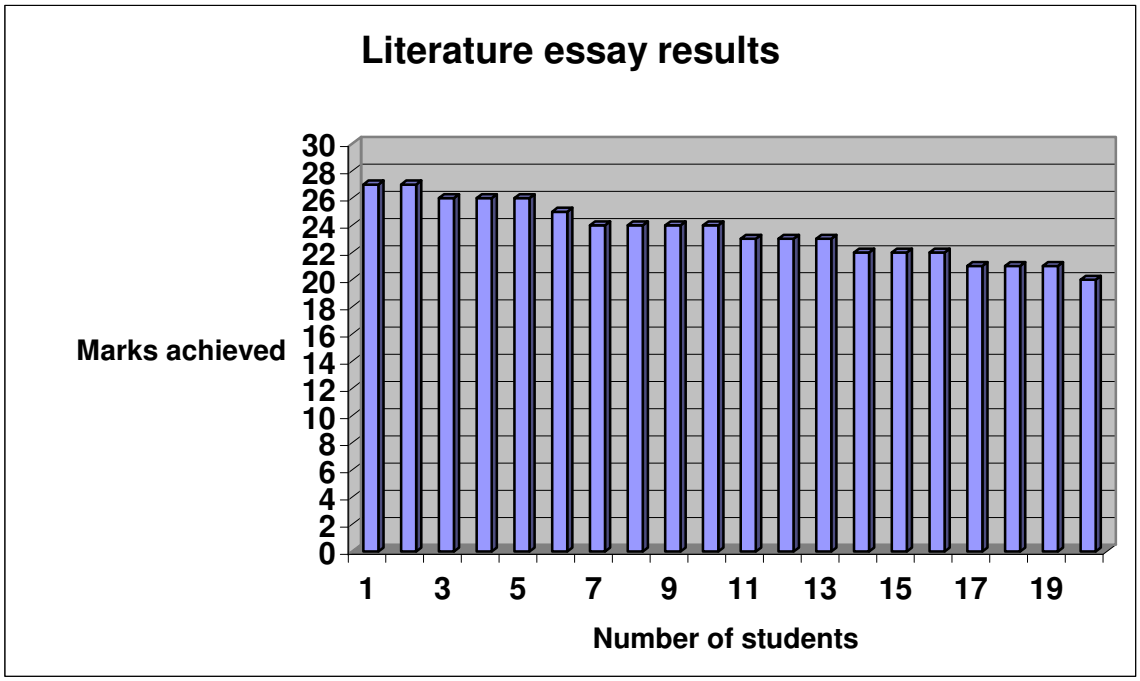


Figure 10: Literature essay results

The class average mark for this essay was 78.5% which means that most girls achieved a high 'B' symbol.

Post-experience questionnaire (See Appendix 14)

I deliberately did not return the completed essays before the students completed this questionnaire. I did not want their perceptions of the process clouded by 'marks'.

1. **Question 1:** ***Do you feel confident that you have grasped the basics of how to write a Literature Essay after this unit of lessons?***

   Eighteen students stated that they feel extremely confident that they will be able to write a Literature essay. Two students stated that they would appreciate more practice and that they would like to see their 'mark' before they commented further. Some thoughts from

the students include, “I feel like I have a very strong foundation that will remain rooted in my head forever. This clear structure will help me to formulate my essays in the correct way.” “Yes, because we’ve been through it so thoroughly. Also, when you have to think about something yourself (like writing up rules for the writing of the essays) you learn more because you’re paying attention to all the important things, whereas you tend to not listen when teachers just explain.” “Yes, because we were able to figure it out for ourselves, it will stay with us and we will remember it, as opposed to if we were given it and didn’t have to think for ourselves.” “Yes, we went slowly through the steps and we started to learn to write an essay before we even realized what we were doing. It also helped to do the collage and write the motivation as this forced us to look at the novel and read between the lines in order to grasp a greater understanding of the novel.” “This approach to teaching it to us was very unique and different from any other … and it worked! It was creative and got us thinking over a broad spectrum about the book.” “Yes, When we made each structured paragraph and you gave us an example exactly how it should be structured helped me grasp the idea as well. Also, when we had to make the checklist ourselves.”

2. Question 2: *Was there any part of the process that did not make sense to you?*

Twenty students responded that they were comfortable during the entire process. Some of the responses to this question included, “No, we did it in such detail that we did understand because we got told and shown the right way without endless pages of boring notes that are often not read by us because we are too busy or don’t want to read because it is boring and we won’t understand it anyway.” “No. It all made sense. At first I couldn’t understand the point of the collage and thought it was pointless, but as it all came together it helped me more than I thought it would.” “No, strangely enough I understood the whole process as we were forced to think about it and talk about it with our group and this made everything so much easier.” “No, because each step helped with the next which made it so much easier.” “No, I had lots of fun doing it in a group as well, because if there was something I didn’t understand my group members would help explain it to me.”

3. **Question 3:** ***Do you think that the process was effective? Why? If not, how could it have been made more effective?***

Twenty students felt that the process was effective. I would like to quote the following responses: “Yes, it was a good way to learn. You gave us the baby steps to start off with and then we figured it out for ourselves. You didn’t use the boring old parrot-fashion and there was no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’.” “Yes. Working with our peers helps tremendously and practising together with the help of given examples helps me and I am sure everyone else as well. I think teaching with just the teacher and pupils and then putting it into action can be a bit boring and I would forget what I have learnt over time. Whereas, with this process it is going to stick in my mind and I won’t forget it. Group work and teaching ourselves with your help is very effective.” “The way it was structured really helped because each part was a building block.” “Having to come to the answers myself and having the steps made clear without actually telling us, made it easier to grasp. We were still helped in the right direction but we needed to figure things out, come to the right conclusions. Made the skills stick.”

4. **Question 4:** ***Do you think that group work aided or hindered the process?***

Eighteen students felt that group work aided the process. One of the two students who were not completely happy stated the following, “It aided and hindered it because we were able to get help from our friends but sometimes the people who had completely grasped the concepts carried on a bit too quickly, leaving other members behind.” The students who were happy with the process stated the following: “We realized that you structured the groups with an ‘A’ aggregate student, a ‘B’ aggregate student and then the rest of us. This was very good because the ‘A’ and ‘B’ students really helped us to understand the work.” “It helped because we could explain to each other and learn from teaching and listening to each other.” “We could use each other’s ideas to perfect our own.” “I feel really comfortable with my classmates so I didn’t feel embarrassed asking questions or sharing ideas. We all helped each other to learn.”

5. Question 5: ***Did you enjoy the lessons? Provide reasons for your answer.***

All twenty students enjoyed the lessons and appreciated the value of the learning experience. Some made very constructive points which I have highlighted here: “Yes, except it was a little long.” “It can become boring to work with the same people for too long, but it is way more pleasant than the normal method of teaching. I really enjoy English more than ever!” “Yes I did. It actually worked and I really believe that it was worthwhile. I enjoyed the different teaching style and getting to inter-act with fellow students and the ability to express opinions and views on specific topics.” “Yes, I did because it wasn’t just some teacher blabbering on about writing an essay. We had to be creative, help each other and talk about it.” “I got to talk to my friends during class – very unusual – and the atmosphere was relaxed and friendly at the same time as being a good atmosphere to work in and be productive in. This made me feel positive.” “It’s a nice feeling to know you’ve actually understood something.”

Concluding thoughts on Literature Essays:

I asked the students to add a general comment to the end of their questionnaire about the effectiveness of their learning during the term. The comments they made were extremely affirming and I would like to include some of them here. “Mrs P, you are the only teacher that has helped me understand English in so much more depth and with enjoyment, for the first time ever! I have learnt more in three months than I have learnt throughout my school career doing English.” “Mrs P, you have really ‘taught’ me. You don’t just stand up in front of us and ‘teach’ us, you give us the opportunity to teach ourselves which is what has made you such a good teacher and has made me understand English one hundred times more.” “I honestly haven’t come across a teacher who has actually taught me, I have gained so much knowledge in just this term- more than I have over my previous school years put together.” “The confidence that Mrs P has in each and every one of us really encourages us to work hard. Her different approach to teaching is really effective.” “Thank you Mrs P for teaching us, not preaching at us.” “If every section of English was taught like this (Keeping Grammar and Summaries in mind) then the general standard would be very high. It also creates positive students. Thanks.” “Other teachers (it seems) just expect us to automatically understand and they get cross if we don’t, whereas these lessons work!”

The last part of this process involved a class discussion about the process and interviews with two of the students. A paraphrase of the class discussion and the interviews is outlined below.

Many of the students were amazed by how 'clever' they were. They were excited and stimulated. They made the following comments which I transcribed:

"The thing I like the most is that you treat us like adults. You never make us feel stupid or shout or tell us that we have done something 'wrong'. We never feel ignorant. You listen to all of us and give us all credit for our ideas. We feel so comfortable in your class. "

"We like the way you make us feel clever. You make us feel like we are doing it for ourselves."

