SUPPORTING TVET STUDENTS TO IMPROVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY: AN ACTION RESEARCH STUDY

BY

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ABSTRACT

According to South African education policy, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have a pivotal and strategic role to play in facilitating inclusive growth and development in society. However, whilst enrolment has increased, throughput rates continue to be low. One reason for this could be that subjects are taught in English, not the home language of most TVET students. Kolb's Learning Styles theory suggests that each of us has a specific learning style – we tend to learn best in particular ways. Matching teaching methods to learning styles can thus improve learning outcomes.

This study was conducted on the Estcourt campus of Mnambithi TVET College, in the midlands of the province of KwaZulu-Natal, where I teach an English First Additional Language intervention class. I hoped that by improving learners' English, they could better cope with all their subjects. The key aim of the study was to match my teaching methods to their learning styles, and exploring the effects of this using action research. I first established the learning styles of my students, and then taught two rounds of classes in which I matched my teaching methods to their learning styles. Class evaluation, participant observation, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were used to reflect on the effects of this.

The study found no real correlation between students' self-identified learning styles and their reflections on what helped them to learn. Rather, using methods that allowed students greater control over, and participation in, the learning process, and that allowed learners to engage collectively in learning, appears to be key. Findings also revealed the significance of listening to what students think about their learning experience in class and taking their feedback on what will work for them in the lessons. Findings also suggest that knowledge, content and skills that relate directly to students lives and experiences is most valued by them.

Keywords: action research exploration; teaching methods; learning styles; English First Additional Language; TVET College

DECLARATION

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Adult Education), University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I, Joyce Duduzile Nene, declare that

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.

2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.

4. This thesis does not contain another person's writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. If other written sources have been quoted, then:

    a. their words have been re-written, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.

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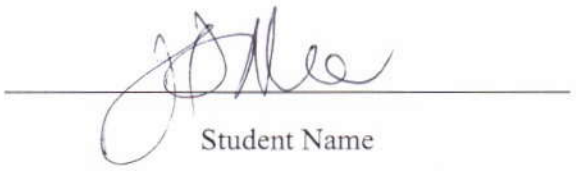

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Dr Anne Harley

Name of Supervisor

Signature

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
AC	Abstract Conceptualisation
AE	Active Experimentation
CAP	Competency and Placement
CE	Concrete Experience
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	Department of Education
ELT	Experiential Learning Theory
EFAL	English First Additional Language
ERIC	Educational Resources Information Centre
FET	Further Education and Training
KLSI	Kolb's Learning Style Inventory
LOLT	Language of Learning and Teaching
LSI	Learning Styles Inventory
LSQ	Learning Styles Questionnaire
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NC(V)	National Certificate (Vocational)
NCVER	National Centre for Vocational Education Research
NDP	National Development Plan
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education
NPDE: VT	National Professional Diploma in Education (Vocational Education)
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSF	National Skills Fund
RO	Reflective Observation
SETAs	Sector Education and Training Authorities
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
VAK	Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1.1 Introduction

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have a pivotal and strategic role to play in facilitating inclusive growth and development in society (Impes, Othman, Wilson & Pislaru, 2014). In South Africa, TVET is seen as a crucial step in order to equip young adults with skills that will develop them and help them to be more employable. Skills development programmes are meant to address the history of past injustices that took place in our country, which as a result thereof lead to some being disadvantaged educationally (Rassool & Mahembe, 2014). The discourse of greater access for students emerged from the deficiencies of the apartheid machinery, where certain groups of students were deliberately excluded from participating in higher education (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

As a result of the importance placed on TVET, the South African TVET colleges have witnessed significant changes over the past two decades. Recently, TVET colleges have become a central focus of education and training, with the promulgation of the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* in 2012 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013b).The *White Paper* says that "the main purpose of these colleges is to train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market" (p.11), and that strengthening and expanding the colleges is the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET's) "highest priority" (p.12). Strengthening the colleges involves, inter alia, improving access and throughput rates. The *White Paper* says that enrolments should increase from 345 566 students in 2010 to 2.5 million students by the year 2030. These targets are reiterated in the National Development Plan (NDP), which argues that increased enrolment in the colleges is a major factor in creating a skilled and educated population. The NDP's vision is of an education system that will "play a greater role in building an inclusive society, providing equal opportunities and helping all South Africans to realise their full potential, in particular those previously disadvantaged by apartheid policies, namely, black people, women and people with disabilities" (NPC, 2012, p.296 quoted in Rassool & Mahembe, 2014, p. 11).

Despite the emphasis on the TVET sector, and the targets for a greatly increased enrolment, significant problems within the sector continue, as will be discussed below.

1.2 Background of the study

In the post-apartheid period, the then technical colleges, which had been divided by race, were racialised. The 152 technical colleges (renamed TVET Colleges in the *White Paper*) merged into 50 larger, multi-campus institutions in 2002 (DHET, 2013b). This study was conducted on the Estcourt campus of Mnambithi TVET College, in the midlands of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Mnambithi TVET College is a result of the merger of the Ladysmith Technical College, Ezakheni Technical College, Ezakheni ex-College of Education and Ezakheni Skills Centre. The college draws its students from areas such as Estcourt, Weenen, Bergville, Winterton, Pomeroy, Msinga, Dundee, Van Reenen, Mooi River, Greytown and the Ladysmith surroundings, making the college accessible to the neediest sections of the community (Mnambithi College, n.d.). The college's central office and Ladysmith campus are situated in the CBD of the town of Ladysmith. The Estcourt campus, where I work as a lecturer, is situated about an hour's drive from Ladysmith.

Most students at this college are pursuing their studies through the National Certificate (Vocational) NC(V) route. The NC(V) was introduced into the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in 2007, to replace the existing National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) (also called Report 191) courses at the lower levels (N1–N3), which were phased out. The NC(V) provides both theory and practical experience in a particular vocational field. The practical component of the study is offered in a simulated workplace environment, where students can experience work situations. The TVET qualifications are pegged at the following levels of the NQF:

Table 1: NQF Levels and TVET qualifications

<table>
<tr><th>NQF Level</th><th>Band</th><th colspan="2">TVET qualifications</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>General Education & Training
(Schooling Grades1–9; ABET levels 1–4)</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td rowspan="3">Further Education and Training
(Schooling Grades 10 to 12)</td><td>NATED N1 (phased out)</td><td rowspan="3">NC(V) courses</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>NATED N2 (phased out)</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td>NATED N3 (phased out)</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td rowspan="6">Higher Education and Training</td><td colspan="2">NATED N4–N6</td></tr>
<tr><td>6</td><td colspan="2"></td></tr>
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The NC(V) comprises a range of courses, namely; Civil Engineering and Building Construction; Drawing Office Practice; Education and Development; Electrical Infrastructure Construction; Engineering and Related Design; Finance, Economics and Accounting; Hospitality; Information Technology and Computer Science; Management; Marketing; Mechatronics; Office Administration; Primary Agriculture; Process Instrumentation; Process Plant Operations; Safety in Society; Tourism; and Transport and Logistics. The college offers eight of the 18 NC(V) courses (Mnambithi College, 2017b); although only three NC(V) programmes are available for learners on campus, namely; Office Administration, Finance, Economics and Accounting and Safety in Society. The college still offers the higher-level NATED Courses (Report 191) from N4–N6 in Business Management, Hospitality, Electrical Engineering, Human Resource Management, Financial Management, Public Management, and Tourism, although these are supposed to be phased out in terms of policy (Mnambithi College, 2017a).

The general minimum admission requirement for NC(V) is a pass in Grade 9; an Adult Education and Training (ABET) NQF Level 1 certificate; a recognised equivalent NQF Level 1 qualification; or an approved bridging programme designed for the specific purpose of access to NQF Level 2; or the recognition of a prior learning assessment programme, which meets the basic requirements for access to NQF Level 2. This broadens access, as is the intention of policy, because the NATED courses required a Grade 12/matric pass for admission. Despite the original target population for the NC(V) being young people completing Grade 9, individuals who have completed 10, 11 and 12 can also enrol for the NC(V); however, they begin at NQF Level 2 of the NC(V) qualification. This means that they must redo certain subjects, even though they have already passed them. The very different education levels of students in the same class can create problems for lecturers (DHET, 2013b).

Learners who have obtained at least a Grade 9 (NQF Level 1) may then enrol for the NC(V) course of their choice. Each NC(V) course takes a period of three years to complete (so learners exit at NQF Level 4). In each programme, learners must pass seven subjects in all the prescribed levels. These subjects consist of three fundamentals (i.e. subjects which are compulsory for all learners), namely; English First Additional Language (EFAL), Life orientation and Mathematical Literacy. The other four termed ‘vocational subjects’, which make up the full seven required for the NC(V) qualification, are regarded as electives. These

electives thus differ depending on the learner's course choice. The requirements for promotion and certification for the NC(V) are 40% in the required official language; 30% in Mathematics and/or Mathematical Literacy; 40% in Life Orientation; and 50% in each of the four vocational subjects (DHET, 2015a).

1.3 Problems in the Field

The *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (DHET, 2012) found several weaknesses within the TVET college sector, including low enrolments; low throughput rates; lack of capacity of lecturers, particularly in their subject-matter expertise; problems with articulation with universities; weak relationships between colleges and industries and problems with the co-ordination of funding of the sector. In 2011, the NDP also argued that many parts of further education and training were underperforming (National Planning Commission, 2011).

As discussed previously, TVET policy in South Africa in response to the *Green Paper* has been concerned with the issue of broadening enrolment. Whilst enrolment targets set in the *White Paper* have not been achieved, enrolment patterns have improved significantly since 2009, with student enrolments increasing by 10.5% (i.e. 358 393 to 737 880 students) from 2010 to 2015 (DHET, 2017).

However, concerns about throughput rates continue. One study (Cosser et al., 2011) reports that 70 out of every 100 students registered for NC(V) programmes either failed or dropped out in the period 2007 to 2009, and Taljaard (2013) similarly shows that high enrolments do not equal high throughput.

Some studies have suggested that low throughput is related to learner preparedness. Papier (2009) argues that most learners recruited into the NC(V) were not doing well at school especially in Mathematics and English. In 2010, a Competency and Placement (CAP) Test was introduced into all TVET colleges, which measures the prior knowledge in Mathematics and English of NQF Level 2 learners entering the NC(V) programme. According to Dodd (2010 cited in Adams, 2011), the CAP test helps to assess whether the learners will be able to cope with EFAL and Mathematical Literacy. No learner is excluded if they fail the test – rather, the CAP test instrument is meant to see where each learner needs support throughout

the course (Taljaard, 2013). Such support is crucial, given the fact that all NC(V) subjects are taught in English.

One of the central concerns in the TVET sector has been the role of the vocational education institutions as democratic sites of learning in educating citizens and encouraging a commitment to social change and increasing levels of social equality (Vally & Motala, 2014). Obviously, if high proportions of students drop out or fail because of their low proficiency in English, the intention of current policy to help to redress the inequalities created by apartheid is undermined. For example, a study conducted in 1999 (NCVER, 1999) found that participants from non-English speaking backgrounds did less well than those from English-speaking background.

Connected to this are the attitudes and skills of the TVET college lecturers. How educators view their roles and the purpose of vocational education, the beliefs they hold about their students, the way in which they select, use and design curricula, as well as how they facilitate learning, all impact the educational success of the student (Black, 2003). The way educators design their curricula should be done in a way that supports the development of democratic institutions (Booyse & Du Plessis, 2008).

It has been argued that vocational education lecturers require engagement with theoretical approaches and pedagogical practices within a progressive and transformative philosophical framework that aids the development of democratic vocational education (Collins, 1991; Dreyer, 2008; Nieman & Monyai, 2006).

The implications of the practically unskilled lecturers and lecturers who feel they are unable to impart the necessary skills on learners, are vast. These kinds of lecturers may hinder the process of meeting skills demands for economic growth which is the international trend and national view of what TVET colleges should work towards providing (Akoojee, 2008). The strength of TVET colleges and the sector is dependent on the staff that it attracts and retains who are directly responsible for fulfilling the need for skills (Papier, 2009).

1.4 Research Problem

I started teaching at a TVET college in 2007, the same year that the then Department of Education (DoE) decided to introduce the National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) in TVET colleges. I was appointed to teach Communication to N4, N5 and N6 students in 2007.

The following year, with the introduction of the NC(V), college management decided that I teach NC(V) Levels 2 and 3 EFAL. Each year end of the NQF Levels 2, 3and 4, the then DoE would organise a workshop for all NC(V) TVET college lecturers. Therefore, I had the opportunity to attend all the workshops for teaching English in all the NC(V) levels, where I learnt about the TVET learners and the challenges facing them. During discussions, I was made aware that some TVET learners come from learning backgrounds where English is not used in the teaching and learning of subjects. While teaching, I came to realise that I had difficulty teaching English to the students in a way that would enhance proficiency for negotiating content in their chosen courses. I was therefore worried that students were going to fail their chosen subjects because of poor proficiency in English, the subject which I had been appointed to teach. This then is where my interest in finding out more about the students that I was teaching, came from. I found out that the dropout rate was significantly high among the students, and that the failure rate was high. I noticed that students who had failed English would go on to fail their chosen courses, and then later drop out. I was concerned that this would have the consequence of discouraging students from backgrounds with poor English teaching, to enrol at our TVET College.

In 2013, the college decided to introduce an intervention programme for NC(V) Level 2 learners in regard to two fundamental subjects, namely EFAL and Mathematics/Mathematical Literacy. This programme is run on Saturdays, from 8h00 in the morning until 13h00 in the afternoon. Lecturers who assist NC(V) Level 2 learners are those who teach the subject during week days. As I am teaching NC(V) Level 2 EFAL, I automatically got involved in the programme. This study will explore how I could assist my NC(V) Level 2 learners learn English as their first additional language. Such an investigation took the form of action research as the intention was to reflect on and improve my practice. Given the argument that matching teaching methods to learning styles can help learners to learn (Rogowsky & Calhoun, 2015), especially concerning the learning and teaching of language (Reid, 1995), Kolb's Learning Styles theory was applied for the purposes of this study (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

1.5 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The key aim of the study was to consider how I might support my Level 2 EFAL students through matching my teaching styles to their learning styles, and exploring the effects of this. The objectives of this study were thus to find out:

1. The different methods that can be used to match the different learning styles of Level 2 learners in my English intervention class.
2. The effects of matching teaching methods and learning styles.

1.5.1 Key Research Questions

The investigation of the problem and/or concern for this study was guided by the following key research questions:

1. What different teaching methods can I use to meet different learning styles of Level 2 learners?
2. What effects can there be when matching the learners' different learning styles with the teacher's teaching methods?

1.6 Research Methodology and Design

As stated above, the intention of the study was to understand the possible effects of matching my teaching methods with my learners' learning styles. The study was located within an interpretivist paradigm as the investigation of the key research questions of the study assumed that there is not a singular reality or truth, but that there are regimes of truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand how people make sense of their social world and the meanings they attach to their actions. Therefore, interpretivism opens the possibility of understanding the experiences of participants from different dimensions and angles, and the understanding that there are multiple, rather than singular, realities of phenomena, and that such realities could differ across time and space (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Consistent with the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach was used. Qualitative research is useful where a researcher seeks to understand meanings, observe, describe and understand experiences, ideas, beliefs and values (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). The assumption of qualitative research is that there can be no such thing as a single, absolute truth or reality

waiting to be discovered, observed and measured (Murphy & Yielder, 2010). This clearly fits my enquiry because I wanted to understand my participants' preferred learning styles and I wanted to garner their reflections regarding their experiences with lessons in which I targeted their learning styles with my teaching methods.

Action research methodology was used to investigate the key research questions of the study as the aim was to explore the different ways in which I could change my teaching methods to match the learning styles of my NC(V) Level 2 learners in my EFAL intervention class in order to improve their performance in EFAL. Khoboli (2005) defines action research as an endeavour where professionals study their problems scientifically, with the intention of guiding, correcting, and evaluating their decisions and actions. The essence of action research for the educator is to improve professional practice and strengthen the ways in which teaching and learning processes are conducted. The action research design was regarded as appropriate for this study because of its potential to allow me to diagnose problems and develop solutions to these problems and to improve my practice (Bryman & Bell, 2011), because my intention was to explore the effects of matching my teaching methods with the learning styles of my students. Using an action research design allowed me to use different teaching methods and to then reflect on the effects of these, as well as to then change my methods and explore any further effects.