"We keep telling our friends in the other classes that they are losing out by not being in your class."

"I don't think I will ever forget what we have been taught."

"Don't teachers know that when they 'preach' to us we don't listen?"

"The 'baby steps' helped us to feel like we were in charge of what we were doing."

"We felt a bit frustrated looking only at 'The Killing Bottle' for eight lessons in a row but now we realize that you couldn't break the lessons and that we had to finish all the steps."

"I loved the way that you trusted us and that you knew we would find the answers. I never doubted for one moment that you knew that we could do this."

"I didn't like the fact, at first that I didn't 'know' where we were going. We just had to trust you and keep working. When I realized what we were doing, I was like, wow – to think we went from a collage to an essay – by ourselves!"

Section C: Summary Writing Skills

Working through the process:

The students were placed in their groups and were given the initial summary passage – Activity 1, see Appendix 15. They were told that they had to reduce the word count of the original passage to 65 words. I instructed them that they were not allowed to be one word above or below the word count and that the final product had to read logically. The groups settled extremely quickly. By now, they were used to the process and the 'hush' that I have become used to prevailed as one member was appointed as a scribe, one member was appointed to write up the 'method' and another was appointed to write up the 'checklist'. The girls set to work and within the allocated forty-five minutes had reduced the passage to the required number of words.

Once all the groups had completed their drafts, I issued Appendix 16 which gave them the 'model' against which to check their 'answers'. After this twenty-minute session, all groups had a 'method' and a 'checklist'. Once again, the level of sophistication in the checklist exercise, was astounding:

A: METHOD

Use the following method when you wish to plan and write a summary:

1. Read through the passage until you understand it. This may mean that you have to read it more than once. If you don't understand the passage, you will not be able to write a successful summary, so don't rush the process.
2. When you understand the passage, underline or highlight the key points.
3. Do not include examples or repeat ideas.
4. Write a rough draft, using the ideas of the original, but your own words.
5. Count the number of words.
6. Edit your rough draft until the word count is EXACT.
7. Read the original paragraph once more.
8. Read your summary and make sure that you follow the logical progression of ideas contained in the original and that you have not left out any important points.
9. Write your summary out in neat.
10. Give it a title (not included in the word count).
11. Write down the word count in a bracket at the end of your summary.
12. You must hand in your rough drafts with your final draft.

The groups then 'jigsawed' and tested their respective summary writing methods. Once the groups had completed Activity 3, they handed their respective 'methods' and 'checklists' to me in order that I could combine them and type them up for the class. The final 'method' and 'checklist' is included under Appendix 25. The girls now worked independently – Activity 4 – and completed a 'test' passage. The summary 'marks' are detailed below**.** Two 'model' summaries – written by the students - are also included as Appendix 26.

Marks achieved for the final summary :

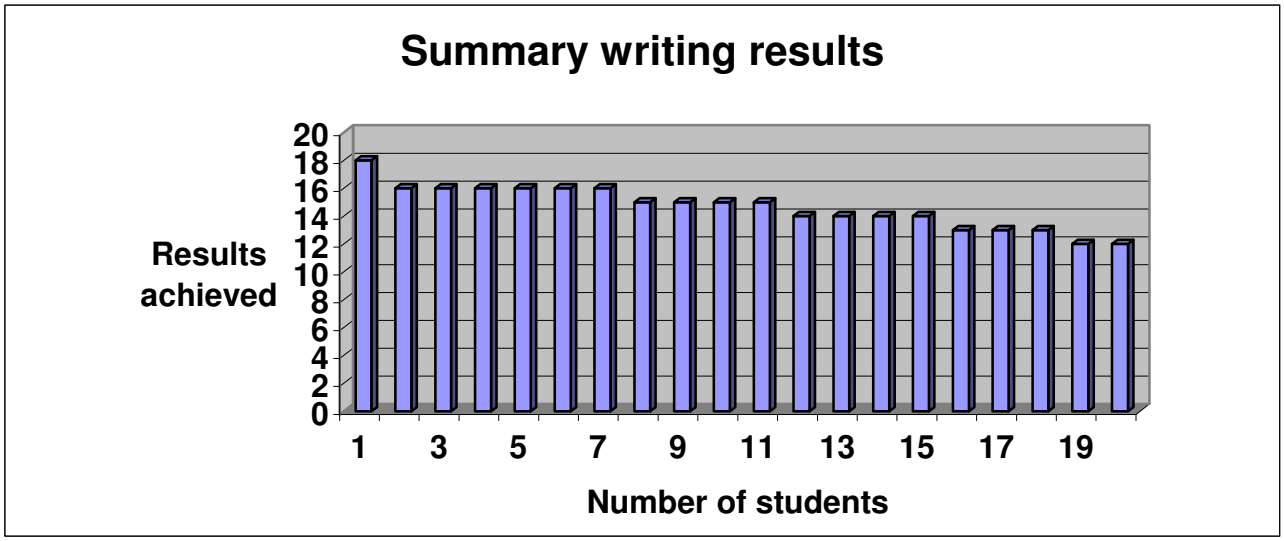


Figure 11: Summary writing results

The class average for this exercise was 73.2 %. Most girls achieved a 'B' symbol for this exercise.

The process worked extremely efficiently. The girls needed no prompting to form their groups or to work through the process. The summaries that they produced were extremely competent and the checklists proved that they had understood and 'mastered' the concept. I was impressed with the insight that they showed into the actual 'mechanics' of the process. Points such as 'If you don't understand the passage, you will not be able to write a successful summary, so don't rush the process," showed that they had a firm grasp of what they were being asked to do.
A 'model' summary is detailed below:

Compulsory Uniforms in British Schools

Wearing uniforms is seen to be impractical by pupils in Britain. Apart from the uniform's unfashionable appearance, it denies adolescents their own freedom of choice. Pupils are subjected to look the same when wearing a uniform, defeating the point of the democratic system of Britain. Pupils argue that that they require responsibility, which can be projected through choice of what to wear and suffering the consequences thereafter. School uniforms do not always account for cold or hot British temperatures. They are seen as a negative regimentation breaching a pupil's rights. (90)

Post experience Questionnaire (See Appendix 17)

For this questionnaire, I have included a general comment for each question and then three 'typical' responses from the students as the results of this survey were almost unanimous.

1. **Question 1:** ***How were you 'taught' summary writing skills in Grade Eight or Nine?***

   Almost all the students (eighteen) stated that they were neither 'taught' nor 'shown' how to write a summary in either Grade Eight or Nine. I will detail three 'typical' responses below:

   "I wasn't. I was given a piece of paper to read and teach myself and was expected to be able to just 'do' it."

   "To read through a worksheet, highlight important words then create a summary."

   "I was not taught summary writing in Grade Eight or Grade Nine. Mrs X just gave us a worksheet with a list of instructions at the top and exercises. We were told to read and complete the worksheet."

2. **Question 2:** ***Did your Grade Eight or Nine experience make you confident that you could write any summary that was required of you? Please provide reasons for your answer.***

   All twenty students answered that they were not confident. Three 'typical' responses included:

   "No, I was never actually taught how to do the work, I was just told to do it and so I was never confident that I could complete such a task really successfully and I never knew whether or not I had the necessary skills."

   "No, when we were told to write a summary, I got myself into a bit of a panic because I didn't actually know what I was doing even though we had been given something to tell us, no-one really had explained it."

   "Ha, Ha, Ha – No! Didn't understand what to do and had to wing it."

3. **Question 3:** ***Was this unit of work on summary writing that we have just completed different to what you have encountered in the past? If it was, explain how it differed.***

All twenty students answered that the work was extremely different. Most felt that they had benefited from the process, although two students (of the brightest) felt that they were happy to just use what they had 'taught themselves' in Grade Nine.
Two 'typical' responses included the following:
"Yes, it was because now I actually know what a summary is and I can write one now, whereas before in Grade Eight and Nine I didn't really know what I was doing but now that I have been 'taught' the correct way to do it, I understand it."
"Yes, you explained what we had to do, but still let us figure it out for ourselves, so with your help, just a little push in the right direction, we were able to figure it out for ourselves and so actually learn it."

4. **Question 4:** ***Did this unit of work increase your confidence in the area of writing summaries? Please provide reasons for your answer.***

Twenty students answered that their confidence had been increased. Among the reasons cited, were the following:
"Yes, now I can write one for starters and now I understand what I am doing, before I had absolutely no idea. I have a lot more confidence now with summaries, but also a lot more confidence in English."
"Yes it did, because it has become so much more clear. It is pasted in my head because I had to do it myself and was able to remember it more easily. I am extremely confident so I feel that I can write any summary that I am asked to."

5. **Question 5:** ***What are your feelings about the way in which you were 'taught' summary writing in Grade Ten? Please include a comment about the effectiveness of the group work process here.***

Most of the students felt extremely positive about the process. Most students felt that the group work process was extremely beneficial and that 'talking it through' was a great aid to learning.

"Well, the different approach of letting us figure it out for ourselves, but still giving us 'nudges' in the right direction allowed us to be confident and try even if we didn't get it right the first time! The group situation is always a good one because ideas are spoken about rather than told to us."

"I feel confident finally, as Mrs P always makes us learn in a unique and very effective way. This year was the first time I can honestly say that I have an insight into English. Group work helps me immensely as we all talk about it and figure it out together, making it so much easier to understand. I feel like my summary skills will stay with me forever."

"It was actually fun, that's the main thing. Now, I think the rules are less on the page and more in my head. The group work was great because it made the process easier and faster. Switching groups was also good because you pick up things your group missed before."

6. Question 6: ***Was there anything about this series of lessons that you did not find useful or productive? Please provide details.***

Most students answered that they did not have any criticisms about this series of lessons.

"No, honestly, all the time and lessons spent were very productive."

"No, it was all useful and productive."

"No, I found I learnt a lot from all the different members of the group and all their different perspectives helped me learn more."

7. Question 7: ***If you were the teacher, what aspects of the process would you revise or change? Please explain the changes you would make and how you would make them.***

None of the students had any suggestions to make. They seemed to be completely satisfied with the process.

"I do not feel that I could change anything about the process because in my opinion, it is faultless. I understand it perfectly."

"I would, if I was a teacher, teach exactly like Mrs P."

Concluding Thoughts on Summary Writing:

The students were extremely happy and comfortable with the summary writing process. They were used to the group format of the lessons and this made them confident. This unit of lessons went extremely quickly. Three forty-five minute lessons were all that was required. The girls stated in the follow-up discussion that they appreciated this fact because they found that sometimes the process could become tedious if it was stretched out for too long. They did admit, however, that the process (such as for the Literature Essays) was necessary. The students felt that because they had been given worksheets on summary writing in Grades Eight and Nine, that they did have an idea what was expected. The process enabled them to 'hone' their skills and increase their confidence. I felt that it was not necessary to interview individual students because the findings from the survey and the class discussion were sufficient. It will be interesting to see what the student's summary results are like in their mid-year examinations. It transpired that the aggregate for these examinations was 77.8%.

REFLECTIONS ON THE TEACHING

Introduction:

This series of lessons was designed using Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about education – in particular the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development - as well as those of Activity settings posited by the Socio-historical school and outlined in the Literature review. These lessons were based on the assumption that the students involved could construct their own knowledge in collaborative learning situations using the mediation of tools and signs such as language and texts. The role of the teacher in the process was that of facilitator and co-participant. The lessons conducted for this research report illustrated the point that the teacher can direct the learning of her students from a distance if the materials are designed to produce the maximum effect.

The lessons themselves were carefully planned in order that there was a clear progression from a point of limited understanding to a point where the students felt comfortable using the concepts. The design was such that the students were initially engaged in a 'broad' task which became

gradually more narrowed and focused until 'mastery' of the desired concept was achieved. This narrowing of focus is central to the achievement of Hedegaard's (1996) idea of the double move which this research design emulated. It was assumed that initially, students had a limited understanding of the desired concepts and that the lessons themselves would cause movement through the zone of proximal development which would lead to a shift in understanding by the students. This was proved to be valid in all three areas of the curriculum that were examined. Hedegaard (1996) proposes that a 'double move' is possible in helping students explore scientific concepts and help them apply these in their everyday conceptions. This research verified that a 'double move' is possible with the teaching of English Language, Writing and Literature concepts. The ideas posited by Wells (1999) where groups are formed within a class and their activities are monitored and adapted according to the progress each group makes were also proved to be viable within an English classroom. The formation of groups and the principal of a 'guided investigation' (Hedegaard, 1996) all contributed to the success of this research.

The work of Tharp and Gallimore (1992 and 1988) in the area of 'assisted performance' was found to be of great value in the design and implementation of the lessons as well as in guiding my own practice.

Some ideas about different models in education

The lessons conducted for this research report support the claim made that 'traditional' methods of pedagogy do not seem to lead to effective learning and that such 'traditional' methods of teaching are not as effective as those designed using a more 'generative approach'. Many of the ideas posited by the Vygotskian theorists consulted for the literature review support the claim that an alternative approach needs to be adopted within classrooms in order to halt the 'ossification' of both students and teachers involved in the process of 'education'. The evidence gathered from the lessons conducted for this research report support the claim that a 'generative' teaching model seems to be highly effective when used as a generic tool used to formulate lessons.

The idea that all knowledge is embedded in a social context is of extreme importance when we as teachers are planning a curriculum, structuring exercises for a class or deciding on the most effective pedagogical methods to use in order to make learning a meaningful and lasting experience for our students. To isolate the child from her context and to disregard the importance of the social in the learning process is, in my opinion, to make 'learning' a meaningless and

fruitless task. The opinions cited by the students in the various questionnaires designed for this research report concur with this view. Rote methods of pedagogy requiring regurgitation of endless facts by students, serves no purpose except to frustrate and bore them. The point made by Moll (1990, p ix) that, "[C]ognition is embedded in the social and cultural world," as well as that made by Rosa and Montero (1990, p 83), that "[C]ognition is a social product that is achieved through interaction," were both proved to be correct when the shifts in competence achieved by the students involved were assessed.

The students in my class were 'active agents' (Blanck, 1990, p 50) in their own learning, especially during the writing of Literature Essays. They constructed their own collages, built their own motivations and transformed them into essays with very little guidance. The process was aided by the fact that the students had completed a reading of 'The Killing Bottle' and that we had discussed themes, issues and characters in a great amount of depth before they began the process. As the novel is South African (set in Mpumalanga) and deals with issues such as teenage pregnancy and parental relationships, it is completely age and context-appropriate and the students were able to 'connect' with its messages and characters. The students were privileged enough to be afforded the opportunity to speak to the author, Jane Fox once they had completed the novel and this aided their insight and understanding. The students' 'living knowledge' (Vygotsky, 1978) is allowed to enter my classroom at all times and I try never to teach according to a 'recitation script'. (Tharp and Gallimore, 1989) The students within my classroom are seldom expected to deal with knowledge or information that is 'decontextualised'. (Wertsch, 1990) I always make the point, that with English, there is seldom a 'correct' answer. The success of a response depends on the thought it contains as well as the support cited from the text under discussion. The Independent Examination Board seldom sets or asks questions where a simple, factual answer is required. Students are expected to display insight, critical thinking skills and the ability to synthesise and process information. Students can only develop these skills successfully if they are encouraged to engage actively and on a deeper level with the materials and topics they are assigned. Debate and analysis are encouraged in my classroom.

The argument made by Wells (1999) that teachers are often constrained by external circumstances which they perceive of as being beyond their control and which 'forces' them into a certain type of role in the classroom, does have bearing on the way in which teachers operate and function. The results of the survey about teaching styles conducted with the students

(Appendix 1) indicate that most teachers teach according to a 'recitation script'. Most of the 'teaching' that happens is old-fashioned, 'chalk and talk'. Unfortunately, the perceptions of the teacher as the 'ultimate authority' and the 'dispenser of knowledge' are firmly entrenched with many teachers. I have spoken to a number of my colleagues about the process involved in this research and many of them have been openly dismissive. Ironically, my students have been discussing what is happening in my classroom and one or two staff members have asked me to explain how I have modified my teaching style. Many teachers are afraid of change. They are well-established within their comfort zones and 'new' ideas make them nervous. They are afraid to deviate from the 'syllabus' because of the 'examination' and they teach to a prescription in order to achieve a certain set of desired 'results' from their students. Wells (1999, p 59) supports the claims made here about the type of education that is not conducive to learning which was borne out by the results of this research:

> "[L]earning is not dependent on teaching; still less is it dependent on participation in the activity system found in most contemporary schools. Indeed, as it is increasingly being recognized, with their emphasis on transmitting cultural knowledge and skills through the delivery of curricula designed independently of the needs and aspirations of the recipients, these institutions often impede rather than facilitate learning by mistakenly conceptualizing and evaluating learning as the product, or outcome of instruction."

The results from this research report seem to support the view expressed by Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 21) that in order to move towards a system that is more conducive to real, meaningful learning, "[*T*]*eaching must be redefined as assisted performance."* Teaching needs to shift away from operating simply at the level of 'scientific' discourse, and it is up to the teacher to help the student make and negotiate meaning of that discourse and turn it into 'everyday' language. Effective teaching (teaching that achieves this 'internalisation' for students) – assisted performance – does seem to occur when the teacher has achieved a high level of competence in her subject matter and she is unafraid of moving in any direction that either the subject matter or the students move her. Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 17) claim the following in this regard, "[T]o do more than manage activities and allow students to learn on their own, teachers must command the knowledge and skills they seek to impart." I have been teaching for over twenty years. During that time, I have read widely and have tried to keep up to date with 'new' ideas and acquaint myself with trends in my chosen profession. I make sure that I am fully prepared for every lesson. I usually prepare a term in advance and use my holidays to organize myself for the term ahead.