In this study, I first identified my learners' learning styles, and then developed lessons to specifically target these. I then assessed how the learners experienced the lessons through individual interviews and focus group interviews. Adjusting my teaching methods in response to their feedback, I repeated the entire process again.

1.7 Structure of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured in six chapters:

Chapter One has provided the background to the study, and stated the problem to which the study is responding. In this chapter, I presented the objectives of the study and the key research questions, as well as a summary of the methodological and design decisions made regarding the way in which the study was conducted.

Chapter Two provides a review, discussion and analysis of literature and concepts relating to the study.

Chapter Three provides a theoretical basis or context by reviewing, discussing and analysing literature and concepts relating to learning styles and experiential learning.

Chapter Four describes the research methodology, design, the research tools, limitations and ethical issues in relation to the study.

Chapter Five presents a description and analysis of the findings of the study. In doing this, the chapter reports on each step of the action research project, and what I observed and the learners' feedback on each. It considers how my experience relates to the literature surveyed in Chapter Two, and to the theoretical frame I have used in Chapter Three. Ultimately, it reflects on the effects of matching my teaching methods to my learners' learning styles.

Chapter Six provides closing statements based on what the study found. In doing this, the chapter provides a précis of the main findings, and consolidate key issues to lift key conclusions in relation to the ways in which NC(V) Level 2 learners can be supported in their learning. The chapter concludes by highlighting limitations related to the study, and suggests areas that could be followed for further research with regarding the ways in which NC(V) Level 2 learners can be supported.

The succeeding chapter provides a review and analysis of literature relating to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The last chapter provided an overview of the study, and presented the problem in which the study is rooted. The purpose of this chapter is to review literature relating to the current Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) context and the problem as identified in Chapter One – the high dropout and failure rate of National Certificate (Vocational) NC(V) students. The intention of such a review is to locate the study within the broader scholarly conversation on this subject.

2.2 Historical Overview of the TVET sector

Taljaard (2013) argues that technical and vocational education in South Africa mirrors the political past of the country. During the apartheid era, TVET colleges were often used as instruments for social control to reinforce government's policy of separate development (Chisholm, Motala & Vally, 2003). Thus, under apartheid different colleges were set aside for different racial groups, with most being exclusively for whites (Ibid.). When analysing technical vocational education and training in the apartheid regime, Badroodien (2004) argues that its provision was located within a "salvation paradigm" for the white working-class-poor, and to regulate and socialise "poor white", "African" and "Coloured" urban workers. It was to ensure that impoverished learners in the rural areas developed the skills and knowledge to prosper there and not to migrate to the cities. Badroodien (2004) further argues that even when it was solely reserved for whites, TVET was stigmatised as "kaffir work" and disparaged by white workers as degrading and unacceptable.

In 1994 the democratic government in 1994 inherited a TVET system that was shaped by apartheid; a system organised along racial and ethnic lines with major disparities in provisioning (Akoojee, 2008; Sayed, 2003). As a result, post-1994 vocational education was seen as a potential mechanism to respond to the previously disadvantaged South Africans (Pampallis, 2012). Pampallis states clearly that the disadvantaged group refers to the black working class who remain largely excluded by the formal economy and its limited absorptive capacity.

Perhaps an even stronger argument than redress concerning the role of TVET post-apartheid is that which sees TVET as pivotal for economic growth. According to Sears (2003), TVET

is being centred as the sites of skills formation that can develop human capital for increased economic growth and to address the unemployment crisis. Education leads to skills, skills lead to employment, employment leads to economic growth (Vally & Motala, 2014). Government has been blamed for not supplying the skills that business needs. It is also blamed for the mismatch between what education produces and what business wants (Ibid.). The cause of unemployment in general is put at educations' door, more broadly arguing that education is not teaching what the economy needs (Shor,1988). It is unfortunately true that many children and youth around the world leave school without the basic skills necessary for life and work (Papier, 2009). The mismatch discourse is however usually less about lack of basic skills and more about lack of vocational skills.

2.3 TVET Policy Post-1994

As discussed in Chapter One, the post-apartheid period saw significant policy changes, including the merger of 152 technical colleges into 50 larger, multi-campus institutions (DHET, 2013b); the renaming of the colleges from Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges to TVET Colleges and the introduction of new programmes.

The historical denial of access to education for certain categories of the South African population resulted in the new democratic government rectifying matters by opening the doors of learning to everyone. In terms of this trajectory, the DHET had a responsibility to serve the growing number of young people and adults who seek education and training outside of the schooling system. The colleges thus provide technical and vocational education and training programmes to learners who completed at least a Grade 9 at school level. In general, TVET colleges now provide three broad categories of qualifications and part-qualifications, namely:

a) The NC(V) that is offered at three levels, i.e. Levels 2, 3 and 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NC(V) is an alternative vocational learning pathway to Grades 10, 11 and 12 of the schooling system.
b) The Report 191 National Technical Education programmes, commonly known as NATED certificates, are offered at six sub-levels (N1 to N6) for Engineering Studies and three or four sub-levels (Introductory, N4 to N6) for Business and General Studies. These part-qualifications culminate in a National Diploma on condition that students meet the requirements for work experience. Students enrolled for Business or General Studies

programmes require 18 months (2 000 hours) of applicable work experience, while those enrolled for Engineering Studies programmes require a minimum of 24 months (2 670 hours) of applicable work experience or a relevant trade test certificate to obtain the National Diploma at NQF Level 6.

c) Occupational qualifications and part-qualifications, inclusive of workplace-based learning (WPBL), are closely linked to workplace demands and opportunities. Many of the occupational learning programmes are funded by Sector Education Training and Authorities (SETAs) and the National Skills Fund (NSF) through the levy grant system.

As a result of the policy focus on TVET, there has been an upward trend in the number of students enrolled in TVET colleges in the recent past (DHET, 2017). The following graph indicates this clearly:

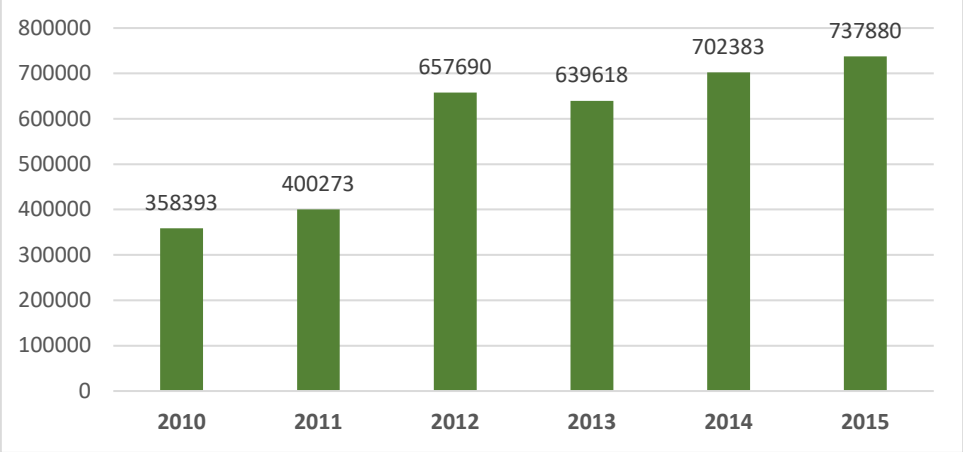

Figure 1: Number of students enrolled in TVET colleges, 2010 to 2015 (DHET, 2017)

The above figure shows that over the period 2010 to 2015, student enrolment increased by 105.9% (from 358 393 students to 737 880 students). The following graphical representation shows the number of students enrolled in TVET colleges by qualification:

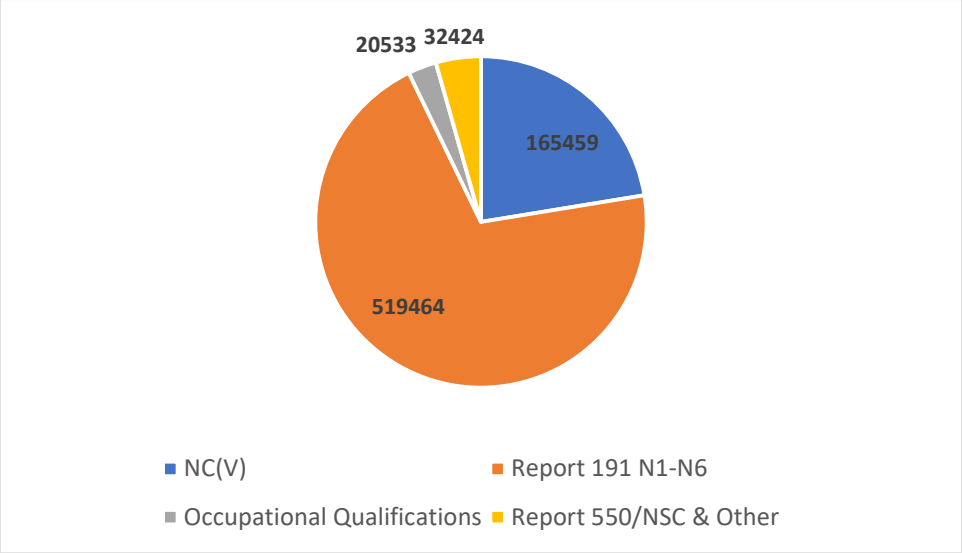

Figure 2: Number of students enrolled in TVET colleges by qualification, 2015 (DHET, 2017)

Out of all the qualifications, a clear majority of students (519 464 students or 70.4%) enrolled for N1–N6 programmes. The second largest enrolments were for NC(V) (165 459 students or 22.4 percent) in 2015. Overall, numbers of students enrolled in NC(V) programmes has been increasing since 2010 (2010: 130 039; 2011: 124 658; 2012: 140 575; 2013: 154 960; 2014: 166 433; 2015: 165 459) albeit with a slight decrease in 2011 and 2015 (DHET, 2017).

Mnambithi TVET College, where this study was conducted, had a student enrolment of 9 429 students in 2015, with 2 017 students (21.4%) enrolled in NC(V) programmes (DHET, 2017). This is far lower than Taletso, South West and Ekurhuleni TVET colleges which recorded the highest enrolments (12 650, 8 280 students and 7 378 students respectively) of students enrolled in NC(V) programmes.

The following graphical representation shows numbers of students enrolled in NC(V) programmes per province:

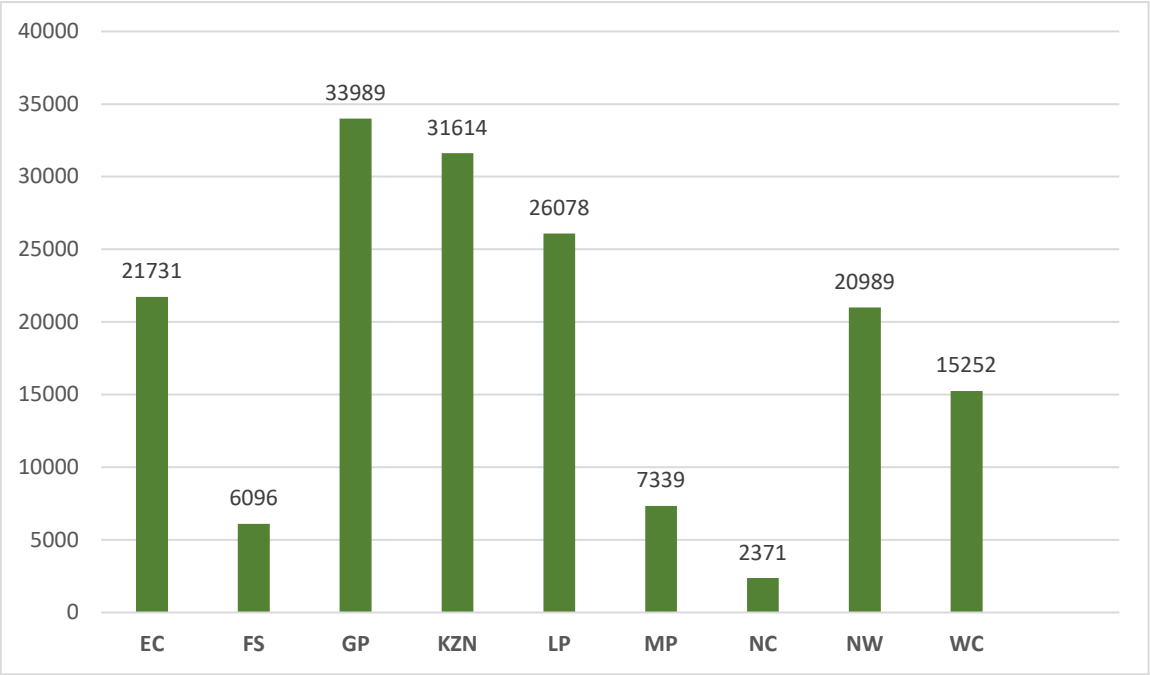

Figure 3: Number of students enrolled in NC(V) programmes in TVET colleges, 2015 (DHET, 2017)

The following table shows the number of students enrolled in TVET colleges by qualification category and population group in 2015:

Table 2: Number of students enrolled in TVET colleges by qualification and population group, 2015 (DHET, 2017)

	African	Coloured	Indian/Asian	White	Other
Report 191	479160	27920	2080	7899	292
Report 550/NSC	895	88	5	8	0
NC(V)	156429	7597	263	606	44
Occupational qualifications	13935	4016	269	1483	56
Other	0	0	0	0	0

In 2015, almost 90% (650 419) of students enrolled at TVET colleges were Africans. The smallest proportion of students were Indian/Asian (0.4% or 2 617). Africans recorded high enrolment for all programmes compared to other population groups (DHET, 2017). Among different population groups, the majority of Africans and Coloured students enrolled for N1–N6 programmes and NC(V) Levels 2–4, while the majority of Indians/Asians and White students enrolled for N1–N6 programmes and occupational qualifications. For NC(V), women were 1.6 times more likely to enrol in these programmes compared to men (DHET,

2017). Of the 165 459 students enrolled for NC(V) qualifications, 101 674 (61.4%) were women and 63 785 (38.6%) were men (DHET, 2017). For all the NC(V) Levels 2–4, enrolment was higher for women compared to men. The highest gender disparity in the proportions was recorded for NC(V) Level 4 (64.0% women compared to 36.0% men).