For example, to teach 'Antony and Cleopatra' to the Grade Twelve students this year, I read two biographical novels about Cleopatra's life as well as a historical guide to life in Ancient Rome. This 'extra' work increases my own confidence and it is incredible how the anecdotal information imparted to students during lessons increases their understanding of a text. Hedegaard (1996) uses this notion of extreme teacher competence as one of the cornerstones of her research because as she claims, the teacher has to have the in-depth subject knowledge in order to 'move' the students to the desired outcome.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 18) claim that subject competence is not enough. In order that a teacher is effective, she must have a thorough knowledge of pedagogical methods to complement her subject knowledge. Among the various methods listed by Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 18) are,

> "[U]se of instructional objectives, positive and efficient classroom and behaviour management, provision of effective and varied activities, properly conducted recitation and drill, orderly monitoring and assessment of progress, checking for comprehension, and any number of other expert practices. The fully professional teacher will command all of these useful and desirable practices and learn to apply them to those aspects of the curricula for which they are most efficient."

My classroom management style has been discussed elsewhere in this paper and is made clear from the responses cited by the students in the 'results' section of this paper. I use many of the methods outlined by Tharp and Gallimore (1988) above in my planning and pedagogy. My aim is to ensure that my students are prepared not only for any examinations or performance measurement they might have to undertake, but also for life.

It has been established that the discourse practiced in schools is a totally different form of communication, where the words themselves are, "[T]he object of study." (Moll, 1990, p 10) The child will not achieve self-regulation if the discourse of the classroom is not made meaningful by the teacher. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 193),

> "[A]ll concepts develop through language use accompanying joint activity. Everyday concepts are closely tied to the specific objects and conditions that their names represent. The word for that object is a part of the object, an attribute of the object as integral as its colour, smell or size. Words, in the everyday realm, cannot be detached and manipulated in the young child's mind separately from the image the phenomenon represented."

From the responses given by the students in the various questionnaires designed for this research report, it seems as if this is a key factor that is overlooked in most classrooms where 'real life' is banned and where children are not allowed to link their knowledge with their everyday conceptions. I have realized, through my increased understanding of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school, that the more children talk about their learning, the more they are challenged to explore ideas and make and negotiate their own meaning, the more successful their 'learning' will be. This fact has been a revelation for me and I will never 'teach' in the same way again.

The potential for learning – the idea of the zone of proximal development

The theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development, defined by Vygotsky (1978), does seem to warrant the significance accorded to it in this research report. The point made by Moll (1990, p 3) that the zone of proximal development allows for, "[P]erformance before competence," was proved to be correct by the findings of this research report. The theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development did allow each student to advance within her own context and capabilities. It allowed communication and collaboration to direct learning and attributed significance to 'real life' which was allowed to happen at the same time as 'learning'.

The zone of proximal development does, therefore, seem to encompass each person's range of potential for learning. The 'extension' of the construct to one where the task itself encompasses the range of the zone of proximal development and the class as a whole, or the groups within a class, can move through the stages that are necessary in order to achieve competence in the set task, was proved to be an even more powerful notion. Each student moved through the generic, set activity and achieved her *own* level of competence for that particular task. The resulting pieces of work produced by the students in the three areas discussed in this report, confirmed the competence achieved within the set tasks by the students. The movement made by my students through the zone of proximal development is without doubt, represented in the diagram below:

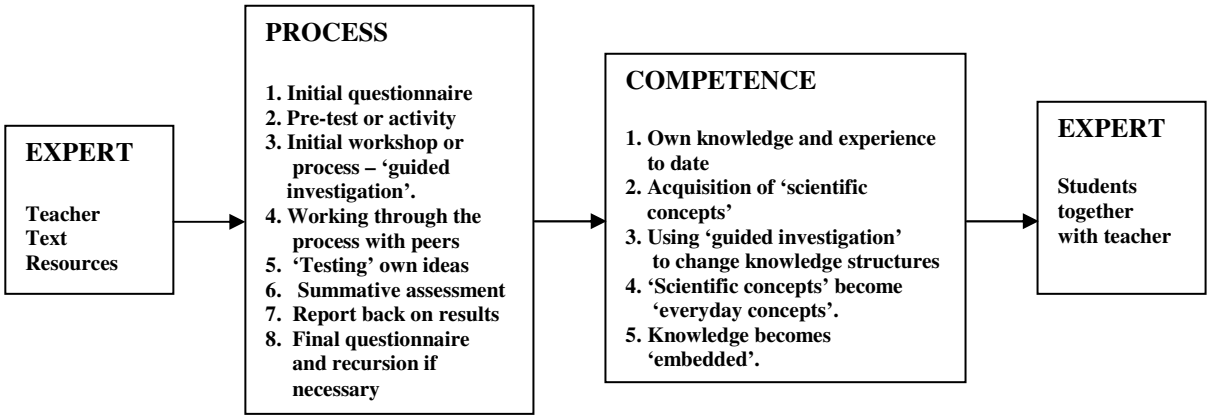


Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of the movement through the zones of proximal development

I made sure that I was aware of the capabilities of my students and I set activities that allowed every student to achieve her maximum potential by the completion of the set activity. This proved to be an extremely complex and time-consuming exercise and tested my competence, my understanding of the capabilities of my students and my subject knowledge. Each series of lessons is unique and uses various methods in order to move students through the stages of the zone of proximal development for that specific task. A great deal of planning and care was taken to ensure that the tasks were designed in order that movement through the stages of the zone of proximal development was incorporated into the lessons.

Moll's (1990, p 13) explanation that the focus of lessons or activities designed to move students through the stages in the zone of proximal development would not concern the 'transferring' of skills from learners who 'know more' to those who 'know less', "[B]ut on the collaborative use of mediational means to create, obtain and negotiate meaning.," was borne out by the process undertaken by the class. The units examining the Summary writing and Literature Essay writing processes in particular, showed the fruitfulness of this approach to learning. Because the lesson design was so detailed and carefully structured, my role was simply to assist children in appropriating or taking control of their own learning. The lessons designed for this research report demanded agency and active participation from the students. After the lessons conducted for this research report, it is my opinion that the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development should be considered as the basis for the planning of most lessons within a classroom.

The role of instruction

The view of most of the researchers consulted for this paper (Tharp and Gallimore (1996), Moll (1990), Wertsch (1990) and Wells (1999) amongst others), that many teachers have been inadequately trained to assist performance or facilitate in collaborative learning situations was validated by the views of the students expressed in the questionnaire on 'Teaching Styles' (Appendix 1). The claim made that many classrooms are places where both students and teachers are bored and frustrated seemed also to have been borne out through the responses of the students in Appendix 1. From the answers to Question 1 in Appendix 1, it seems as if using the ideas of the Socio-historical school will assist teachers in designing and implementing effective strategies in order that real learning occurs and students are actively engaged in their own learning activities. It has been my experience this year that preparing lessons that excite and stimulate students is an extremely rewarding experience and I have found myself highly motivated within my classroom.

Moll (1990, p 12) states that according to Vygotsky, (1978) the use of the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development within a classroom setting must,

> "[N]ot only analyse teaching and learning as part of extant instructional practices but create fundamentally new, advanced instructional activities; in other words, produce learning by facilitating new forms of mediation."

The idea of Vygotsky (1978) as outlined above was used within my classroom and with the lessons designed for this research paper. The structure of the lessons and the use of mediation by 'more capable others' as well as texts and visual material did produce new, exciting forms of mediation. With the collaboration between peer groups and myself and through the exploration of the environment through the materials and assigned tasks, the students were able to move through the stages of the zone of proximal development and create 'everyday' concepts which made these learning experiences meaningful and life-long. The comments made by the students about how they will remember what they have learnt 'forever' affirm this fact. I re-tested their skills at various stages in the term after the processes were completed. Comprehension and Language results - after the research was completed - have improved by up to a symbol per child. This

improvement indicates their sustained confidence in this area. Students have written three Literature essays to date and they are displaying confidence and competence in this area.

I have to disagree with the claim made by Wells (1999, p 328), that there is,

> *"[T]he increased understanding among educators that teaching involves much more than appropriately selecting and delivering a standardized curriculum and assessing the extent to which it has been correctly received.* Teaching certainly involves preparation, instruction and assessment; but to be truly effective it also involves the ongoing co-construction of each student's zpd and on-the-spot judgments about how best to facilitate his or her learning in the specific activity setting in which he or she is engaged."

From the results of the survey on teaching styles (Appendix 1) it does not seem as if enough educators are aware of the 'extension' required by them. Some teachers seem to feel that if they have 'taught' the section or the piece of work, that they have performed their 'duty'. I have realized that students need constant reinforcement in order that they achieve 'mastery' of a skill. With the Literature essays for example, the students write a draft, have it checked by a peer and make the required revisions before submitting it to me where it is then assessed. Once I return the essay, the students are given the opportunity to do a re-draft if they so wish. Corrective teaching and assessment are extremely necessary, but do not seem to happen in most classrooms.

It has become clear to me from the work that I have done with my students over the last eighteen months that it is possible to learn and grow as a teacher if one is receptive to different ideas and methods and if one is willing to take risks when instituting 'new' methods in one's classroom. I agree with the statement made by Tharp and Gallimore (1988, p 24) that,

> "[T]eaching is a complex, human activity at which a teacher can grow steadily more proficient over the years by means of disciplined curiosity, continuous training and skilful assistance.'

Some teachers should, it seems be trained in collaborative settings and assisted themselves in order that they are confident enough to step back and allow 'real' learning to occur within their classrooms.

The claim made in this research report that some teachers seem to be afraid that they will 'lose control' and that their 'discipline' will be questioned if they allow for collaborative learning

situations within their classrooms was supported by the responses given by the students in Appendix 1.

I have to disagree with the view posited by some researchers, who seem to believe that the zone of proximal development has no practical application within a class or group setting. From the research conducted for this report it has become clear to me that such a view might be misguided. The findings of this research report seem to concur with Daniels, (2001, p 13) who maintains that,

> "[W]e should certainly read Vygotsky's texts and try to understand what he had to say; but, in appropriating his ideas and putting them to use, we should also be willing to transform those ideas so that they can be of greatest use in meeting the demands of our own situations."

The above quotation supports the claim that it is possible to adopt different approaches when utilizing the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development within different contexts. The findings contained in this research report confirm the claim made by Hedegaard (1996) that it is possible to establish the zone of proximal development of an entire class and modify instruction accordingly.

The notions of Hedegaard (1996) and Wells (1999) were both used during the lessons designed for this research. The teaching of English allows for a great deal of scope and variation in the approach adopted by the teacher and the degree of engagement with which students approach set tasks. The fact that it is possible to set a generic question and for students to engage with and answer that question at completely different levels, was validated by the research conducted for this report. The level at which the students engaged with the material was also different, according to their level of maturity. Moll (1990, p 3) states that, "[M]aturing or developing mental functions must be fostered and assessed through collaborative, not independent or isolated activities." The importance of collaboration was validated through the lessons designed for this research report.

Scientific and everyday concepts

The findings of this research paper seem to support the ideas posited by Vygotsky (1978) about the significance of the 'General Law of Cultural Development'. It seems that in order to make learning meaningful and applicable to the life of the child, the child needs to learn to use scientific concepts voluntarily and manipulate them at will in order to achieve mastery and

control over them. As the students involved in the research for this report began to narrow their focus on the given tasks and move towards achieving 'mastery' over scientific or 'school-based' concepts, it appeared that 'scientific knowledge' had indeed become deeply embedded and had become a part of the child's 'retrievable system' of everyday knowledge. These findings support the view of Daniels (2001, p 50) who maintains that,

> "[F]or Vygotsky scientific concepts are characterized by a high degree of generality and their relationship to objects as mediated through other concepts…according to Vygotsky (1987) children can make deliberate use of scientific concepts, they are constantly aware of them and can reflect on them."

It appeared as if many of the students within this Grade Ten class achieved self-regulation for the tasks set for them – which means that they reached the end-point of the zone of proximal development for the set tasks which, according to Vygotsky (1978) should be the aim of any 'learning' experience.

Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 194) state that,

> "[V]ygotsky argued that the unique route to higher-order verbal thinking is the experience of schooling. *Schooling detaches the word from its designation and attaches it to a generalization.* This shift is of profound importance because *only if the word is freed of its sensory impediments can it be manipulated voluntarily and with conscious awareness.*" (Emphasis in original)

Language is undoubtedly the key to the development of the mastery of 'scientific' concepts. Once the student has achieved a measure of verbal mastery, she needs to explore written discourse and learn to manipulate language on the page. The students involved in the research conducted for this paper met the challenge of achieving mastery on the page. Their Literature Essays and their Summaries are proof of this.

Hedegaard (1996, p 172) maintains that,

> "[T]he degree to which the child masters everyday concepts shows his actual level of development, and the degree to which he has acquired scientific concepts shows the zone of his proximal development." (Leontiev 1985, pp 47-48)

The development of these scientific and everyday concepts was mediated by instruction and by speech within my classroom. Using the help of 'more capable others' in this case, other students, in order to facilitate 'learning' seems to be a viable method to use mediate students' acquisition of

concepts. The lessons within this unit of research did shift students' acquisition of scientific concepts into everyday concepts. Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that it is through the use of everyday concepts that children will come to make sense of scientific concepts and therefore, make sense of their world." The results shown in this research report support this claim.

Vygotsky (1978) criticized the view that instruction must be oriented towards already completed stages of development, which is what rote learning aspires to do. Vygotsky argued instead that,

> "[I]nstruction is good only when it proceeds ahead of development. It then awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lie in the zone of proximal development … It is in this way that instruction plays an extremely important role in development." (Vygotsky, 1956 p 278 as cited in Wertsch, 1985 p 251)

The idea that scientific concepts become everyday concepts in order that the child may achieve control over her environment has important implications for what happens in a classroom. The child needs to be able to link, connect and relate school discourse and the language of learning, to the language of life. From the responses cited in Appendix 1, the view that some teachers do not allow students to make these connections and thus their learning remains 'stuck' and of very little actual use, seems to be validated. Moll (1990, p 10) supports this view when he states, "[T]o make schooling significant one must go beyond the classroom walls, beyond empty verbalisms; school knowledge grows into the analysis of the everyday."

The four stages of the zone of proximal development: how it worked

Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 83) outline four main stages which occur in the zone of proximal development and through which the participants of each task have to move in order to reach the stage of 'internalisation' or 'fossilisation'. It appears as if the students involved in the lessons designed for this research report did move through the four stages outlined and that they did achieve 'internalisation'.

Stage 1

In compliance with the view of Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 83), that before children can function independently they must use the help of adults or more capable peers for outside regulation of task performance, the set tasks for all three sections of the syllabus used both an

adult and more capable peers in order to facilitate this stage of the process. During this stage of the process, groups were assisted through questions, feedback and further cognitive structuring. During stage 1, there was a steadily declining plane of adult responsibility for task performance and a reciprocal increase in the learner's proportion of responsibility. The students completed the developmental task of stage 1 which is to transit from other-regulation to self-regulation in all three sections of the syllabus.

Stage II

The students soon began to show a great deal of individual competence and when asked to perform a task individually, such as write a summary or identify a part of speech, they were able to do so. A further refinement at this stage was seen when the students began to 'test' their newly forming knowledge and ideas with their peers and receive affirmation or guidance from them. This was seen especially during the Literature essay process where the students kept asking their peers about points they were considering including in their responses.

Stage III

The completed summaries, the results from the Grammar tests and the completed Literature essays all demonstrate that most of the students achieved individual mastery over the set tasks.

Stage IV

The students were offered a number of 'revision' exercises for the Grammar unit during the course of the term. Once they had written their first Literature essay and I had assessed it, they were offered the opportunity to perform a 're-write'. They have written two more essays, one on 'The Killing Bottle' and one on 'Romeo and Juliet'. They have also written two summaries as part of various Comprehension and Language exercises and they have demonstrated extreme competence in all of these areas. Students who were unsure of a task have shown increased confidence and competence as the year has progressed. As stated earlier, this is a 'three-year' process and students will have many opportunities to re-visit concepts and improve on their competency.

Self -regulation

Mediation and collaboration

Vygotsky's (1978) particular interest in the sign systems of human communication – especially in speech as a human communicative activity- and the implications of this communication for learning and development and how it inter-relates with other aspects of human activity - has been a fascinating 'mini-study' of its own during the research conducted for this report. Another concern of Vygotsky's (1978), which was extremely interesting to note in practice, was how speech and communication could be used in problem-solving and collaboration in order to benefit a group, particularly within a formal school environment.

The emphasis placed by Vygotsky (1978) on the fact that all development happens within a social context and that interaction with and mediation through tools and signs are an integral part of the process was confirmed by the findings of this research. According to Daniels (2001, p 51) Vygotsky argued that it was through communication that, "[S]ocial understanding was made available for individual understanding." Wells (1999, p 58) states most eloquently that, "[I]t is by attempting to make sense with and for others that we make sense for ourselves." The ideas cited above were all validated as Dr Macdonald and I watched the students move through the various lessons and activities. The value of the communication process was highlighted continually as the students pushed and stretched one another to achieve competence.