As argued above, apart from wanting to redress apartheid inequities, post-apartheid TVET policy has also emphasised the importance of TVET to economic growth. The NC(V) was introduced specifically to respond to the priority skills demand of the South African economy (DHET, 2012). However, the implementation of the NC(V) curriculum has been marred with teething challenges ranging from significant numbers of NC(V) Level students unable to progress to the next level to the capacity of lecturers to implement the curriculum (Mabale, 2012). From the above, it could be discerned that access to vocational education and training for the vulnerable sections of the South African population has greatly increased. However, although there has been a significant increase in numbers of students enrolling in TVET programmes, this access has not translated into equality of opportunity and outcomes for students (Mabale, 2012; Machingambi, 2011). Taljaard (2013) shows the significant drop out rate of NC(V) students between 2007 and 2011:

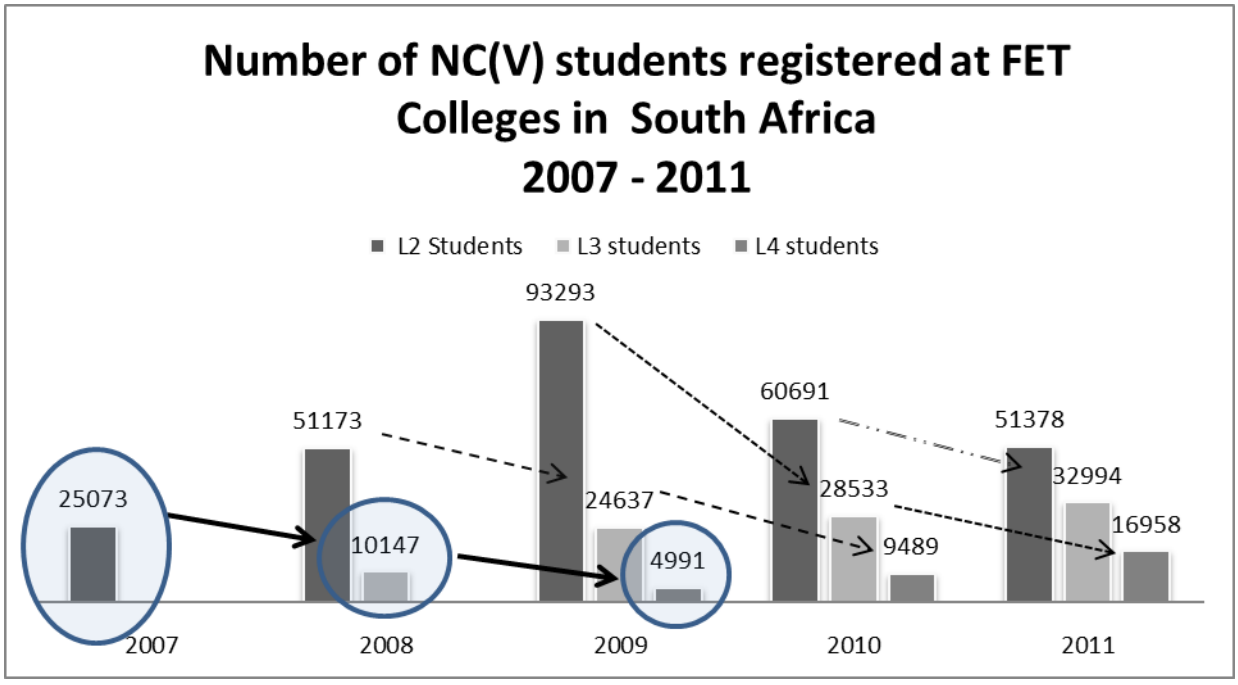

Figure 4: Number of NC(V) students registered at TVET College, 2007–2011 (DoE 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011 cited in Taljaard, 2013, p.21)

This suggests that higher access to vocational education and training has not been a sufficient condition for equity for these social groups (Machingambi, 2011). Akoojee (2008) argues that the education provided in many of the TVET colleges is generally of poor quality and cannot be used to fulfil the promise of ensuring, that the post-apartheid TVET system serves as a vehicle to include in the mainstream of life and economy of those that were excluded. Thus, the change in the racial composition of students has had little impact in terms of redress. This is largely because in South Africa, vocational education remains confronted by the stigma of a system generally characterised by programmes of students who work with their hands and not with their heads, programmes that do not train students to think conceptually and critically, programmes for poor black youth and adults who do not have access to high skill prestigious jobs and careers and institutions that fail to provide students with an alternative to schooling (Badroodien, 2004). McGrath (2004) thus claims that the post-apartheid government is providing inferior education to blacks.

2.4 Problems within the TVET sector

There are a number of arguments about why the TVET system has failed to operate as either a redress mechanism or one which will lead to increased skills, increased employment and increased economic growth.

There is a growing critique of the mismatch argument. Vally and Motala (2014) have made this point clearly. They argue that vocational skills which are often context specific are best taught on the job. Secondly, unemployment is not a worker supply problem but a structural problem of capitalism. Billions of people are under-employed not because they do not have the right skills, but because full employment is neither a feature nor a goal of capitalism.

Whilst there are a number of problems in the TVET sector in South Africa, the poor performance of NC(V) learners is seen as a challenge to both the redress and skills for jobs intention of the TVET College sector (Adams, 2011). It is a debate amongst scholars whether learners' poor performance is a student issue or because of a broad educational system failure (Clark, 2011). One of the key scholars on TVET in South Africa, Papier (2009), identifies three possible reasons for poor throughput and poor academic performance, viz. college-related factors, programme-related factors, and learner-related factors. I will discuss each of these in more detail below.

2.4.1 College-related factors

Papier (2009) identifies under qualified lecturing staff, and the attitudes of lecturers, as key college-related factors related to poor throughput and poor academic performance. In 1994, the TVET college sector inherited a system where specific teaching qualifications were not set out as a requirement for the appointment of TVET college lecturers, yet they were required to teach (Papier, 2008). Given the lack of clear and effective professional pathways for college lecturers in the vocational education and training fields, often TVET colleges have had to recruit lecturers from industry. However, these lecturers often did not possess a teaching qualification, and possessed only qualifications related to technical fields backed by workplace experience and knowledge (Papier, 2008). By 2012, according to DHET (2012), most TVET College lecturers still did not have a professional qualification. Where lecturers had a teaching qualification, they possessed very little or no industry experience.

Where provincial departments of education required a teaching qualification for lecturers, very few higher education institutions offered professional qualifications for TVET college lecturers. Often, in cases where these were available, the programmes lacked any serious orientation to the philosophical debates about education and training and their relationship to curriculum design and classroom practice (DHET, 2012); and many of them fell away with the establishment of the new NQF, as they had been designed using the repealed Norms and Standards for Educators (DoE, 2000; DHET, 2015b).

This suggests that there have been serious challenges with regard to the qualifications that TVET college lecturers have. For instance, this has meant that college lecturers have obtained qualifications that are meant for school teachers, that is, they are getting qualifications that are not aligned with working in the technical and industrial fields (Papier, 2008). However, in rare cases, some universities and universities of technology have customised teacher qualifications with a view to making them suitable for working in vocational education and training contexts. This has created huge disparities in how TVET College lecturers are prepared, often resulting in inadequately capacitated lecturers (Buthelezi, 2016).

In 2008/9, College lecturers were given extensive training by the DoE in order to be able to deliver and assess the new NC(V) programmes within an outcomes-based orientation (DoE, 2008). Other lecturers who did not undergo the training were later employed. Whether the council of the college recognised the importance of retraining the newly employed teaching

staff is under question. If not trained, how then do they successfully deliver the curriculum in the classroom? Booyse and Du Plessis (2008) agree with Nieman and Monyai (2006) that the lecturer is a learning programme developer. Thus, the lecturer has to develop a daily lesson plan for the students. If not trained for that how will the lecturers succeed? Now that all subjects are taught in English, English lecturers should be well skilled in delivering the curriculum in the classroom for the good performance of learners in all NC(V) subjects done at the TVET College.

In addition to being able to develop and present the new programmes, according to Niemann and Monyai (2006) lecturers also need to be armed with the ability to create and exercise a more holistic and democratic practice with their students. Progressive vocational lecturers have an important role to play in building an emancipatory vocational education through democratic institutions, curriculum design and classroom pedagogy (Nieman & Monyai, 2006). Building an emancipatory vocational education requires a mission for vocational lecturers associated with a sense of vocation which calls for emancipatory strategies within a transformative and critical pedagogy (Collins, 1991). This necessarily means that vocational education has to transform students' life and their condition. I think vocational education can only be useful if it is practical and relates directly to the lives of students, while simultaneously enhancing their role as citizens in the society.

The major problem with this scenario is that transformation of the TVET sector (the introduction of the new NC(V) programmes) assumes that lecturers would be able to implement the new changes (Akoojee, 2008). For instance, the historical perceptions of the TVET sector as a place for the less able students, who could not make it to the prestige of a university education, often attracted students for inappropriate reasons (Buthelezi, 2016). As a result of this, lecturers largely found the implementation of the new NC(V) curriculum more difficult, as most courses often required highly capable students. The low expectations associated with vocational education and training often extended to how lecturers were viewed. For instance, Buthelezi (2016) reports that TVET lecturers often had "feelings of being undervalued and being looked down on" (p. 203). This suggests that TVET lecturers have had to spend time trying to shake off the low status and stigma that is associated with the sector. It stands to reason that working as a lecturer in a context such as this one is likely to place a huge emotional burden on TVET lecturers. In addition, it must be remembered that curriculum change in the TVET college sector happened while college lecturers were

grappling with practical, organisational and administrative complexities of the processes of merging 152 technical colleges into 50 TVET colleges (Powell, 2013).

2.4.2 Programme-related factors

Papier (2009) argues that programme-related factors include the inherent difficulty of some subjects, the poor results achieved by students, teaching and assessment methods of lecturers, poor retention and throughput in Level 2 and 3 of the NC(V). Papier says that the cognitive demands of particular subjects are sometimes inconsistent with the level to which they are assigned. Lecturers face excessive workload due to long syllabi and assessment requirements and overload associated with assessment. This is a challenge to the lecturers as it is expected of them to carry out all those paperwork challenges which are regarded as part of the workload assigned for all NC(V) educators (Macintyre, 2000). Lecturers spend a lot of time doing administration work in the classroom instead of carrying out the daily lesson plan (Macintyre, 2000). To date this is still a challenge to lecturers and this contributes to the poor performance of learners at the end.

It is true that there are other factors which are not from the students' side which contributes to students' poor performance in NC(V) Level 2. I agree with Papier (2009) that TVET students need student support interventions particularly for fundamental subjects like Maths/Mathematical Literacy and English. Adams (2011) suggests that attention to student poor performance must be tackled in the classroom, so as to ensure high quality which then binds the lecturer along with the institution, to a set of quality objectives that are student driven. Macintyre (2000) also argues that the best performance of students is facilitated by the lecturers in the classroom when doing action research about their own work.

Clark (2011) also agrees with Macintyre (2000) in that students perform better when formative assessment is in action in the classroom. This ensures consistent satisfaction of all the major role-players who are students, TVET colleges, industry and economy. Learners who do not perform well in the Competency and Placement (CAP) test also do not perform well in the classroom and obviously this affects the progress in the assessments for learning in the classroom and in the final summative assessment. According to Dreyer (2008) some students, when they see that they do not do well, start to absent themselves from attending classes, others abscond and end up dropping out of the college. This creates a problem for lecturers because these students are already on the college attendance register (Black, 2003).

If intervention programs are taken seriously by both students and lecturers, there should not be a significant failure rate or dropout rate of students. This is because it creates a problem for the whole college and the Higher Education Department because students are given a bursary to study with and if they dropout or fail, it becomes a loss. Having looked at the poor performance of our NC(V) Level 2 learners in English First Additional Language (EFAL) specifically, I wanted to examine the different methods I could use to match the learning styles of my learners, and the potential effects of this.

2.4.3 Learner-related factors

By 'learner related factors', Papier (2009) means issues such finances (i.e. inability to pay for studies), health, attitude issues, problems at home, death, and being offered a job. Taljaard (2013) identifies other factors raised by researchers as being pregnancy, lack of vocational guidance, inability to cope with the College environment because of immaturity (particularly of students with a Grade 9), and transport problems. Students also sometimes register for programmes they are not interested in, or are beyond their capabilities, because NSFAS funding is available for those courses.

From my experience, many learners are recruited into doing (NC(V) although they did not do well at school especially in Mathematics and English. In the case of some of these learners, it has been more than ten years since they left school. When such learners attempt the CAP test which is written by all NC(V) learners after registration to test their prior knowledge in Mathematics and English, I have drawn the conclusion that there is really no background knowledge left about these subjects in the students' minds because most of them dismally fail the CAP tests. This then becomes a challenge for the teachers of Level 2.

There is evidence that English as a medium of instruction presents a barrier for students whose mother tongue is not English (Merga, 2016; Amedome & Fiagbe, 2013; Dorasamy, 2012). This is the case in TVET Colleges as well. Often, these students already have a weak proficiency in English as they picked up deficits from the schooling system. Literature abounds with arguments that, in a significant number of instances, learners whose mother tongue is an indigenous language tend to perform more poorly in educational contexts in which another language, such as English, is used as the language of learning and teaching (Dorasamy, 2012). This suggests that in countries such as South Africa, where English tends to be the preferred medium of instruction, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds

may find it difficult to navigate the learning process. In a vocational education and training milieu, the consequence of these language barriers will most likely be inadequate access for students, and effective participation and success in vocational education and training courses will be impeded by their lack of English proficiency to engage effectively with subject content (Pithers & Lim, 1997). Therefore, as literature reveals, students who found themselves in these circumstances are most likely to perform less well compared to their peers from English-speaking backgrounds in English-centric vocational education and training courses (Black, n.d.). When this happens, these students may not be able to enter the job market, not because they are incapable, but because they lack English proficiency.

Landsberg and Dednam (1999) argue that learning support should preferably commence from the level of the student. That is, it must respond to the challenges that are making it difficult for the student to succeed. If the support intervention is not correctly pitched, and the student is incapable of improving from the support intervention, then the student is likely to lose confidence and interest, and join the numbers of those who feel hard done by the system.

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER, 1999) using 1996 data provided a national statistical overview of non-English speaking background students in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Institutes and other government providers. Participants in the NCVER study were students from non-English speaking backgrounds, who indicated on their enrolment form that they spoke a language other than English at home. The finding of this study was that overall, both female and male participants fared less well compared to students from English-speaking backgrounds, that is, 4% and 7% less well respectively (NCVER, 1999). However, the problematic dimension of this study is that it views students from non-English-speaking backgrounds as a homogenous category affected in similar ways by similar variables. This way of understanding the performance of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds is erroneous in that these students most likely have varying backgrounds and experiences (Volkoff, 2004). Clearly, the implication here may be that one size does not fit all when it comes to educational policy because students from non-English-speaking backgrounds are generally not located within homogenous, symmetrical and stable social, economic and political backgrounds (De Haan, 2000). This suggests that we need to disentangle threads of the complex dynamics of learning in an English-medium classroom for non-English-speaking students (Volkoff, 2014).

In our attempt to understand the complexity of learning in a foreign language, we need to consider various inputs such as cultural diversities in training competencies; ensuring learning material is written in simple, user-friendly English; usage of culturally-appropriate forms and types of assessment; and the professional development of lecturers in vocational education and training contexts (Volkoff, 2014). For instance, there is ample evidence in literature that the performance of students from non-English-speaking contexts could be enhanced by providing effective integrated language support; acknowledging and addressing cultural issues; having lecturers and teachers who have intimate understanding of the students' backgrounds and are willing and ready to accommodate diversities among students (Miralles, 2004).

The teaching of English in TVET colleges is different to that of the schooling system as TVET colleges are expected to teach English as a tool for students to use for different professional purposes, while they are still in the TVET College and after their graduation in the workplace (Merga, 2016). Therefore, in the case of the NC(V), English proficiency serves the purpose of assisting learners to do well in the NC(V) and in the workplace, and must be taught in a way that fits this purpose. English therefore must be taught in a way that assists learners to develop their English language skills which will then enable the learners to do well in the tasks and activities related to the NC(V) as well as enabling the learners to cope in the workplace. English should therefore be taught in such a way that places it as a useful vehicle for doing well both in the NC(V) and in the workplace.

2.5 Policy responses to the problems in the TVET sector

One response of government to the considerable problems discussed above was the introduction of the CAP test at the beginning of 2007, after the intake of the first cohort of NC(V) students (Taljaard, 2013). According to Dodd (2010 cited in Adams, 2011) and Taljaard (2013), the intention of the CAP test was to firstly, assess whether students will be able to cope with Level 2 EFAL and Mathematical Literacy by testing their NQF Level 1 competencies in the two subjects; and secondly to assist prospective students to identify and make a choice about the vocation they sought to pursue. The CAP test thus provides a mechanism to assist TVET colleges in the early identification of students who might be at risk and to put in place the necessary support mechanisms for these students (Taljaard, 2013).Therefore, the intention of the CAP test was to help remove barriers to the learners'

completion of their qualification rather than to exclude them; it was “not to function as a gate-keeping device” (Bohlmann, 2005, p.363; Kim & Suen, 2003; Taljaard, 2013). According to Taljaard (2013), the CAP test is meant rather to see where each learner needs support throughout the course.

The CAP Test comprises of three components or subtests, namely, an English competency test, a Mathematics competency test and the Career Interest Questionnaire (Taljaard, 2013). The English and Mathematics Competency Tests measure which NQF Level 1 outcomes a prospective student has mastered. This is important in placing the students as the DoE (2006) decided that NQF Level 1 (i.e. Grade 9) is a requirement for entry into NC(V) Level 2. The intention of the Career Interest Questionnaire is to identify the student’s area of interest in one or more of the 14 training and vocational programmes offered by the TVET colleges. Placing students in this way was also important in that there is often no going back to mainstream secondary school once a student has chosen to pursue a particular vocational field (Taljaard, 2013).