The poetic words of Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 193) below, express most eloquently the process witnessed by Dr Macdonald and myself. The word 'hallowed' has particular significance when one considers the 'hush' that prevailed in the classroom as the students worked intently and moved through their assigned tasks:

> "[T]he intersubjectivities of activity settings are created through the words in discourse; these signs and symbols take on new and shared meanings, as they are hallowed by use during joint productive activity. The social meanings of words are internalized by individuals through self-directed speech, taken underground and stripped down to the lightning of thought. When we turn our attention to word meaning and a theory of knowledge development and expression, we are merely attending to another facet of the

> zone of proximal development and the activity setting. But this facet is a vital one; word meanings are the threads by which society weaves itself into one cloth."

The idea that the theoretical construct of the zone of proximal development takes into account that mediation happens through the use of tools and signs, but that it also happens through sharing ideas and solving problems with the help of peers or adults was validated during the group work process. While the students were engaging with a text, discussing the novel, or analyzing a sentence, they were using the signs and tools at their disposal, but because they were doing these activities with a more capable peer or a teacher, they were able to do them with greater insight, as well as more efficiently and effectively.

The notion posited by Vygotsky (1978) that, "[T]he central fact about our psychology, is the fact of mediation." (1982, p 116, cited in Wertsch, 1985a, p 15) as well as the fact that Vygotsky, (1978) felt that mediation was especially important in the interaction between the adult and the child in formal instruction, were validated by the research conducted for this paper. The various texts, the collages constructed by the students and the communication with their peers all contributed to extremely positive learning experiences. The ideas outlined in this section of the Literature survey were confirmed as the students moved through the planned lessons.

Because of the importance given to social regulation in the surveyed literature, it was deemed necessary to include the social world of the students as a part of the research design. It was for this reason, that the school invited Jane Fox to run a workshop for the students to discuss her novel, 'The Killing Bottle'. It was also decided to take the students to various museums and historical sites and introduce them to aspects of their history which have an impact on their Literature syllabus. Students were also encouraged to bring their own experiences into the classroom during the lessons, especially in the Literature lessons. Responses given in the 'results' section of this research report state clearly how much the students appreciate being allowed to discuss 'real life' within a classroom context. It therefore seems that it is necessary to look not only at the individual, but also at the external world in which that individual life has developed. The social world and the context of the students is of vital importance to teachers if they are going to construct meaningful learning experiences for their students. The idea posited by Daniels (2001, p 7) who stated that Vygotsky, "[D]eveloped a theory within which social, cultural and historical forces play a part in development," was validated by the responses of the students. It is therefore important to note that the learning in question is shaped by the socio-historical

environment – including other people – in which it takes place. The mediating roles of peer groups, the teacher and the resources are of great importance when considering how the structuring of a unit of work within a learning environment is to be accomplished.

It is the teacher's task to design and manage appropriate activity settings within her classroom in order that the learning opportunities created are of maximum benefit to all parties concerned. The lesson design for this unit of research tested and validated the ideas of mediation and collaboration outlined in this section of the Literature survey of this research report. The assertion made by Vygotsky (1966, p 72) that, "[R]elations between the higher mental functions were at one time real relations among people," was highlighted through the research conducted for this report. When the students were moving through the various lessons, a collaboration took place. According to Brown, Metz and Campione, (1996, p 146) Vygotsky asserts that,

> "[W]hat children do with the assistance of others is even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone."

The statement above applies more in a classroom or a school than in any other sphere. The activity setting of the classroom is where collaboration will give rise to the most profound changes and potential for growth. It is such a tragedy that in some schools and classrooms – borne out by the survey conducted as Appendix 1 - this fact is overlooked or simply ignored.

The findings of this research report confirm that 'being taught' is not enough. The child has to use the regulating speech of others in order to become capable of self-regulating, independent action and speech. This ability to 'self-regulate' does,

> "[C]onstitutes the next stage in the passing of assistance from the adult to the child, from the expert to the apprentice … [and] is itself an aspect of cognitive development of the most profound sort." (Tharp and Gallimore, 1986 p 87-88)

The focus within all the learning situations designed for this report were based on the child's active, creative problem-solving techniques and the use of collaboration in order to accomplish or reorganize the task so that meaning was negotiated. The point made by Moll (1990, p 11) was validated during the process:

> "[V]ygotsky (1981) claimed that the intellectual skills children acquire are directly related to how they interact with others in specific problem-solving environments. He

> posited that children internalize and *transform* the help they receive from others and eventually use these same means of guidance to direct their subsequent problem-solving behaviours." (Emphasis in original)

Social settings, such as those within a classroom, do seem to be of extreme importance because they create zones of proximal development. The initial social interactions and collaborations by the students definitely caused movement through the zone of proximal development which led to the students being able to internalize the newly discovered knowledge. According to Wells (1999 p 319) the child's initial 'social speech' or 'speech for others' becomes converted into the "[I]ntrapsychological activity of inner speech… As [Vygotsky] puts it, 'thought is born through words." Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 77) point out that the knowledge that children already have and what they bring into the classroom with them is of extreme importance. Many teachers, it seems, overlook this fact and attempt to isolate 'scientific knowledge'. This could be part of the reason why so many students 'fail to learn'. Teachers need to realise that the conceptual structures of their students cannot be built without a foundation. The responses of the students, especially for Appendix 1, bear witness to this view.

After conducting this research, I have to agree strongly with the claim made that the beginnings of life-long learning are formed during the interpersonal exchanges between the child and various elements of his environment and that these exchanges are the precursors of cognitive and communicative functions that will some day be self-regulated by the child. It is through such simple interactions that children learn the cognitive and communicative tools and skills of their culture. According to Tharp and Gallimore (1986 p 77), "[T]his insight from Vygotsky has the most profound implications for how we think about development and teaching." Wells (1999, p 56) concurs with this view and I would like to re-state it here as it is central to my thinking in this regard:

> "[A]s Lave and Wenger (1991) insist, learning is not a separate and independent activity, but an integral aspect of participation in any 'community of practice.' All participants thus continue to learn throughout their lives, as each new situation makes new demands and provides opportunities for further development. Nor is learning dependent on teaching, if teaching is construed as deliberate instruction according to a set of pre-formulated objectives. In joint activity, participants contribute to the solution of emergent problems and difficulties according to their current ability to do so; at the same time, they

> provide support and assistance for each other in the interests of achieving the goals of the activity as these emerge in the situation."

From the results obtained for the purposes of this research report, it can be seen that the approach that is called for in all classrooms is one where there is both collaboration and exploration. This process is not one that can be hurried because there are time and curriculum constraints. The emphasis in lesson design and planning should be on the acquisition of skills, not on the covering of content. Significantly, outcomes must allow for open-endedness in the planning and design of the curriculum.

The findings of this research report have validated the importance of speech in the child's learning. However, the findings have also highlighted the fact that students can receive assistance in the zone of proximal development from other sources. The claim made by Wells (1999, p 320) that written texts can provide, "[A] powerful means of self-instruction, as the reader appropriates the thoughts of others and makes them his or her own," proved to be an exciting and important factor which was central to the findings of this research report . Texts, when treated 'dialogically' were seen to be extremely productive and formed a device used to generate ideas and negotiate meanings. It was proved to be true that artifacts mediate interaction with the child and her environment and because they have the capacity to generate meaning, they are considered to be necessary tools. In the classroom situation, texts, visual materials and student's own constructions of the various assigned tasks become the tools of learning and conceptualizing. I concur with the view that learning could not take place without the use of tools and signs (texts and speech) and the interpretation of these by a group of students within a social setting as well as the view of Wells (1999, p 77) who cites Lotman (1988) in his argument that, "[A] text can serve a dialogic function, becoming a 'thinking device' and a 'generator of meaning."

In this series of lessons, many of the texts became the 'teacher' – the tool that mediated a large part of the instruction. I agree fully with Carpay and van Oers (1999, p 307) that:

> "[L]earning activity, then, is in essence a text-composing activity. Students should be encouraged to compose their own (written or oral) "scientific" texts (utterances) according to a particular body of knowledge ..."

I experienced, through the engagement of the students with the various stimuli (texts, visuals) used for the lessons with which they were engaged the validity of the idea posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 195) that:

> "[C]omprehending text means the weaving of new, schooled concepts with those of everyday life"

This idea posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1992) was central to the creation of the lessons and use of texts in the lesson design for this research report. The lessons, as it as been shown above, were designed according to a generative model and it was shown that through collaboration, students made and negotiated meaning and increased their level of comprehension and understanding. The findings of this research report supported my view that schools are places where conversations among students should be created and supported and that students should not be forced to sit passively and listen to the 'teacher' like 'sponges'.

The lessons within this unit of research relied almost exclusively on collaboration between the students (with each other) and the teacher (with groups of students as well as individuals) . It was proved through the evolution of the lessons, that in a collaborative situation all parties concerned have to assume agency for the process. There has to be a definite shift in mind-set from the teacher and then co-operation from the students. The goals of all parties concerned have to be addressed and the classroom dynamic has to shift. I have to agree with Wells (1999, p 65) when he maintains that the role of the teacher is crucial to the process. The teacher needs to be involved,

> "[A]s a co-enquirer with the students in the topics that they have chosen to investigate. To be able honestly to say, in response to a student's question, 'I don't know. How could we find out?' is probably more important, in creating an ethos of collaborative enquiry in the classroom, than always being able to supply a ready-made answer."

Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 92) concur that roles within the teaching dialectic need to be re-examined and re-defined in order that learning becomes more beneficial.

> "[T]he assistor must be in close touch with the learner's relationship to the task. Sensitive and accurate assistance that challenges but does not dismay the learner cannot be achieved in the absence of information. Opportunities for this knowledge, conditions in which the teacher can be sufficiently aware of the child's actual, inflight performing, simply are not available in classrooms equipped and staffed in the typical pattern. There are too many children for each teacher. And even if there is time to assess each child's zone of proximal development for each task, more time is needed – time for interaction, for conversation, for joint activity between teachers and children. There is still too large a

> gap between the conditions of home and school. Most parents do not need to be trained to assist performance; most teachers do."

While I concur with the initial statement posited by Tharp and Gallimore (1986, p 92) outlined above, the lessons designed for this research paper indicate clearly that it *is* possible to utilize the zone of proximal development successfully within a classroom dynamic as posited by Hedegaard (1996). While these lessons were time-consuming, their value, educationally, far outweighed the time constraints imposed by having to complete the syllabus. There was ample time allowed for conversation and for joint activity. The groups were manageable enough that I was able to assist each one. During the process of the lessons, I did ensure that I was aware of the student's 'inflight performing' and I did adjust the process where necessary. For example, with the writing of the Literature essays, I picked up that many of the essays were become almost 'formulaic' in structure. I stopped the process and we looked at ways of avoiding this problem, as a class. The lessons were designed to move the students from a very broad, general level of understanding to a narrowing of their focus as they move further forward. Because of this approach to the lesson design, the desired results were achieved.

The claims made about effective group work earlier in this research report were validated through the strategies employed in the lesson design. It was shown that effective group work can be used to move students through the stages of the zone of proximal development for a series of tasks. It was also proved that group work activities need to be designed and implemented with extreme care. The groups themselves were closely monitored during the process and because groups were carefully structured, they functioned effectively. While the groups were structured by me, I allowed the girls' autonomy within their groups when it came to assigning roles. I monitored and guided the groups as they moved through the learning process. I used a laboratory stool that I carried with me and I did not 'hover', I actually sat with groups for a period of time and observed what they were doing. If necessary, I stopped the process, or added my opinion to their discussion. I only interjected if I felt that it was absolutely necessary. In this way, I ensured that all members of the group were participating and that group members were committed fully to the process.

The idea posited by Wells (1999, p323) that "[I]t is not necessary for there to be a group member who is in all respects more capable than the others," was validated during the process of this

research. None of the girls had any idea initially of what they were being asked to do. While there were two students in each group whose English skills were slightly superior, all members of the group were at an equal 'disadvantage' in terms of the aim of the set tasks. Wells (1999, p324) explains that by working through a problem together, the group is able to construct a solution,

> "[T]hat none could have achieved alone. In other words, each is 'forced to rise above himself' and, by building on the contributions of its individual members, the group collectively constructs an outcome that no single member envisaged at the outset of the collaboration."

Groups were assigned in order to ensure that effective collaboration occurred. Through the use of 'jigsaw' methods and co-teaching, students were encouraged to participate and co-operate and reach the desired outcome 'together'. Wells (1999, p 324) concludes this alternative idea of possible group work activities with the following thought, "[I]t seems, therefore, for learning to occur in the zone of proximal development, it is not so much a more capable other that is required as a willingness on the part of all participants to learn with and from each other."
This extremely appealing notion was proved through the research conducted for this paper.

Motivation

The findings of this research show categorically, that if students are excited and stimulated then the teacher merely has to steer them towards the end-point of the task. The point made by Rosa and Montero (1990, p 80) that motivation is a key factor in the learning process that is often overlooked by educators and who quote Vygotsky as stating that,

> "[I]f we ignore the child's needs, the incentives which are effective in getting him to act, we will never be able to understand his advance from one developmental stage to the next, because every advance is connected with a marked change in motives, inclinations and incentives," (Vygotsky, 1978, p 92)

was shown to have extreme significance in the learning situation, both from the results obtained and from the responses given by the students This is where collaboration performed a vital role. The motivation gained from peers and the desire to participate actively and gain maximum benefit from the learning process was shown to have been considerably enhanced by interaction.

One of the easiest ways of motivating students is to set them topics in which they are interested. In this way, the 'content' will virtually take care of itself as it will become a natural product of the

inquiry or 'guided investigation' as termed by Hedegaard (1996). In this kind of activity - as that designed for the lessons used in this research report - the focus was on the making of meaning and the full attention of each student was seen to be focused on the task at hand. Learning occurred naturally in these activity settings. I took into account the idea of Wells (1999, p 63) in the lesson design that,

> "[T]he choice of experiences that provide the topics for investigation is critical. They must be such as to arouse students' interest, engaging their feelings and values as well as their cognition. In addition, they must be sufficiently open-ended to allow alternative possibilities for consideration, thus providing challenges appropriate to individual students' capabilities while at the same time encouraging them to collaborate with others in constructing shared understanding that is both practical and theoretical. In other words, they need to be experiences that generate real questions."

The care and attention given to the planning of the set tasks ensured that the students enjoyed their learning experiences and were therefore motivated to complete and excel in them.

Great care was taken to give the students feedback, both during the learning process and after the tasks had been completed. Tharp and Gallimore (1992, p 180) claim that "feedback" is an important motivational tool. The students in my classroom were praised and encouraged and assisted in their quest to find solutions to set tasks and this gave them a feeling of security and confidence and made them 'want' to continue. A further effective motivational 'tool' that I used within my planning and during my teaching was to ask the 'right' kinds of questions that 'assist', not merely 'assess'. I would like to add, that such questions, coupled with a statement of praise about a student's or a group's progress is even more effective.

It was noted that within a collaborative setting, the students are forced to deal with different personalities. They therefore also learn social skills which will aid them later in the work-place. I also noted that the students gained an appreciation for the value of sharing and pooling knowledge. The world with which they will have to engage once they leave school will demand that they are flexible and that they can co-operate and work with all sorts of different people and ideas. It is the duty of schools to prepare these students for life. Classrooms where such modes of collaboration are practiced will be places that equip students for the demands of the wider world.

The Double Move

The work of Mariane Hedegaard forms the basis of my own research, so this section will be presented in detail and will encompass and re-state many of the ideas already outlined above.

The claim made by Hedegaard (1996) that it is the task of the school to pass on knowledge and skills**,** but that often, students do not seem to be able to transfer this knowledge or these skills into their everyday conceptions was proved by the findings of this research report. Hedegaard (1996) argues that the reason for this is that most of the knowledge imparted within the school environment is empirical knowledge – factual or text knowledge. As such, this knowledge has very little use in the everyday lives of the students. The responses of the students to the questionnaires designed to support this research report validate this sentiment. In order to make this theoretical knowledge of 'use' to the child, Hedegaard (1996, p176) claims that,

> "[T]heoretical knowledge must be acquired through exploratory activity. In school, this activity is controlled activity, consisting of the exploration of problems that contain the fundamental conflicts of the phenomenon. A prerequisite for theoretical knowledge acquisition is teaching activity built on tasks that illuminate the contrasts found in a phenomenon's fundamental relations. Through this exploration it becomes possible to gain insight into the development of the phenomenon."

The further claim, that part of the problem with children's acquisition of knowledge seems to be the way in which students are expected to acquire this knowledge was validated totally by the responses of the students to the questions in the 'results' section of this research report. Much 'teaching' within the school environment seems to be conducted through rote methods. Students, it seems, have very few opportunities to explore the material, engage with the concepts or make assumptions about the surrounding issues or discover 'new' knowledge for themselves. Most students, despite having being 'taught' Grammar skills, Summary writing skills, Literature skills or Poetry skills could not apply or use these skills effectively. It was noted that many students could not provide verbal answers to questions concerning the concepts on which this research is based during initial class discussions, especially with regards to the Grammar component.