Research conducted on the CAP tests reveals that the CAP test falls short as a predictor of a student’s future performance, but that it is a good mechanism for the identification of gaps in foundational skills and knowledge in the mastering of grade 9 (Taljaard, 2013). For instance, a student who performs poorly in the CAP test (i.e. Grade 9 level of work), but who performs well at the TVET college, could possibly have benefitted from the excellent work of lecturers or could have compensated for the work that should have been covered in Grade 9 by working harder (Taljaard, 2013). For this study, I believe that students could benefit from my improving the way in which I conducted my teaching. Therefore, I believe that I could make things better for students to perform excellently.

Another key intervention has been the problem of under qualified lecturers. As argued above, TVET is seen by government as pivotal in the country’s efforts to address the skills shortage by developing a citizenry who can contribute effectively to social and economic development in the country (DHET, 2013a). That is, there is an explicit need for the TVET college sector as a place to produce real-world skills required in both the public and private sector. This places TVET college lecturers at the coalface of the programmes to address the challenge of skills shortage, as central players in this landscape. In other words, TVET colleges must be staffed with “sufficient, appropriately qualified and competent lecturers, who understand and have expertise in both the academic and work-related dimensions of TVET” (DHET, 2013a,

p.3). Therefore, there is a presumption that TVET college lecturers are “a well-motivated and effective component” of the TVET college system capable of tackling the national skills development challenge (Akoojee, 2008, p.297).

With the realisation that there was a need to formalise the TVET sector, the DHET took steps to begin the long road to producing qualified and competent lecturers (DHET, 2013a). It thus introduced the National Professional Diploma in Education: Vocational Training (NPDE: VT) as an interim measure targeting those unqualified lecturers currently teaching in colleges. The qualification was an alternative route for further education and development for these educators to become fully qualified professionals, which is at the level of Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) 13. The qualification had a strong classroom focus and equipped these educators with the competencies required to pursue further studies at NQF Level 6. The qualification also took advantage of and built on the previous experiences and professional training that these educators may have accumulated.

However, many education faculties tweaked the original NPDE, which was intended for the upgrading of school teachers, and offered it as an adapted version for college lecturers (Papier, 2008). As a result, very few of the higher education institutions (the University of KwaZulu-Natal being one of the exceptions) could articulate vocational education and training policy and global issues in their course outlines. In some cases, universities did not have the requisite capacity to offer technical subject matter to college lecturers (Ibid.). Therefore, lecturers who required proficiency in technical subject matter, qualified without it. In addition, the take-up of the NPDE: VT was slow and the numbers of lecturers who enrolled were relatively small. The challenges of implementing the NPDE: VT was exacerbated by the fact that there was a vacuum in terms of what exactly TVET colleges were meant to be and what they were teaching (Papier, 2008). Therefore, establishing what college lecturers needed to be trained in was a difficult mission. In addition, it was unclear who the vocational trainers of college lecturers were at institutions of higher learning, as there was little experience and capacity in higher education in this sector.

To respond to this and to level the regulatory landscape regarding this call, the DHET published the *Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (DHET, 2013a). The primary intention of the policy was to ensure that qualified and competent lecturers were made available for the TVET college sector. This was important in that the TVET sector has a responsibility to contribute to the

country's efforts to respond to the priority skills demand. In addition, the policy provided a qualification framework that could be deployed for the "professional and post-professional development of TVET lecturers" (p. 3). Implicitly, the policy sought to strengthen the efforts to address issues such as low throughput rates, high dropout rates, low rates of progression, and poor rates of completion, by improving the quality of teaching and learning in the TVET college sector (DHET, 2013a; Mgijima, 2014). The provision of a set of higher education qualifications would also assist to align the sector with international standards in terms of the professionalization, standardisation and certification of TVET college lecturers (Papier, 2008).

From the above, it is obvious that there is a need for a diligent focus on improving the quality of and expanding professional development opportunities for TVET college lecturers, and encouraging TVET college lecturers to take advantage of these opportunities. Lecturers are crucial implementers of the envisaged curriculum changes (Kanyane, 2016). Amongst other things, there is a need for the DHET to invest more interest and resources to ensure that TVET college lecturers are qualified and competent. The motivation and competence of lecturers are significant factors for the success of the sector. Lecturers must be capable of assisting students to improve their performance in English to ensure that they are able to succeed in English-medium courses. The type of the student enrolled in the NC(V) programme requires the type of lecturer that can ensure that students are equipped with the skills and knowledge required in the labour market. In other words, a lecturer that is required for a vibrant vocational education and training is that which is adequately equipped to ensure that the sector can meet the expectations of the national skills agenda (Nieman & Monyai, 2006). Without such a lecturer, the TVET sector will be unable to execute its mandate of either redressing past inequities or producing sufficiently skilled graduates. Therefore, TVET college lecturers must be the focus of intervention as they are primary agents for fulfilling the agenda of the vocational education sector (Akoojee, 2008; Papier, 2009). I took this argument to heart in thinking about my study and its purpose. I am mindful of the fact that there are many different factors at play, as discussed above, over which I have little control. I thus chose to use an action research design focusing on myself and my practice as a lecturer, and using Kolb's Learning Styles Theory as a point of departure.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of literature relating to the issues and trends in the field of training and vocational education, including an historical overview of the TVET sector and the learner-, college- and programme-related problems in the TVET sector. However, it is important to signal that even though this chapter has discussed a range of challenges facing the TVET sector, this study focuses on the poor performance of learners.

In the next chapter, I provide the theoretical basis of the study and the lens through which the findings of the study must be read.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided some insights into the history and complexities of transformation in the TVET sector and the problem of learner performance. The intention of the chapter was to locate this study within the scholarly conversation regarding questions and issues in the TVET sector. This chapter provides a theoretical and conceptual foundation which framed my study and through which the discussions and findings of the study may be understood. The chapter will do this by discussing learning styles theory as a possible means for helping students studying English First Additional Language (EFAL).

3.2 Theoretical foundations of learning styles theory

Best practice theories on learning styles posit that a teaching paradigm that addresses and accommodates a range of learning styles provides the teacher with a greater coverage of the needs of learners, thereby ensuring that learning opportunities are not lost and that the teachers and students are not frustrated (Romanelli, Bird & Ryan, 2009). This study adopted the learning styles theory derived from the Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) and the model of learning developed by Kolb (1984). Kolb's ELT posits that learning is "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience ... [in which] knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). However, this process is a very individual one – people will approach it differently, bringing a different emotional response and personal preferences to it.

The ELT model reveals two dialectically related methods of grasping experience, namely, Concrete Experience (CE) and Abstract Conceptualization (AC) (the *perception continuum*), and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience, namely, Reflective Observation (RO) and Active Experimentation (AE) (the *process continuum*) (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 1999; McCarthy, 2010). Experiential learning is a process of constructing knowledge through a creative tension (i.e. a structure or framework that makes it possible to facilitate inventiveness and change) among the four learning modes or abilities of the two continuums outlined above (McCarthy, 2010). The processing continuum is about how learners approach a task, and the perception continuum has to do with learners' emotional responses or how learners think and/or feel about the task (McLeod, 2013).

The above discussion suggests, therefore, that it is possible for individuals or learners to respond to the contextual demands of their own social world – that is, it is possible for learners to learn from experience (Kolb, 2015). For Kolb (1984), the process of experiential learning is therefore "intended to be a holistic adaptive process on learning that merges experience, perception, cognition, and behavior" (McCarthy, 2010, p.132). This process could be represented as a cycle or spiral of learning, which involves the learner going through various stages of learning and knowledge construction, namely, experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting – in a repeating or cyclical process in response to the learning situation and that which is being learned (Kolb, 1984; McCarthy, 2010). This suggests that for effective learning to take place, a learner must go through all the stages, irrespective of where they start (McCarthy, 2010). However, concrete experiences remain the foundation for observations and reflections (McLeod, 2013). These reflections are adapted and refined into abstract concepts from which new suggestions for action emerge (McCarthy, 2010). It is these implications that function as guides for generating new kinds of experience and learning. The figure below shows Kolb's Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle:

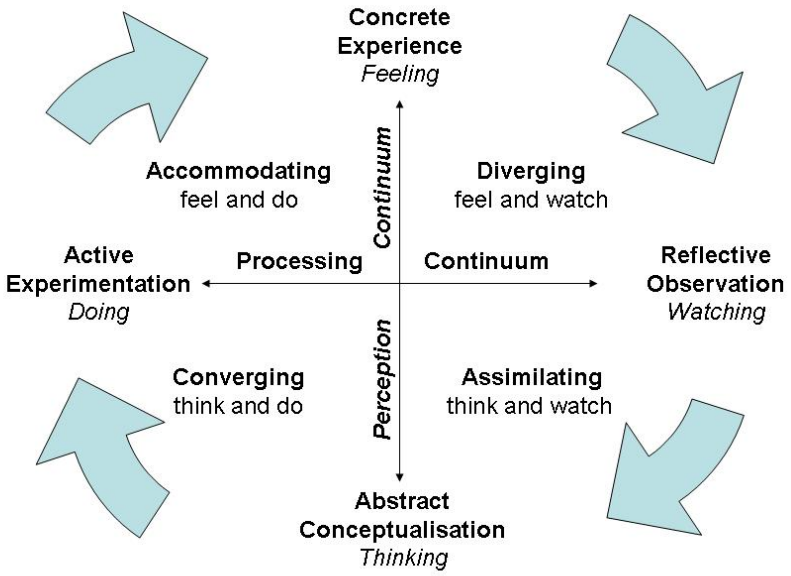

Figure 5: Kolb's Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Cycle (Clark, 2000)

The four-stage learning cycle represented in Figure 4 above, forms the foundation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Style Theory (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; McLeod, 2013). These four stages are discussed below:

- **Concrete Experience (CE)** refers to the encountering of or coming across a new experience of a situation, or a reinterpretation of an existing experience.
- **Reflective Observation (RO)** of the new experience involves the identification of and reflection on the possible discrepancies or contradictions that may be existing in the realms of experience and understanding.
- **Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)** happens when a reflection generates into a new idea, a new understanding or a modification and reconfiguration of an existing concept or understanding.
- **Active Experimentation** (AE) refers to a situation where a learner applies or experiments with the newly acquired experiences and/or new knowledge in their social world to test possible outcomes.

Kolb (1974) argues that learning happens when a learner progresses through the four-stage cycle of encountering or touching base with a concrete experience; followed by observation of and reflection on that experience to resolved contradictions that may be existing in the realms of experience and understanding; and this leads to the formation of new understandings or reconfiguration of existing understandings; which are then applied to or tested in new life situations. Kolb (1974) contends that learning constitutes a unified process, with mutually supportive stages that work or function as a coherent unit. For him, the learning cycle could be entered at any stage, and effective learning will happen if the learner completes or goes through all the four stages of the model. This suggests that no one stage is superior or more important than the other; the stages work as a coherent unit to give rise to learning; they cannot bring about effective learning in isolation.

Kolb (1974) argues that there are four distinct learning styles, which have their foundations or roots in the four-stage learning cycle (see Figure 5 above). For Kolb (1974), individuals tend to prefer a single learning style. Kolb (2005) defines the concept of learning style as the individual differences in learning, based on the learner's preference for employing particular phases or stages of the experiential learning cycle. Therefore, a learning style describes the unique ways individual learners or students spiral through the experiential learning cycle, based on their preference for the four different learning modes, namely CE, RO, AC, and AE (Kolb & Kolb, 2013a). Learning styles reflect internally-based characteristics of individuals

that affect how learners absorb and understand information (Reid, 1998; Zhou, 2011). Various factors account for preference of learning, including social environment, personality type, educational experiences, educational specialisation, culture, type of task and basic cognitive structure (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2013a; McLeod, 2013).For Kolb (1974). It does not matter what learning style is preferred; what is instead important is that preference of a learning style is a product of two variables, namely how we approach a task (i.e. the processing continuum) and our emotional response or how we feel or think about it (i.e. the perception continuum). In other words, our learning styles are a product of both the processing and perception continua.

Each learning style thus has specific characteristics; and because of this, a learner with a specific learning style will learn most easily when particular teaching methods are used. The table on the following page considers the characteristics of each learning style, and thus the methods which best match that learning style:

Table 3: Learning styles, characteristics, and preferred method (Kolb, 1974, 1984, 2005; Kolb & Kolb, 2055, 2013a; McLeod, 2013)

Learning style	Characteristics	Preferred method
Diverging (feeling and watching):	Learners: • can view phenomena from different viewpoints or dimensions – they are open-minded and imaginative. • learn by watching rather than doing; • tend to absorb information and use imagination to solve problems.	Learners perform better: • in situations that require generation of divergent views and new ideas, such as brainstorming; • in group contexts; • when they can listen without being prescriptive in their thinking; • where concrete situations are presented for them to view from different perspectives.
Assimilating (watching and thinking):	Learners: • tend to be more interested in ideas and abstract; understanding than in people; • focus more on logical soundness than practical value.	Learners perform better: • when there are good and clear explanations rather than where they are required to act out their learning; • in situations where they have to assimilate new experiences into new understandings or concepts; • when they have to engage with readings; • when they attend lectures; • when they can explore analytical models; • when they have time to think things through.
Converging (doing and thinking):	Learners: • Like finding practical solutions to problems, or practical uses for ideas; • like to process information by taking part or doing an action; • are problem solvers and decision makers; • prefer to deal with technical tasks and problems, and not so much with social and interpersonal issues; • prefer to work by themselves thinking carefully and acting independently.	Learners perform better: • when they are required to find practical uses for ideas and theories; • where there is a solution to a question or problem; • when they are in simulating situations, such as role plays; • when they work with practical applications; • when they can perform laboratory experiments; • when they can experiment with new ideas; • when they can think about things and try out ideas to see if they work in practice.
Accommodating (doing and feeling):	Learners: • enjoy carrying out plans; • rely more on solving problems through intuition than logic; • prefer to deal with people rather than abstract concepts; • rely more on other people's analysis for information rather than their own technical analysis.	Learners perform better: • when they are given tasks that allow them to be 'hands-on'; • when they can work with others to get tasks and assignments done; • when they can do fieldwork; • when they can try out approaches; • when they can participate in new, unfamiliar and challenging learning situations.

Kolb (1984) argues that it is useful for learners to know their learning style, since this can help them understand how they learn. Discovering his/her preferred learning style allows the learner to determine his/her own strengths and weaknesses.

Kolb's Learning Style Inventory (KLSI) was developed by David Kolb in 1971, as a tool to assess individual learning styles of learners (McCarthy, 2010). The KLSI was developed as an educational tool to increase teachers' understandings of how learners understood learning processes through experience and what individual approaches they followed or adopted for their learning (Kolb, 1984). Therefore, the KLSI is a useful tool as a starting point for exploring how individual learners learn best and what teaching styles could be matched with those learning styles to enhance effective learning (Rogowsky, Calhoun & Tallal, 2015). Kolb and Kolb (2005) assert that the KLSI could also be used as a research instrument for investigating and exploring ELT and the characteristics of learning styles of individual learners. This is the reason why this study adopted the tool as a starting point in investigating, exploring and matching teaching styles to learning styles of individual students.

There are five versions of the KLSI in literature on ELT and learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; McCarthy, 2010). The table on the following page provides a summary of the five versions of the KLSI as developed by Kolb and Kolb (2005).

Table 4: Kolb's Learning Styles Inventories (Kolb & Kolb, 2005; 2013b)

Version	Year	Description
1	1969	This version was developed as an experiential learning exercise intended to support learners to understand the experiential learning process and their individual learning style from experience. The concept of learning style denotes individual differences in how people learn (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The ultimate version comprised nine items that were later modified to include six scored items. Validity was ensured in many of the fields. This generated empirical backing, which led to the most complete and systematic statement of the experiential learning theory.
2	1985	Six new items were selected to enhance internal reliability and added to each scale making 12 scored items on each scale. Wording on all items was clarified and made simpler to that of a seventh-grade reading level and the format was adapted to include sentence stems e.g., "When I learn...". A new more varied normative group of 1,446 men and women was created.
2a	1993	In 1991, Veres, Sims, and Locklear issued a reliability study of a randomized version of the Kolb Learning Style Inventory (KLSI) 2, which showed a small reduction in internal reliability, but a significant increase in test-retest reliability with the random scoring format. Version 2a was published as a research version to study this format. Research with the Learning Style Inventory 2 continued to ensure validity for the instrument. While internal reliability was consistently high in independent studies, test-retest reliability remained low.
3	1999	The randomized format was adopted in a revised self-scoring and interpretation booklet that includes simplified scoring. KLSI 3 continued to use the KLSI 2 normative reference group.
3.1	2005	KLSI 3.1 adapted LSI 3 to include new normative data. This revision included new norms that are based on a larger, more varied and representative sample of 6,977 KLSI users. Results from seven different studies of the KLSI 3.1 indicate that the scales demonstrate good internal consistency reliability across a number of different populations. In several studies, test-retest correlation coefficients range from moderate to excellent. I used this KLSI in my study, for reasons discussed below.
4.0	2011	Kolb Learning Style Inventory version 4.0 (KLSI 4.0) is the latest revision of the original LSI developed by Kolb. The KLSI 4.0 includes four main additions, namely, a typology of nine new learning styles; assessment of learning flexibility, an expanded personal report focused on improving learning effectiveness, and improved psychometrics. This is discussed more below.

The design of the KLSI is such that the individual must respond as they would to a learning situation. Moreover, the individual must order their preferences for abstract, concrete, active, and reflective abilities and effectively resolve the conflict between the abstract-concrete and active-reflective dimensions. All varieties of the KLSI have the same design. They comprise of a short questionnaire that asks individuals to rank four sentence endings that match four learning styles – Concrete Experimentation (experiencing), Reflective Observation (reflecting), Abstract Conceptualization (thinking), and Active Experimentation (doing) (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The individuals must then rank their learning style preferences among the four approaches of the learning style (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

The LSI evaluates six variables: four primary scores that measure the individual's relative emphasis on the four learning abilities – Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observation (RO), Abstract Conceptualization (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE). An additional two measures are a combination score that evaluates individual's preference for abstractness over concreteness (AC-CE) and action over reflection (AE-RO). The four learning style types – Accommodator, Diverger, Assimilator, and Converger, are determined by dividing the AC-CE and AE-RO scores at the fiftieth percentile of the total norm group and plotting them on the Learning Style Grid (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

The implication of Kolb's learning styles theory is that teachers could use Kolb's (1984) theory to ensure that all their students have a chance to actively participate and benefit from learning situations. In this way the stages and styles can be useful in assisting teachers to identify students' preferred ways of learning and make their teaching more inclusive.

3.2.1 Critiques of Kolb's ELT and learning styles theory

There have been several critiques of Kolb's ELT, with many writers branding ELT as fraught with bias and error (Brehmer, 1980; Buchmann & Schwille, 1983; Eisenstein & Hutchinson, 2006; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Some critics have focused on the nature of experience itself (Miettinen, 2000); on the stages of learning (do learners have to go through all stages? Do they have to go through the stages in sequence? How do the stages relate to each other?) (Miettinen, 2000); and on the fact that his learning model focuses on the learning process of an individual learner and fails to mention how the individual learner fits into a social group during this process and what role the group may play. There is no discussion on how a social group may gain knowledge through a common experience (Miettinen, 2000). There have also

been philosophical critiques, for example from a post-modern perspective, where the theory is seen as individualistic, cognitivist and technological (Kayes, 2002; Vince, 1998; Holman et al., 1997 & Hopkins, 1993). However, I will focus my discussion on critiques of Kolb's learning styles theory.

Kozhevnikov (2007) argues that learning styles are not fixed, and can change over time and in response to contextual demands. That is, students may call on or prefer to use different learning or cognitive styles in different learning situations (Kozhevnikov, 2007). This is something that Kolb himself appears to have accepted in his later work (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). Jahiel (1982) cited in Yassin and Almasri (2015) contends that not all learners depend on a single learning style; some have a primary or dominant learning style, others have more than one learning style.

Reid (1998, cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015) differentiates between learning styles and learning strategies. A learning style as internal, acquired unconsciously, whereas a learning strategy is an external skill that can be learned consciously. In other words, unlike Kozhevnikov's (2007) claim that learning styles can change, Reid argues that children are born and grow up with learning styles, which cannot be changed and/or replaced in the future (Reid, 1998 cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015). Learning strategies, on the other hand, can change.

There is some debate about what influences learning style. As discussed above, Kolb himself argues that social environment, personality type, educational experiences, educational specialisation, culture, type of task and basic cognitive structure all influence a learner's learning preference (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2013a; McLeod, 2013). Shaughnessy (1998, cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015) says that age, achievement level, cultural background, individual's method of analysis, and gender, control an individual's learning style. Some writers have argued that learning styles are so unique to everyone, that they can be compared to a 'fingerprint' (Gallaher & Nunn, 1998, cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015).

Research reveals that gender has a significant impact in how we learn (Burman, 2008; Howe, 1997; Sax, 2008). For instance, in an investigation of the relationship between gender and learning styles, Opeoluwa (2014) concluded that girls tended to prefer diverging and assimilating (i.e. they were thinkers rather than doers), while boys preferred converging and accommodating learning styles (i.e. they were doers rather than thinkers).

Kolb himself has cautioned against the oversimplification of preferred learning styles, which he argues may be counterproductive and lead to the stereotypical treatment of students (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

3.3 Further development of Kolb's Learning Styles theory

Research and critiques of Kolb's learning styles theory have meant that his theory has been extensively developed by others, as well as by himself. For instance, empirical and clinical studies over the years revealed that the original four learning style types, namely, accommodating, assimilating, converging and diverging, could be refined further into a typology of nine learning styles. These were understood to better define the unique patterns of individual learning styles and reduce the confusions introduced by borderline cases in the old typology of four learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2013b).

The new KLSI 4.0 introduces these nine style types by moving from a 4- to 9-learning style model as described below. The learning style types can be systematically arranged on a two-dimensional learning grid, still defined by Abstract Conceptualization-Concrete Experience and Active Experimentation-Reflective Observation:

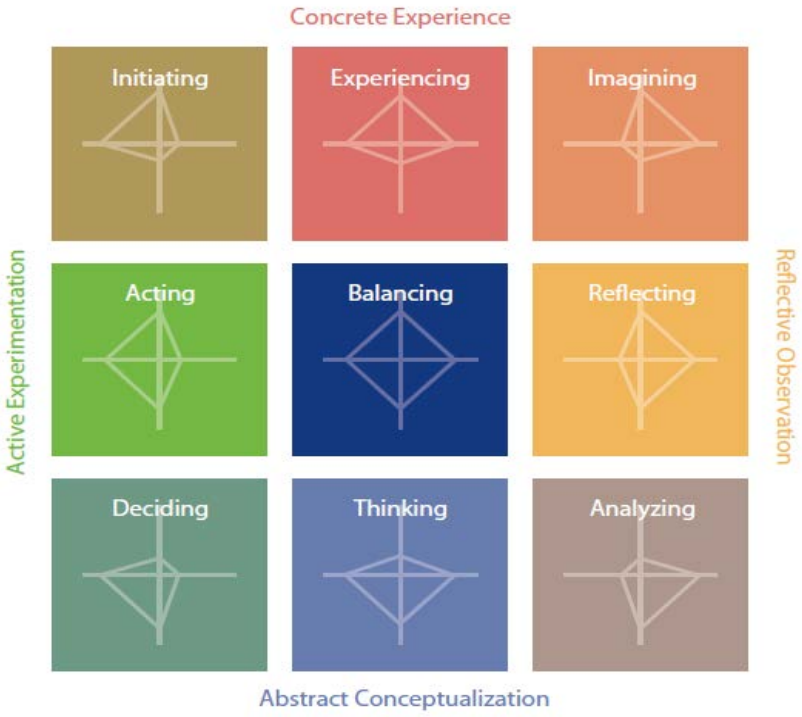

Figure 6: The Nine Learning Styles in the KLSI 4.0 (Kolb & Kolb, 2013b)

Because this is a relatively new, and somewhat different, model, relatively few studies have been published using it. I thus decided to rather use the established model, and KLSI 3.1.

Alternative learning style models have also been developed by others, in particular by Honey and Mumford (1992) and Dunn (2003). Honey and Mumford's (1992) model is directly derived from Kolb's ELT. Honey and Mumford aimed at creating an instrument which would be phrased in the language of United Kingdom managers and of pragmatic value to them rather than academic. Hence there are a lot of similarities between Kolb's model and Honey and Mumford's model, though they used different wording. Honey and Mumford use "activist" instead of "accommodator", "reflector" instead of "diverger", "theorist" instead of "assimilator" and "pragmatist" instead of "converger". They have developed a Learning Styles Questionnaire (LSQ) based on Kolb's LSI to help individuals identify their learning style (Honey & Mumford, 1992).

Like Kolb and Honey and Mumford, Dunn (2003) argue that learners have different learning styles, and can master the curriculum if they are taught with different strategies or different methods that match these. However, they focus on three main sensory receivers, namely, visual, auditory and kinaesthetic to determine the main or most preferred learning style (Penger &Tekavčič, 2009), and thus identify only three learning styles in their Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (VAK) Learning Styles Theory. The theory posits that "one or two of these" (i.e. visual, kinaesthetic, and tactile) "is normally dominant" (Penger &Tekavčič, 2009, p.5). The dominant or most preferred style defines the person's best way of learning new information, and filters what is to be learned. According to them, visual learners prefer to learn through charts, symbols, adverts or anything that they can see in their process of learning. Auditory learners prefer to learn from hearing and speech in lectures, group discussions and student seminars in which they will have a chance to communicate with other students. Kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn by doing and movement in their learning process. However, Penger and Tekavčič (2009) contend that the dominant learning style may not necessarily be the same for all tasks. That is, the individual may prefer a different learning style and/or a combination of learning styles.

3.4 Studies done using Kolb's Learning Styles model

Since 2000, there has been a resurgence of interest in the potential of learning styles in enhancing efforts to meet learning needs (Coffield, Moseley, Hall & Ecclestone, 2004;

Penger & Tekavčič, 2009).Studies on learning styles since 2000 include the following: Alban-Metcalfe (2002); Dart, Burnet, Puride, Boulton-Lewis, Campbell and Smith (2000); Duff and Duffy (2002); Dunn and Griggs (2003); Kayes (2002); Lhory-Posey (2003); Cassidy (2004); Loo (2004); Cuthbert (2005); Argyris (2007); Demirbas and Demirkan (2007); Garcia, Amandi, Schiaffino and Campo (2007); Herbert and Stenfors (2007); Kayes (2007); Škerlavaj and Dimovski (2007); Armstrong and Mahmud (2008); Alkhasawneh, Mrayyan, Docherty, Alashram and Yousef (2008); Dimovski, Škerlavaj, Kimman and Hernaus (2008); Duff, Dobie and Guo (2008); Li, Chen and Tsai (2008); Metallidou and Platsidou (2008); Peters, Jones and Peters (2008); Gooden, Preziosi and Barnes (2009); Penger and Tekavčič (2009); Scott (2010); Hanzelka (2013); Opeoluwa (2014); Watts (2014).

Several studies have specifically used Kolb's learning styles theory to match their teaching styles with their learners' learning styles (Claxton & Murrell, 1987; Romanelli, Bird & Ryan, 2009; Wilson, 2012; Yassin & Almasri, 2015), because this is "crucial to the comprehension process" (Yassin & Almasri, 2015, p.31). Part of the process of matching learning styles and teaching styles is understanding why teachers teach the way they do. A teachers' teaching style is a combination of two things; their learning style, and their past successful learning experience. Dunn (1979 cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015) suggests that "teaching style is the result of the academic background of the teacher. It is a result of how teachers learned" (p.30). Teachers tend to plan lessons to suit their own learning styles. Teachers often believe that the way they teach is the best way, simply because it is what they are most comfortable with. "In this way they teach the way they like and do not give learning styles any attention…Relying on teaching styles only may create obstacles for students in general and ESL students in specific" (Yassin & Almasri, 2015, p.30). Citing Sarasin (1999) Yassin & Almasri argue that a gap develops between teachers and students:

> When this gap occurs in class, neither teachers nor students will feel comfortable in class. As a result, the low comprehension level may expand and students may become bored; teachers will not feel that students are willing to comprehend the lesson. The motivation will be in the lowest level for both teachers and students. (p.30)

Preventing this gap requires a teacher to carefully think about his or her teaching style: "An understanding and appreciation of a given individual's teaching style requires self-reflection and introspection" (Romanelli, Bird & Ryan, 2009, p.3).

Studies that have been done, however, are uneven in their findings. Based on his findings, Martin (2010) argues that teachers would have achieved the same results had they randomly assigned learning styles to their learners rather than using KLSI. In addition, although teachers claimed to be matching their teaching methods to the learners' learning styles, in fact "they appeared not to routinely act on this knowledge to significantly differentiate their practice" (p.1590) – in other words, they continued teaching based on what they though worked, rather than on education theory or research. Wilson (2012) conducted a study to identify the extent to which matching learning styles with teaching methods resulted in academic achievement. The results of the study revealed a lack of significant correlation between the degree of match and academic achievement (Wilson, 2012). Wilson also found that strategies used by teachers didn't always match learners' learning styles, with teachers preferring certain modes of instruction over others. However, Wilson did find that learners have preferred learning styles.

What the studies do tend to show is that using a range of different teaching is beneficial, even when these do not match learners' learning styles: "a teaching style-learning style mismatch might challenge students to adjust, grow intellectually, and learn in more integrated ways" (Romanelli, Bird & Ryan, 2009, p.3). However, as Wilson (2012) notes, it is important for teachers to be aware that their learners might have different learning preferences. Other education researchers focused on the use of ELT as a framework for curriculum design particularly in language and science (Hainer, 1992; McCarthy, 1996). Also, Mann (1999) modified and developed Kolb's theory which was later used successfully in Geography studies.

3.5 Conclusion

As can be seen, literature on learning styles argues that knowledge of learning styles is useful for both teachers and students (see for instance, Kara, 2009; Yassin & Almasri, 2015; Zhou, 2011). For instance, teachers can use learning styles to differentiate instruction and make learning accessible for different types of learners. Therefore, teachers must realise that learning styles are a device through which learners can access their teaching, and that without a match of learning styles and teaching styles, learners would become frustrated (Kara, 2009).

Thus, my study focuses on the effects of matching my teaching methods to the learning styles of the learners in my EFAL class. I discuss how to do this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGICAL AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Introduction

The last two chapters have outlined the problem I was seeking to address in my study, and the theoretical lens I am using. This chapter considers and presents the methodological and design choices I made in carrying out this study, i.e. how I went about taking decisions about how the key issues of this study were to be investigated and the rationale for those decisions and choices. However, before proceeding with the substance of this chapter, it is important to recap on the key research questions for the study. The key research questions for the study are as follows:

1. What teaching methods can I use to meet the different learning styles of Level 2 learners?
2. What effects can there be when matching learners' different learning styles with the teacher's teaching methods?

Therefore, this chapter presents the methodological and design decisions and choices made, and provides the reasoning for those decisions and choices that I made in this regard. Lastly, I consider the limitations, ethics and issues of credibility and trustworthiness that were pertinent to the study.

4.2 Interpretivist Research Paradigm

A research paradigm can be defined as a frame of reference, or a worldview, used to organise reasoning and to understand the complexity of the social world and to guide research action (Babbie, 2007; Guba, 1990; Patton, 1990). A paradigm is therefore a way of viewing and understanding the social world. Thus, it has its roots in the philosophical assumptions of the researcher and guides and directs their thinking and action (Avramidis & Smith, 1999).

Although it might be difficult to locate a research study neatly within a specific research paradigm without overlaps, this study was located within the interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm assumes that the purpose of educational research is to understand meanings that inform human behaviour in the social world (Habermas, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The interpretivist paradigm departs from the premise that there is not a single interpretive reality

or truth, but rather a regime of realities or truths, which are historical, locally specific and cannot be generalised (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In other words, the interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their social world and what meanings they attach to their actions. Based on this, the interpretivist paradigm opens the possibility of understanding the experiences of participants from different dimensions and angles, and the understanding that there are multiple, rather than singular, realities of phenomena, and that such realities could differ across time and space.