I concur with Hedegaard's (1996 p 180) claims that the zone of proximal development can be used to guide students, "[F]rom the learned and understood scientific concepts [school-based knowledge] to the spontaneously applied everyday concepts through a method of teaching [Hedegaard] has called a *double move*." According to Hedegaard (1996 p 181), knowledge should be acquired by students through a process of 'guided investigations'. The lessons designed to guide the students through the processes of analyzing Grammar, constructing Literature essays and writing effective Summaries were all based on the idea of a 'guided investigation'. Through these investigations, which were meticulously planned and based solely on the curriculum, students came to their own understandings and constructions of the relevant concepts. Because these constructions were finally of each student's own making, they became embedded in the memory of each student and this led to individual competence for each task.

The Socio – historical school's notion that 'psychic' tools such as 'spoken language', systems of notation', 'works of art', 'written language', 'schemata', 'diagrams', 'maps' and 'drawings' are produced through social activity was an extremely important one for the purposes of this research. The students within my classroom constructed their own knowledge, in cooperation with one another and with very little 'visible' assistance from me. The 'assistance' from the teacher here took the form of the structuring of the relevant lessons and the 'suggestions' during the process. Because the students involved in this research are already quite emotionally and developmentally mature, the lessons were structured and pitched in a very careful way. The students were motivated and challenged and they took the lessons seriously. It must be stressed once again, that my role during the process was simply that of a mediator. However, the initial planning and lesson design was an extremely time-consuming process that had to ensure that I could take a step back once the lessons were underway. It was also extremely important that I knew exactly when to intervene and stop the process if necessary. Hedegaard, (1996, p 175) makes this quite clear,

> "[T]he teacher's role is to direct action within school activity in a manner appropriate to the child's present level of development, the cultural and social context, and the teacher's theories of what central subject matter is."

I agree with Hedegaard (1996, p 180), who seems to feel that the main issue is with the "linguistic relations" that are formed during the exploration of the given topic. It is through using and

manipulating language that the child will be able to 'internalise' the scientific knowledge and use it in her everyday conceptions. Hedegaard (1996, p 180) further maintains that there should be a number of external stimuli that are used in order that the students are able to link 'scientific' knowledge to 'everyday' concepts. "[T]his is why practical research activities with objects, films and museum visits are such an important part of instruction." As has been stated previously, a number of efforts were made to link the learning of the students to practical research activities. The trips and activities helped them understand many of the texts and visuals with which they engaged.

After conducting the research for this report, I have to agree with Hedegaard (1996), that teaching should create zones of proximal development through involving students in different and new kinds of activity. I also agree that these activities must be 'social' in nature because of Vygotsky's (1976) position that "[P]sychological development and instruction are socially embedded." (Hedegaard, 1996, p 171) If students are guided in this way, it will definitely provide them with new concepts and possibilities for action which will allow scientific concepts to become a part of their everyday concepts. Hedegaard (1996), claims to be able to accomplish this shift from the 'intermental' to the 'intramental' through her idea of the 'double move'. In order to accomplish this 'double move', Hedegaard (1996) maintains that the teacher, when she is planning her lessons, must have a deep and thorough understanding of the general laws and concepts of the subject. The lessons must be planned in such a way that they advance from,

> "[T]he general laws to the surrounding reality in all its complexity. In order to explain these laws the teacher must choose concrete examples that demonstrate the general concepts and laws in the most transparent form." (Hedegaard 1996, p 190).

Hedegaard (1996) goes further to explain that while the teacher's planning must move from the 'general' to the 'concrete', the student's learning must develop from their 'pre-conceived actions' to a concrete application of the knowledge they obtain through their research. The final step is that they are able to formulate and discuss their findings and show their understanding of the 'new' concept. Hedegaard (1996) posits that the basis for instruction should be the division of the learning activity into three different types of actions:

4) *Delineation of the problem.*
5) *Problem solution and problem construction.*
6) *Evaluation and control.*

My own 'double move' was planned in the manner outlined above and used the 'primary principles' posited by Hedegaard (1996) below.

1) Each child was considered when I planned the lessons for the class. I took into account that children's development takes place through their relation to their peers and to the groups formed within the class. I also paid attention to the fact that group work activities tend to develop a zone of proximal development for the class as a whole, where each child acquires personal knowledge through the activities shared between the teacher and among the children themselves. These notions posited by Hedegaard (1996) were central to the design of the lessons used in my research report.
2) I ensured that the general content of the teaching was related to the experiences of the students as well as the various texts and visuals which were chosen to compliment the learning experience. As the teacher, I planned and gave direction to the activities.
3) Motivation and interest in the content of teaching was developed in my students. This was achieved through the careful choice of texts as well as the detailed planning and structuring of the proposed lessons. It was noted that the students did become excited by the fact that they were learning and discovering for themselves. The fact that teenagers value their independence was noted. Once the students realised how much 'fun' it was to 'learn' in this way, they became 'hooked' on the idea and that they embraced it.
4) Hedegaard (1996) made extensive use of a 'germ cell model' as the basis for her lessons. My research dealt with a completely different aspect of the syllabus and my students did not need one specific or generic 'model'. Where model answers were needed (as in the Literature Essay and Summary Writing section) they were designed according to the perceived needs of the students.
5) Knowledge was integrated with performance in the student's acquisition of various aspects of the syllabus. This integration of knowledge and performance was made possible through the student's modeling of their knowledge and later, their use of their own models for analyzing and producing questions. This integration was achieved and the students showed that they had 'internalised' their knowledge and it had become a part of their everyday lives. They now have productive competence.

My double move proved that my students were able to acquire the scientific concepts necessary to understand the outlined sections of the English syllabus and apply these concepts to their

everyday conceptions. Furthermore, my students were able to acquire these scientific concepts successfully because they were allowed to construct their own knowledge and make use of Hedegaard's (1996) notion of a 'guided investigation'. My 'double move' used effective planning and external stimuli to aid the process. The constructing of collages, the engagement with various texts and visuals and the designed activities all aided the students in this regard. I agree fully with Hedegaard (1996, p 192) when she states that,

> "[T]he zone of proximal development *must* be used as a tool for class instruction. In our teaching experiment, we saw that it is actually possible to make a class function actively as a whole through class dialogue, group work, and task solutions. The teaching experiment differed from traditional instruction in that the children were constantly and deliberately forced to act. The children's research activity was central in these guided actions, which gradually led the children to critical evaluations of the concepts." (Own emphasis)

Final thoughts:

The points below are a paraphrase of the conclusions drawn by Wells (1999, p 331-333) concerning the relevance of the use of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school in the context of education. Many of the points cited here have relevance for the findings of this research report and I concur completely with them:

- The zone of proximal development does constitute a potential for learning that is created through the interaction between participants as they engage in a particular activity together. The end-point of the learning process is essentially unknown because each student will achieve competence at his or her own level. Often, the end-point shifts as the activity progresses and new directions and opportunities are created that were not initially envisaged.
- As an opportunity for learning with and from others, the zone of proximal development is available to all participants, not only those who are more competent or struggling. Each student's goals and current stage of development are important when designing materials and lessons, as well as a consideration of the end-point of the set task.
- The sources of guidance and assistance for learning are not limited to human interaction. Texts and visual materials provide other forms of mediation.

- Learning in the zone of proximal development involves all aspects of the learner – acting, thinking and feeling. It has the potential to transform the learner's identity and ultimately, the community as a whole. The classroom, therefore, as a microcosm of the broader society, has to be representative of all that is positive – a commitment to sharing, collaboration, participation, as well as individual excellence.
- Learning in the zone of proximal development involves all aspects of the learner and leads to the development of identity as well as of skills and knowledge. There must be an environment created of trust, mutual respect and concern. Students will learn to develop the skills necessary to act responsibly, creatively and ultimately be able to reflect on their own practice if they are allowed the opportunities for meaningful interaction.

It can be seen from the findings of this research report, that there are many reasons as to why the use of the ideas posited by the Socio-historical school, are of importance within a classroom environment. The zone of proximal development, with its emphasis on the social activity involved in learning, the obvious importance of bringing the world of the child into the classroom, the key role played by mediation of tools and signs and the role of the teacher in the process of learning are all elements that indicate that this research report must have validity for teachers involved in all stages of the curriculum. There is a definite need within education to find pedagogical methods that facilitate and aid learning. It seems to me from the findings contained in this research report that there needs to be a shift within many classrooms, and that note needs to be taken of the fact that 'rote' teaching and learning styles are not effective. I definitely believe that looking at classroom practice from a Socio-historical perspective will give teachers insight into their practice and will allow more effective teaching and learning to take place. Finally, I have to concur with Wells (1999, p 53) who sums up the usefulness of a Vygotskian approach in the classroom when he states,

> "[T]oday … the theory that [Vygotsky] originated is coming to have a growing influence on those who are trying to envision and enact a form of education better suited to the increasingly diverse and changing world in which we live compared to the one that we inherited from the Industrial Age of the 19th and early 20th centuries."

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