Therefore, within the interpretivist paradigm, multiple interpretations are recognised as equally valid (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The researcher makes interpretations with the purpose of understanding the behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of the participants. For the current research study, the interpretivist paradigm was relevant because the study sought to understand the experiences the participants with different learning styles have with the different teaching methods and to look at the effects of this, with a view to finding the most appropriate teaching method and/or mix of teaching methods. In addition, in this study, the interpretivist paradigm allowed me to familiarise myself with the context of the participants as they endeavoured to understand the means they attach to the actions and experiences. The interpretivist paradigm therefore provides an opportunity for taking the participants' subjective experiences and views seriously, by listening carefully to their views and experiences (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a; Terre Blanche, Kelly and Durrheim, 2006).

The interpretivist paradigm assumes that the social world is interwoven with human knowledge, and that it is not independent thereof (Nieuwenhuis, 2007a). Therefore, as a researcher, I knew my ways of conceptualising and doing research were directed and guided by a basic set of philosophical convictions, and that this had an influence on the way in which I undertook and participated in the research process. In being constructed by these convictions, I was aware that I was likely to bring my own interpretive lens (es) to the experiences and views of the participants.

4.3 Qualitative Research Tradition

Although some quantitative analysis of the data was necessary, this study explores the key research questions through a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research departs from the point of view that reality is constructed, multidimensional and ever-changing (Merriam, 1995). Therefore, the assumption of qualitative research is that there can be no such thing as a

single, absolute truth or reality waiting to be discovered, observed and measured (Murphy & Yielder, 2010). Various interpretations of reality could apply, depending on the philosophical assumptions of the researcher. That is, there can be no objective researcher. Researchers are human beings who can assign meanings to experiences in the social world (Bradley, 1993), who are guided by a plurality of ontological, epistemological and methodological convictions. Thus, in qualitative research, there is an "inescapable interpretive activity of all humans including researchers" (Bradley, 1993, p. 433).

The qualitative research tradition was appropriate for this study as it was framed in an interpretivist paradigm and the goal was to obtain an in-depth understanding into the experiences of the participants of the research. With qualitative research, the researcher is located within experiences and is influenced by the social world of the participants, an experience that presumably provides rich and in-depth information (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The benefit of the qualitative research approach is its ability to produce data from those who are directly involved and have direct experience, which puts the researcher in a good position to obtain a reasonably "holistic view of what is being studied" (Leedy, 1993, p.144). Thus, qualitative research can provide a malleable, empirical and discovery location to occurrences.

To capitalise on the advantages of the qualitative research approach, several qualitatively-oriented research methods were adopted to generate data from the participants of the research study. These are outlined in the section on research methods below.

4.4 Action Research

For this study, to respond to the key research questions, a decision was made to use action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), which goes beyond simply an approach to research, but is a methodology in itself. The concept of action research is often associated with the work of the American social psychologist, Kurt Lewin, whose intention was to improve social, economic, and industrial conditions (Melrose, 2001; Waterson, 2001). Action research streams have tended to develop according to three different fields, namely, an education stream with a specific focus on learning and teaching; a community improvement stream, with a special focus on marginalised minorities; and an organisation stream, focusing on the development and operation of organisations (Baskerville & Myers, 2004); Kemmis (1997, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011) argues that there are several different schools of action research. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), within the education

stream teachers can use action research in many ways, including specifically looking at teaching methods. The emphasis of action research is on change, solving a perceived problem and improvement (Melrose, 2001; Oates, 2006; Schmuck, 1997). In other words, action research is intended to provide a space for continuous, participative learning, with a view to creating sustainable and context-relevant solutions to local problems, and empowering research participants to take control of their lives and situations (Greenwood & Levin, 1998).

Kemmis and McTaggart (1992 cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011, p.345) emphasise that action research is not simply what teachers do every day; rather "to do action research is to plan, act, observe and reflect more carefully, more systematically, and more rigorously than one does in everyday life". So, action research is cyclical in nature. That is, data collection and analysis follow a cyclical pattern, starting with identifying a problem, issue or concern, generating data, analysing the data, acting to resolve the problem, and assessing whether the outcome and/or solution has indeed resolved the identified problem (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b).

My intention was to utilise an action research methodology to focus on my own teaching practice as both teacher and researcher:

> Action research is a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be … it involves you thinking about and reflecting on your work … In traditional forms of research – empirical research – researchers do research on other people. In action research, researchers do research on themselves. Empirical researchers enquire into other people's lives. Action researchers enquire into their own practice. Action research is an enquiry conducted by the self into the self. You, a practitioner, think about your own life and work, and this involves you asking yourself why you do the things that you do, and why you are the way that you are. When you produce your research report, it shows how you have carried out a systematic investigation into your own behaviour, and the reasons for that behaviour. (McNiff, 2002, p. 8)

Action research was chosen as the research design because of its potential to allow the researcher to diagnose problems and develop solutions to problems to improve their practice (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The view taken in this research study was that the social world is in

constant state of change, and that both the researcher and researched are implicated in that change (Collis & Hussey, 2003). This implies that although the researcher took the lead, both the researcher and researched were likely to be influenced by changes in the social world. As this study was located within the interpretivist paradigm, an interpretivist approach was adopted. Interpretivist action research assumes that the knowledge of reality is a product of social construction (Walsham, 2006). The application of action research took the form of a self-reflective inquiry, which I undertook in a social situation (namely, live lessons with learners). This was important for a study that sought to allow me to identify weaknesses in my own teaching and improve my teaching practice. Therefore, action research enabled me to conduct research and observe my own practice, while being involved in bringing change to my practice.

As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) show, there are different models of action research, which include different numbers of stages, but essentially, for something to be action research (rather than a case study), it requires an action step (and not simply a collection of data). I have used the model as presented by Khoboli (2005) in his PhD on teachers' practice of learner-centred education. This model of action research is represented as follows:

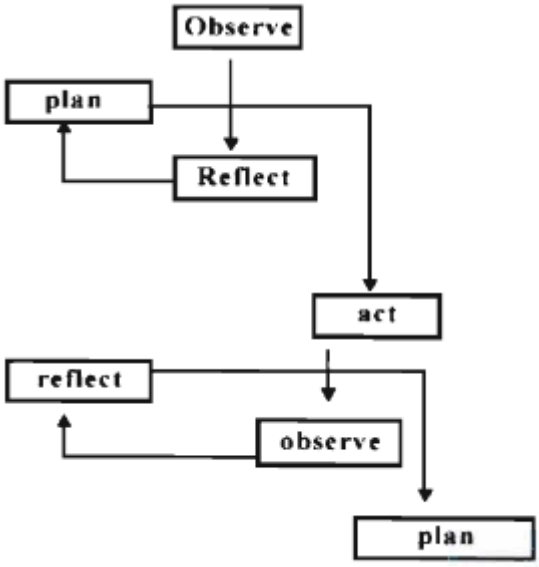

Figure 7: Action research spiral adopted for the study (Khoboli, 2005, p.62)

I went through two cycles, as follows:

CYCLE 1

- **STEP 1: Observe**

  As discussed in Chapters One and Two, I observed that many students failed or dropped out of my TVET College because they were unable to cope with the language of learning and teaching (LOLT).

- **STEP 2: Reflect**

  During this stage, I critically reflected on the problem that continued to persist despite the intervention support programme that was intended to address it. I asked myself why the problem was persisting and what I could do to improve the situation, with the help of what I knew about the problem and interventions that had taken place. For instance, I realised that I had been using teaching methods without any serious consideration of their effectiveness and/or their appropriateness as tools to benefit student learning. In addition, I viewed my teaching as a routine that did not require any interrogation. I just taught without focusing much on the success of my teaching in making students learn. In other words, I taught in a mechanical way, like a robot, without reflecting on and adapting my ways to ensure that my students were learning. I realised that there was a serious problem with my teaching, because it was not leading to effective learning for my students. It is during this phase that preliminary thoughts about how I was going to approach the situation first emerged. The question was how I could improve the teaching and learning of English as a tool to assist students to improve performance in English-medium subjects. I did this by reviewing my practice at the time, identifying the aspect that I wanted to improve. I also clarified the reason why I wanted to research this issue. Given the fact that the goal of classroom action research is to ensure that the teacher-researcher has decision-making powers, I ensured that the question or problem focused on the area in which I had control (i.e. my own teaching). In addition, the question or issue had to be feasible in terms of time and resources. I also asked questions about the specific conditions that were allowing the situation to be as it was, and looked to finding ways of changing these conditions. This stage was important in that the reasons for our actions are often rooted in our values, that is, the things we believe in and that drive our lives (McNiff, 2002). To enhance my knowledge about the problem, I consulted the Educational

Resources Information Centre (ERIC) database and reviewed literature that related to the teaching and learning of English across the curriculum, experiential learning and the various teaching and learning styles.

- **STEP 3: Plan**

  Hatten, Knapp and Salonga (1997) contend that this phase of action research is where a plan is formulated based on what the study seeks to investigate. This stage involves having to think about what I could do about the problem or issue. I had to think about ways in which I could influence the situation in a positive way. I needed to think about ways in which data was going to be generated to address the problem. I planned to identify my learners' learning styles, and then planned lessons targeting each learning style. I would then assess what my learners thought about the experience (through an evaluation sheet, interviews and focus group interviews), and I then built their feedback into a second round of lessons before a final assessment of learners' views. It was thus during this phase that I developed tools (i.e. Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (KLSI), translated into isiZulu; after-class evaluation; interview schedule) in line with the forms and types of data that I sought to generate to respond to the research question. I also planned four lessons, each one targeting one of the learning styles (starting with the style identified by most students). The lessons followed the required English First Additional Language (EFAL) curriculum, but were designed to use the methods preferred by the particular style targeted, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

- **STEP 4: Act**

  I administered KLSI (version 3.1), to determine my learners' learning styles. I discuss this in detail in the data collections methods discussion below. After identifying their learning styles, I taught four classes over four weeks, each class targeting a different learning style.

CYCLE 2

- **STEP 5: Observe**

  During the lesson, I closely observed my students, to gauge their reactions to the methods I was using. For example, I observed group discussions, and watched as students read articles they had been given. I looked to see which students were actively participating in activities. I also observed presentations and group

feedback to assess the learning that students had made. At the end of each lesson, I gave all of the students an evaluation sheet to complete (see Appendix 1). This gave me immediate feedback on whether the students had enjoyed the lesson, and/or learned from it. It also asked them whether they had found anything difficult. After each of the four lessons, I interviewed each participant individually regarding their experiences. I asked them what they had enjoyed; what they had learned; what they would like changed in the future. After all of the interviews, I ran focus group interviews each comprised of learners with the same learning style. These allowed deeper discussion.

- **STEP 6: Reflect**

  Reflection forms the bedrock of any action research, because it allows an opportunity for the researcher to 'go back' and consider what went on and how it could be improved (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005, p.72-73). The observations and considerations that a researcher makes during reflection form an important basis for action that is taken to improve things in the next action research cycle(s). McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.82-73) contend that effective reflection should involve asking specific questions of one's practice and intervention, namely: *What have I done? What have I learned? What is the significance of this learning? How will my new learning generate new actions?* For this study, I used the same questions to guide my reflections on the feedback I had received from my learners in the evaluation, interviews and focus group interviews, as I will discuss in detail in the next chapter.

- **STEP 7: Plan**

  Based on my analysis, I determined what changes needed to be made to the lessons. The changes were incorporated into my planning of the next cycle of four lessons.

- **STEP 8: Act**

  As a result of the reflection process (as will be discussed in the next chapter), I re-administered the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory (KLSI). I again conducted four lessons each targeting one of the four learning styles, this time taking into account student feedback.

- **STEP 9: Observe**
  I repeated the evaluation sheet, semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews as described in Step 5 above.
- **STEP 10: Reflect**
  In this final reflection, I looked across all the steps, and considered my experience and my data in the light of the literature and the theoretical framework I used.

Action research literature suggests that a good final step is to share findings. In this study, sharing of the findings of the research study with the research community took the form of a dissertation, which would be placed at the university library and presentations at seminars and conferences where possible.

4.5 Selection of Participants

In this study, availability and purposive sampling was used to select participants from a group of National Certificate (Vocational) NC(V) Level 2 learners, who were attending the Saturday intervention programme. Purposive sampling refers to a type of non-probability sampling where participants are selected on the basic of the researcher's judgment about which will be most useful in generating the data to respond to the key research questions (Babbie, 2007). Therefore, in purposive sampling, selection does not depend only on availability and willingness to participate; selection is conducted based on participants meeting a specific set of criteria (Durrheim & Painter, 2006). For this study, two criteria were considered for the selection of the participants, namely, they had to be doing NC(V) Level 2; and participating in the EFAL Saturday Intervention Programme. Because I was doing research on my own practice, they had to be students in a class I was teaching; and thus availability sampling was used. Sixteen participants were selected for the study based on the criteria mentioned above. These 16 were the entire class (i.e. all agreed to participate in the research).

4.6 Data Collection Methods

Melrose (2001) emphasises that action research is about *research*. That is, it involves collecting data to inform the researcher about the context for the present practice or situation; generating a theory about what emerges from the practice and/or situation, connecting that

emergent theory to the existing body of theories in that field; and disseminating that theory for the benefit of the research community in that field of knowledge. Therefore, action research without the research component would be a futile exercise that does not have any useful contribution to the related body of knowledge. As can been seen from the steps outlined above, data collection was done primarily in Step 5 and Step 9 (the observation steps). However, initial data on learning styles was required for any planning or action to take place.

4.6.1 Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (KLSI)

Kolb's Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) version 3.1 was used to identify the preferred learning styles of participants – i.e. diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating. The inventory was translated into IsiZulu to ensure that participants did not have to struggle with a double hurdle of English language and trying to understand how the inventory worked. The inventory consists of 20 questions, each with four possible endings. Participants had to rate each ending according to how well it described them, with four for the most preferred ending, and one for the least preferred ending (see Appendix 2).

I then calculated each student's learning style, using the KLSI's formula. I gave each learner a handout about all four learning styles, and each learner was given an opportunity to read about the different learning styles, including their own. I also went over it with them. Participants were then asked to talk to the person next to them about their learning style. Thereafter, participants had to share with the whole class about their chosen or preferred learning styles.

4.6.2 Observation

As described in the outline of steps above, participant observation was used as a method for this study. Participant observation happens when the researcher or observer takes a role that implicates and/or includes them as part of the situation or phenomenon that is being studied (Adler & Adler, 1994). Obviously, in this case I was part of the situation, in that I was undertaking action research on my own practice. I used participant observation of my students during classes to reflect on my actions and those of my students, and to assess my students' reactions to the methods that I was using, and the extent of learning that had taken place during learner presentations. This was useful for my study in a variety of ways; it

allowed me to record what was happening in the class as it happened, and make sense of it within the context of what I was doing in my teaching. However, there were challenges and/or limitations with the use of participant observation, namely, the subjective influences of my own pre-conceived dispositions had to be constantly reflected on. Therefore, the behaviours and responses of the participants sometimes were not completely insulated from my interference and influence as the researcher, although I was constantly guarding against excessive interference from my pre-conceived ideas and influences.

As in most research using observation as a method for data generation, participant observation places certain demands on the researcher. For instance, observation requires of the researcher to establish a relationship, understanding and connection with the participants and the researcher must learn to act in a way that ensures minimal interference with the situation (Bernard, 1994). In this case, I already had an established rapport with my students.

Literature suggests some limitations involved with the use of observation as a tool for data generation. For example, male and female researchers may have access to different types of information, as they may focus on different aspects of the situation being observed and related bodies of knowledge (De Walt & De Walt, 2002). In addition, observation, like all other research, is conducted by a biased human, with their own philosophical convictions and theoretical approach, who is likely to attach their own interpretations on what is happening and attach unequal weight to the significance of what may be happening (Bateson, 1972; Cole & Knowles, 2001). Therefore, this calls for the researcher to remain cognisant of how the different aspects of their identities, such as their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class and many others, may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation (Kawulich, 2005). To moderate for the effects of this, I tried to be constantly aware of the influence of my own preconceptions and convictions on what I was observing and/or had observed throughout the research process, as discussed above.

4.6.3 Semi-Structured Interviews

As described in the outline of steps above, semi-structured individual interviews were held with the participants after each round of classes, to find out what they had enjoyed, what they had learned, and what they would like changed in the future. This is because the perspectives of participants were essential to find out their experiences and thoughts about the teaching methods I used to assist them to learn better. Interviews are believed to have the potential to

provide an opportunity for participants to provide a meaningful and purposeful expression of their experiences and views about learning and teaching styles (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

Semi-structured interviews are constructed based on a set of preconceived but open questions. This means that subsequent and/or probing questions could be developed during the dialogue and/or conversation between the interviewer and the interviewee (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Semi-structured interviews have the possibility and ability to provide an opportunity to reject questions that are incapable of and ineffectual in producing the required information and to substitute them with different and/or missing questions (Ibid.). This allows the researcher to probe further, and follow the new leads as they emerge, rather than slavishly following the interview guide. Therefore, semi-structured interviews could, despite their limitations, places the researcher in a good place to explore the multiplicities of experiences and views of the research participants using different angles and dimensions of making sense (Kvale, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews thus have the inherent ability or capacity to enable the researcher to explore in a more profound way the participants experiences and views. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the process of interviewing and/or being interviewed is not inherently equal and empowering; it has the potential to skew access to power, with the researcher leading and controlling the process and/or the proceedings (Henning, 2004). The process of interviewing, therefore, potentially provides a space where an interviewer and/or researcher could influence the outcome of the process. Thus, this required understanding from my side that the interviewing process is charged and not a free, natural exchange of ideas between equals; it is an artificial social interaction (Henning, 2004).

The interviews were carried out using an interview guide or list of questions prepared before the interviews (see Appendix 3). The importance of the list of questions was in its ability to provide me with a list of things I had to remember to ask about during the interviews (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). I arranged for the interviews with the participants to take place one by one on different days. The rationale for doing this was to ensure that I had sufficient time to reflect on the key issues that came up during the interviews. I set aside approximately 45 to 60 minutes for an interview with each participant. I invited participants to respond in their preferred language in order to ensure, to a reasonable extent, that participants could express themselves with a minimal impact of the hurdle of an unfamiliar language. The rationale for doing this was based on my experience as a language teacher of second language

speakers who often have to struggle to get their point across. For this study, it was important that I, as much as I possibly could, eliminate with the debilitating effect of an unfamiliar language to allow participants to share their subjective experiences. As part of the ethical parameters I had set myself, I requested permission from the participants to audio-record the interviews, a request that was granted. The recordings of the interviews were then transcribed immediately thereafter. The rationale for doing this was to ensure that I transcribed them while the memories of what went on were still fresh in my mind.

4.6.4 Focus Group Interviews

As described in the outline of steps above, focus group discussions were held after each round of interviews. Focus group interviews use group context and/or interaction to explore participants' perceptions, insights and experiences that may potentially be inaccessible using, for instance, individual interviews (Morgan, 1988). However, this does not imply that focus group interviews are inherently neutral and open discussions; they too required that I constantly monitored my influence in shaping their outcome. However, focus group interviews provided me with an opportunity to tie the proceedings to a specific topic or theme (Krueger & Casey, 2000). This was important in that the process had to align with the focus of the study, as the study was not about everything.

In addition, focus group interviews provide an opportunity for a relatively homogenous group of participants to be asked to reflect on, share their specific their experiences, and express their opinions, perspectives and insights about a specific topic and/or theme (Patton, 1987). Focus group interviews are, therefore, unlike individual interviews in that they provide a space for research participants to be part of the conversation, hear and respond to the responses of other research participants and to provide additional input based on what they are hearing (ibid). Therefore, for this study, the fundamental premise for using focus group interviews lay in the intention to provide a space for participants to consider and reflect on their own views in the context of the views of their fellow participants (Patton, 1987).

As a researcher, I decided prior to the beginning of the focus group interviews that I would play a very specific role. I therefore understood my role as that of ensuring that the process was carefully planned, and potentially provided for a focused discussion. I also understood my role as that of establishing a favourable atmosphere for participants to enable participants to express themselves freely, without the concerns of being hounded. Therefore, for the

discussion to be focused, I encouraged to listen carefully and respond respectfully to the ideas, perceptions and insights of the group (Krueger, 1994). In other words, I pointed out that the discussion was intended to obtain a group understanding without shutting down individual views on the topic under discussion.

Because of the need for relative homogeneity, and to suit my overall purpose, I ran focus group interviews with learners who identified themselves with a particular learning style – that is, one focus group interview with each style – using a schedule (attached as Appendix 4). Another issue that I had to consider was the size of the focus group. In order to obtain an idea in this respect, I consulted Denscombe (2007), where I learned that a group size of 6-9 participants was recommended for a potentially productive focus group interview session. However, I also learned that focus groups could be larger, depending on the context of the research.

My focus groups were generally smaller, because I was working with 16 students and four learning styles. The focus groups thus varied between two and nine participants (in both rounds, there was only one learner who identified as a Diverger, and thus only an individual interview was held for this learning style). The intention was to provide a space for participants to reflect on their experiences as a group. In order to try and create a conducive atmosphere for participants to talk freely about their experiences, I conducted focus group interviews at the TVET college campus. This was also valuable in that it granted me with the opportunity to refer directly to relevant contextual issues, and to explore their experiences in the English and Mathematical Literacy intervention programme.

During the focus group interviews, I pointed out that participants were free to respond in the language in which they were familiar and most comfortable. Mostly, participants used isiZulu, although they occasionally threw in one or two English words in their responses. The rationale for allowing participants to use their most preferred language was informed my experience in teaching English, that English could restrict and disadvantage participants' in their expression, responses and inputs. However, although I tried as much as I possibly could, participants were not immediately free to express their views in the presence of other participants; they were initially reluctant to share their ideas as they, presumably, were expected to share issues that they might have considered as sensitive information. However, I noticed that as the focus group discussion sessions preceded, participants gradually became comfortable with group context, and began to share their ideas and insights with the group.

Prior to the commencement of the focus group discussions, I requested permission from the participants to audio-record the session, which was granted. This was important because it was going to be almost difficult to take notes during a focus group discussion, as participants tended, in some instance, to say things simultaneously without waiting for others to finish their statements. However, I decided to supplement the recording with taking notes where necessary, especially where things that could not be audio-recorded were happening (such as, for instance, gestures, smiles and frowns). Each focus group session lasted for approximately sixty minutes. However, some sessions were longer than an hour, largely due to the fact that, at times, participants were willing to contribute and/or clarify issues. What also contributed to sessions that were longer than the allocated hour was the fact that sometimes ideas and perspectives were repeated, although these were often rephrased.

4.7 Data Analysis

In any research endeavour, specifying the exact time at which data analysis commences for the study is almost always tricky, as analysis of data often begins as soon as data is available. This was the case in this study as well. This was partly because the process of analysing data happened concurrently with the process of generating data, as is inherently the case in action research. Data analysis involved cycles of meaning making, which involves a process of making sense of what was emerging, in the form of observations, expressions and/or symbolic representations (De Vos, 1998). Before I began with the analysis of the data generated, I read through the data to acquaint myself with it. This process involved submerging myself in the data, identifying evolving patterns and themes, coding, explaining, analysing and making sense of situations as they emerged from the data (Babbie, 2007).

Data from KLSI was analysed quantitatively, using numerical representations and manipulation of the inventory items (Babbie, 2007). The intention here was to identify the learning style of each learner. The analysis of the KLSI is presented in the next chapter.

A process of thematic content analysis was used to analyse data from interviews as well as focus group interviews. Thematic content analysis enabled me to scrutinise and work to find deeper meanings from the transcriptions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). This process of analysing the content of the data involves a process of making sense of textual qualitative data (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Downe-Wamboldt, 1992). As indicated above, text data for this study included spoken data and data in print form generated through observations, semi-structured

interviews and focus group interviews; and visual data included photographs I took during my observations.

There are two different types of content analysis, namely, inductive and deductive. For this study, I began with inductive analysis. I began the process of analysing data by reading the data over and over to obtain a global sense of what the data was saying (Tesch, 1990). I generated codes by reading the textual data verbatim with the intention of identifying developing themes and patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994), from the experience of participants in my class over the period of the study. I did this by first paying a particular focus on the exact words from the text that represented the main thoughts, ideas and implications of what the participants were trying to communicate. In doing this, I made notes of my observations, impressions and thoughts about what I believed the data was saying.

As the above process progressed, I then grouped the developing codes into sub-categories based on how they linked and related to each other (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Next, I reduced sub-categories into fewer thematic categories depending on how these related and linked to each other. I then created definitions and explanations for each theme, sub-category, and code to ensure they talked to a focus area of meaning and to prepare for the description and discussion of findings (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Once I had completed my inductive analysis, I looked to see how this related to the theory I was using, which was deductive analysis. I considered the theory of learning styles, as developed by Kolb, and the research based on this theory, and considered whether my finding confirmed or questioned this.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

The concept of ethics originates from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning ‘character’. Ethics in research forms the core of the relationship between researchers and research participants. This therefore suggests that researchers need to consider the ethical dimension of their conduct during the research process. A consideration of how the researcher will ensure that the research is ethical needs to be at the centre of thinking about and doing research, from the conceptualisation of the research problem to the collection, analysis, interpretation and publication of the research findings. Ethics involves making decisions about what is right and wrong (Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). These often originate from social values about what governs acceptable conduct. Therefore, even research work, like all human activities, must be in line with individual, community and social values (ibid). In other words, ethical conduct in

research involves the responsibility to ensure the protection and dignity of research participants in the research itself, and the manipulation and publication of the findings of a research study.

Like all other research, qualitative research is not exempt from ethical considerations (Wassenaar, 2006). The argument that qualitative research is often conversational, and that data analysis attempts to preserve the integrity of the data collected, should not be advanced as a reason for not setting up mechanisms to ensure that the research is ethical. That is, every research study must undergo scrutiny in terms of its alignment with ethical codes of doing research. The major ethical issues in research are informed consent, beneficence (no harm to participants), respect for anonymity and confidentiality, and respect for the privacy of participants. This study devised means to ensure that these ethical issues were considered and applied to ensure the protection and respect of the rights of the participants. The means for the protection and respect of the participants in this study are discussed below.

The major ethical challenge in this study related to my positionality, namely, the fact that I was the participants' lecturer, and therefore that I had power over them, that might have influenced what emerged from the study. For example, I was aware that the participants, being also my students, might have felt compelled to participate for fear that I might use marks to punish them if they refused to participate in the study and/or provided negative feedback about the lessons. In my studies, I have been taught of the significance of the necessity to be constantly aware of the ever-changing shifts of power relations between researchers and participants. There has been a growing shift towards changing the social relations in the conduct of research (Oliver, 1992). For this study, I decided to make initial contacts myself because this presented me with an opportunity to build a research relationship with them other than the relationship they had with me as their lecturer (Seidman, 1998). I had to be aware of the importance of creating conditions where the participants consented to participating in the research out of their own volition rather than to please me and/or escape punishment. To do this, during my normal class session with them, I explained at length the intention of the study and pointed out to them that they were not obliged to participate in the study, and that their participation and/or non-participation in the study would have no bearing to their relationship with me as their lecturer. I explained that the study was part of the requirements for the Master's degree towards which I was studying. I also answered any questions that they had regarding what their participation would entail. I

also explained to them that they were at liberty to withdraw from participating in the study even after they had given consent, where they felt that it was necessary for them to do so. Participants were assured that no reprisal would occur should they take a decision to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the study.

I then gave them a recruitment letter describing the study and requesting their participation. The letter also explained all aspects of the study; their right not to participate, and to withdraw at any stage with no repercussions; and their right to anonymity. The letter was written in both English and IsiZulu to eliminate the chance of language presenting as a barrier to those for whom English was not their mother tongue.

The above meeting, and the letter, meant that I obtained informed consent from the participants because they were fully informed about the research and their rights related to it. After the participants were clear about what the study entailed and what their participation would involve, participants completed and signed the consent form.

Thirdly, I was always aware of my responsibilities to ensure that participants were treated with respect before, during and after the study. This is what formed the main principle in the way that I worked with the participants. This also involved keeping their individual information confidential at all times – so that they were not personally identified with the research or any parts thereof that could attract harm through various ways. This was ensured by not referring to them by name, and ensuring that any other information that could lead to them being identified was removed, camouflaged and/or protected.

However, I anticipated that the presentation of findings for this research would require the use of the photographs of the research participants, particularly where this was useful for sharing teaching and learning experiences within the context of the research study. For this, I fully understood that suspending confidentiality when it comes to the photographs of the participants created ethical issues. Therefore, I approached the participants to obtain consent to have their photographs in my thesis. This was formalised through participants' signing of forms signalling their agreement to their photographs being used in my thesis.

Lastly, participants were provided with the details of my supervisor, myself, and the UKZN Research Office to whom they could direct questions, concerns and comments relating to their role or any consequence of their participation in the study. This included providing

participants with the name, postal and email addresses, and telephone number of myself, my supervisor and the Research Office.

4.9 Credibility and Trustworthiness

Given the nature of action research as a self-reflexive process, trustworthiness is considered a key concern (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). The researcher must be able to justify claims made/conclusions drawn, provide a clear trail of evidence, and demonstrate reflexivity.

In this study, I played the roles of educator, curriculum developer, learner and researcher. To address the potential for bias, I used multiple methods of data collection, namely, semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and participant observation; and triangulation of methods (Denzin, 1970). I also used both the participants' feedback and my own observations as sources of data. Cross validation across participants was also conducted to assist me to guard against potential bias.

The semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews provided data on the perspectives and experiences of the participants. This was because I had to ensure that the voices of the participants are heard in the way I told the story about what had emerged in the research study. Therefore, when I used triangulation, I was constantly bore in mind that it has been reported to subscribe to a naive realism of the existence of a single definitive account of the social world. I thus used triangulation cautiously as a way of corroborating evidence, without falling into the trap of taking anything emerging from the data as a singular truth. In addition, I also checked with the participants, using a process called member checking (Carlson, 2010), if what had been recorded accurately reflected their views (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.10 Limitations of the Study

The major limitation in this study is that data was generated from participants from a specific geographical area, and from a small sample of students from a particular TVET college context; and focused on my own practice and reflections on this. Because of this, the experiences and views of the selected students in this study may not be representative of other students and learners in other contexts (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). However, it is important to explicitly point out that my research was to improve my own practice - it was never my intention to generalise my findings to other contexts. Rather, the intention was to

understand the experiences and views of selected students from a particular TVET college context of whether or not particular teaching methods matched their learning styles and the effects thereof. In addition to the above, I knew that the study had to be completed within a specific period, and that this would necessarily limit the complexity of what I could do.

4.11 Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is evident that I made specific options that I adopted regarding methodological and design issues, and that these were most often a product of my convictions, beliefs and assumptions and that they were therefore, inherently charged, rather than unbiased and impartial (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

Related to the above were the considerations and choices I made regarding research methods that are adopted for the production and/or generation of data. These were, to a large extent, tied my epistemological and ontological assumptions and convictions as a researcher. Often, this involved a messy struggle where I was often called upon to cautiously and judiciously weigh options as to which data generation methods were to be deployed in each instance (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), and the rationale behind those decisions, which included processes of weighing up their limitations and strong points, which required me to consider as this was most likely to have an influence on what finally emerged as findings of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Mouton, 1996).

This chapter provided an indication of how these complexities were traversed and negotiated in the current study. The following chapter will present the findings that resulted from the particular methodological and design considerations and choices that I made. In addition, the chapter will endeavour to understand and make sense of the findings within the parameters provided by key research questions of the study. It is important that, in doing this, the chapter is likely to be guided my own epistemological and ontological orientations, which cannot be avoided in making sense of what emerged. In addition, the theoretical foundations presented in Chapter Three will be deployed to make sense of the findings.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented methodological foundations of the study. This chapter presents and discusses data produced through the various data-collecting methods described in the previous chapter, namely, implementing the Kolb Learning Styles Inventory (KLSI), class observation, class evaluations, individual interviews and focus group discussions. It is important at this point to restate that the object of this study was to explore the effects of matching my teaching methods to my learners' learning styles. The data and findings presented in this chapter are guided by the objectives and key research questions of the study.

5.2 Profiling of the Participants

There were 16 participants in this study – the students in my English First Additional Language (EFAL) Intervention Support Class. The following table shows the profile of my participants:

Table 5: Profiles of participants by age, gender, location of secondary school attended, highest grade passed, and mark for EFAL component of the CAP test

Participant	Gender	Age	Rural/Urban School	Highest grade passed	Percentage pass in the CAP test
1	F	21	Rural	Grade 11	39
2	F	27	Rural	Grade 11	44
3	M	23	Rural	Grade 11	30
4	M	23	Rural	Grade 10	22
5	F	21	Rural	Grade 9	21
6	M	21	Urban (Township)	Grade 9	30
7	F	21	Rural	Grade 10	43
8	F	30	Urban (Township)	Grade 11	55
9	M	21	Urban (Township)	Grade 10	36
10	F	22	Rural	Grade 11	44
11	M	23	Rural	Grade 12	61
12	F	20	Rural	Grade 10	32
13	F	20	Rural	Grade 9	23
14	F	21	Rural	Grade 10	43
15	M	22	Rural	Grade 10	39
16	F	21	Urban (Town)	Grade 9	25

All of my students are black students with isiZulu as their mother-tongue. From the above table, 10 participants were female and six were male. The age range of participants was from 20 to 30 years of age. However, fifteen out of sixteen participants were below the age of twenty-four. This suggests that participants were young, but had spent some time either within the schooling system (repeating grades) and/or being unable to continue with their education after completing Grade 12. Twelve participants went to a secondary school in a rural area, while three went to a township school and one to a town school. Four of my students (one quarter) had a Grade 9 level of education, whilst six had a Grade 10 level. Only one student had passed matric. My learners' profile, in terms of race and gender, matches the overall profile of National Certificate (Vocational) NC(V) learners, as discussed in Chapter Two. As can be seen, my class contained four different levels of students – a common issue facing lecturers of NC(V) classes as reported by DHET (2013b). My learners' profile suggests that current policy to expand access to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, as discussed in Chapter Two, is working.

As can be seen, most of the students (14 out of 16) failed the English component of the Competency and Placement (CAP) test. Both students who did pass had either passed Grade 12, or attempted Grade 12; and there is a general correlation between the mark achieved in the CAP test and the highest grade passed. However, there is no correlation between grade passed and whether a student went to a rural or urban/township school; and no correlation between their ages and how they did in the CAP test.

5.3 Researching Practice

This section explains how I went about researching my practice through the action research design, and the data collected as part of this process.

CYCLE 1

STEPS 1 and 2: Observing and Reflecting

As discussed in the previous chapter, this step involved identifying the problem, and the intervention to potentially address this – i.e. matching my teaching methods to learners' learning styles. I have presented the problem in detail in Chapter Two.

STEP 3: Planning

As discussed in the previous chapter, I translated Kolb's LSI (KLSI) version 3.1 into IsiZulu to ensure that the participants did not have to struggle with a double hurdle of English language and trying to understand how the inventory worked. The inventory was necessary in order to determine the participants' learning styles, namely, diverging, assimilating, converging and accommodating. I also prepared classes in line with the different learning styles. This is attached as Appendix 2.

Step 4: Acting

As discussed in the previous chapter, in this step I first identified the learners' learning styles, using the KLSI; and then taught four classes over four weeks, each targeting one learning style.

The following table shows the preferred learning styles of participants:

Table 6: Learning styles of my participants

Learning style	Number of students identified as this style, according to KLSI (T=16)
Converger	9
Diverger	1
Accommodator	4
Assimilator	2

In the table on the next page, I summarised each of the classes taught, targeting the different learning styles and their characteristics and learning preferred methods, showing the methods I used.

Table 7: Learning style, characteristics, method preferred, and method used, Cycle 1

Learning style	Characteristics	Preferred method	Class targeting this learning style
Converging (doing and thinking): ***Nine learners***	Learners: • Like finding practical solutions to problems, or practical uses for ideas; • like to process information by taking part or doing an action; • are problem solvers and decision makers; • prefer to deal with technical tasks and problems, and not so much with social and interpersonal issues; • prefer to work by themselves thinking carefully and acting independently.	Learners perform better: • when they are required to find practical uses for ideas and theories; • where there is a solution to a question or problem; • when they are in simulating situations, such as role plays; • when they work with practical applications; • when they can perform laboratory experiments; • when they can experiment with new ideas; • when they can think about things and try out ideas to see if they work in practice.	**LESSON 1:** TOPIC: Skimming and scanning OUTCOME: Read to determine meaning and formulate responses to the intended message METHOD: 1. Learners asked to find the words 'skim' and 'scan' in the dictionary 2. In groups, learners had to skim and scan four newspaper articles about abuse, and write up responses to questions about a specific type of abuse on flipchart paper (each group focused on a different type of abuse) 3. Groups reported back to the rest of the class on the type of abuse they focused on – the abuser and the abused, what happened, how it should be dealt with 4. Each group role-played the scenario described in the newspaper article which affected them most
Accommodating (doing and feeling): ***Four learners***	Learners: • prefer tasks that allow them to be 'hands-on'; • enjoy carrying out plans; • rely more on solving problems through intuition than logic; • prefer to deal with people rather than abstract concepts; • rely more on other people's analysis for information rather	Learners perform better: • when they can work with others to get tasks and assignments done, • when they can do fieldwork; • when they can try out approaches. • when they can participate in new, unfamiliar and challenging learning situations.	**LESSON 2:** TOPIC: Listening and speaking OUTCOME: Listen and speak in social and academic contexts for a variety of purposes METHOD: 1. In pairs, learners shared an experience where they did not feel good, and where they had felt good, in a situation where they were trying to communicate with someone, how they responded to the situation. They identified the type of communication (social, written, verbal, non-verbal). The experiences were summarised on flipchart paper.

Learning style	Characteristics	Preferred method	Class targeting this learning style
	than their own technical analysis.		2. Pairs reported back to the rest of the class. 3. The class was asked how what they had heard related to interpersonal and intrapersonal communication 4. Back in pairs, students had to come up with advice for someone in the same situation 5. Pairs reported back to the rest of the class 6. Each pair performed one role-play based on their experience 7. Each student wrote down advice to him or herself about how they could deal with a similar situation better next time. 8. I gave a brief lecture on how they could improve their self-image
Assimilating (watching and thinking): ***Two learners***	Learners: • tend to be more interested in ideas and abstract understanding than in people. • focus more on logical soundness than practical value.	Learners perform better: • when there are good and clear explanations rather where they are required to act out their learning; • in situations where they have to assimilate new experiences into new understandings or concepts; • when they have to engage with readings; • when they attend lectures; • when they can explore analytical models; • when they have time to think things through.	**LESSON 3:** TOPIC: Language and Communication OUTCOME: Use a variety of theoretical principles to improve effectiveness of communication in social and academic settings METHOD: 1. In groups of three, learners looked at a particular scenario about a communication problem, and analyse it 2. I then gave a brief lecture on the Communication Model 3. Groups then reflected on how the Communication Model helped explain the communication problem in the scenario 4. Learners took turns to read from the textbook about barriers to communication 5. Class discussion on the how barriers in the scenario could be overcome

Diverging (feeling and watching): ***One learner***	Learners: • can view phenomena from different viewpoints or dimensions – they are open-minded and imaginative; • learn by watching rather than doing; • tend to absorb information and use imagination to solve problems.	Learners perform better: • in situations that require generation of divergent views and new ideas, such as brainstorming; • in group contexts; • when they can listen without being prescriptive in their thinking; • where concrete situations are presented for them to view from different perspectives.	**LESSON 4:** TOPIC: Reading and viewing OUTCOME: Reading and viewing in order to determine meaning. METHOD: 1. Learners were divided into two groups of eight. One group was given a picture showing the death of Hector Peterson in June 1976; the other a picture of Natalie du Toit finishing her swim from Robben Island to Blouberg. Each picture had an article attached about the event depicted 2. I gave additional information about each event and why it happened. 3. In their groups, learners had to discuss their feelings about each scenario, and then report back to the whole class. 4. Learners were given an article either on motivation or on changes in education in South Africa. They took it in turns to read aloud from the article to the class.

CYCLE 2

STEP 5: Observe

As discussed in the previous chapter, this step involved observation of the learners during each class; learners completing an evaluation sheet at the end of each class; individual interviews with each of the learners; and focus group discussions with learners identified as having the same learning style.

During the lesson, I closely observed my students during the lessons, to gauge their reactions to the methods I was using. For example, I observed group discussions, and watched as students read articles they had been given. I also took photographs. I looked to see which students were actively participating in activities. I also observed presentations and group feedback to assess the learning that students had made.

Figure 8: Students skim and scan a newspaper article during group work, Lesson 1

Figure 9: Pairs discuss situations in which they tried to communicate, Lesson 2

At the end of each lesson, I gave all the students an evaluation sheet to complete (see Appendix 1). This gave me immediate feedback on whether the students had enjoyed the lesson, and/or learned from it. It also asked them whether they had found anything difficult, and whether I could improve the lesson in any way.

All sixteen learners felt that they had learned something from all four lessons. Almost all learners enjoyed all of the lessons; one learner said that s/he had not enjoyed Lesson 1 because it brought back past bad memories (in this lesson, learners had to skim and scan newspaper articles about abuse). The few learners who said that they felt I could improve my lessons suggested things like providing more information, and giving homework. One learner (Converger) asked me to make lessons more “doable” and to “to make us not suffer from thinking; in fact, the more we do makes the thinking straightforward”.

Figure 10: Students complete the class evaluation sheet

After the four lessons, I interviewed each participant individually regarding their experiences. Students were again asked to say which lesson they had enjoyed most; and which they had not enjoyed, or had found difficult (now being able to reflect across all four lessons). The following table summarises their responses:

Table 8: Interview responses, Cycle 1

Participant	Learning style	Lesson targeting this style	Lesson most enjoyed	Lesson found most difficult/ did not enjoy
1	Converger	1	1	None
2	Converger	1	1 & 4	None
3	Converger	1	1	None
4	Converger	1	4	None
5	Converger	1	1 & 3	None
6	Converger	1	2	None
7	Converger	1	1	None
8	Converger	1	1 & 2	None
9	Converger	1	1	2
10	Accommodator	2	1	2
11	Accommodator	2	1 & 3	None
12	Accommodator	2	4	None
13	Accommodator	2	2	1
14	Assimilator	3	4	None
15	Assimilator	3	1	None
16	Diverger	4	1	2

I reflect on the implications of this as part of ***Step 6: Reflection***, below.

I asked them what they had enjoyed about the lesson they chose as the most enjoyable, what they did not like about any lesson that they had found difficult or had not enjoyed, what they had learned, and what they would like changed in their classes in the future.

- **Divergers**: The learner (there was only one) reported that he had enjoyed the lesson as it provided him with opportunities to share information and ideas in a group context. He believed that a group context allowed learners to discuss issues, and view issues from different dimensions. He also reported that learning in groups provided learners with an opportunity and space to test their ideas against those of other members of the group. He felt that this resulted in more productive and effective learning than they would have if they were learning individually. This learner also said he liked learning things which were useful inside and outside college.
- **Accommodators**: Participants said that they enjoyed working in groups and sharing ideas. Their view was that they "learn more when we are in groups". However, they felt that it would make the lessons more productive if there was more material for them to read and share using English. In other words, the participants wanted more opportunities for learning in this way. In addition, they wanted more examples to consolidate their learning of the new skills. One learner said that s/he did not like being asked questions by me, or getting oral feedback, in front of the class.
- **Convergers**: The participants who had enjoyed Lesson One1 said that they were already using the "skimming and scanning" skills they had acquired from the lesson. They enjoyed working in groups and sharing ideas and information, and benefitted from what their fellow students were contributing from the lesson. They enjoyed real-life examples that were used in the lesson. For them, the greatest benefit was that it exposed them to new life situations, which they could apply to their own lives. They reported that they did not see the acquired skills as applicable to only one area, but that they could apply it different life situation. That is, they reported they were already utilising the skills to improve their performance in other subjects as well. There were other benefits for using group work such as "Group work is good because I am a shy and withdrawn learner". They reported that problems were easier to solve "when we share in peers and in groups…The more you share, the more you get information and solutions to problems and challenges". In addition, they reported that this also empowered them to assist others who were struggling like them. One learner said that

s/he had not enjoyed Lesson 2 because of "the touchy, sensitive experiences which were shared by my class mates".

- **Assimilators**: The two participants wanted to be provided with "more articles …to read", and reported that they liked the stories and examples that related closely to their lives. They also reported that the use of examples and material that related directly to their lives encouraged them to participate in the lessons, and therefore improved their self-esteem. They reported that they had learned two ways of getting information, which they found useful in obtaining new information. They reported the skills they had acquired were assisting them with their other subjects and reading of newspapers and magazines.

A significant number of learners, across all learning styles, emphasised the usefulness of Lesson 1 in their own lives. They reported that they had learned life skills, which they were going to use or apply to their life situations. For instance, one learner pointed out that "I am no longer communicating like before with other people now". This is true in that experiential learning is about learning and re-learning, and creation and recreation of knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Regarding the improvement of the lessons, learners from all learning styles suggested improvements to the lessons after Cycle 1. This suggests that learners were engaged and participated in shaping the lessons. As indicated earlier, this student feedback was used to shape subsequent lessons and effective learning and opportunities for reconstruction of their experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). Doing this was important in that I understood action research to be about improving my teaching and for the benefit of my students' learning (McNiff, 2002). Therefore, I needed to constantly check if what I was doing was really working. Checking entailed listening to the learners' views about what they were experiencing regarding my teaching and their learning.

After all of the interviews, I ran three focus groups, each comprised of learners with the same learning style. These allowed deeper discussion.

- **Convergers**: Participants believed that it was important to learn how to use English as it was "connected to all subjects". Therefore, participants realised the significance of participating in the attempts to assist them to improve mastery of the language. Participants reported the value of the lesson for their own lives, beyond what was required in the classroom. For instance, they believed that the skill of skimming and scanning was useful when "buying newspapers and magazines". In addition, participants

enjoyed the fact that the lesson dealt with real-life issues, such as social problems (such as substance (ab) use), disability, societal attitudes and career aspirations. The participants also pointed out that they were benefitting more in learning as a group rather than doing individual tasks, as they were able to obtain more understanding where there are opportunities to share information. They believed that the support provided by a group context made learning easier for them. They also found useful the part of the lesson where they learned how to use a dictionary. They felt that this would be useful for them as no-one had taught them about how to use a dictionary in their own schooling lives before. However, they believed that the following aspects needed attention:

- The time for the lesson was too short and needed to be extended.
- Given the usefulness of the articles, the lecturer needs to use more articles. The feeling was that articles are useful in that they not only expose them to the different uses of English, but also to different real-life situations and issues, and allowed them to learn from how other people have handled them.
- Sometimes they get tired. Thus, the lecturer needs to introduce play activities where they are actively involved in learning.

They believed that the lessons had gone very well and asked me to continue with the teaching style I had used for one lesson, which involved reading to the group and to the whole class; and getting different opinions from other students. They were also happy about the provision of refreshments as "some of us do not eat breakfast in the morning, [and] the food you provide us helps us". In addition, they reported that the availability of refreshments created a different atmosphere that made them love the lesson more.

- **Accommodators**: Participants reported that they enjoyed the availability of information, and that this made learning possible and easier for them. They reported that they felt much better after the lesson. That is, they were now confident to communicate in English without feeling deficient. Participants believed that proficiency in English was like a bridge to success in other subjects, as all their other subjects used English as the language of learning and teaching. They felt that the skills they had acquired in the lesson would be useful in studying in other subjects, and that the lessons were therefore empowering. Participants also enjoyed the breakfast that was provided for them. For example, one learner said, "There is no money for breakfast almost every day…", and another, "I come

from a poor family, I come to school without food sometimes and you [rescued] me with the refreshments we got after these classes".

- **Assimilators**: Participants were happy with the lesson: "Nothing is lacking, I am now brave to face the future". Participants were also confident that "these lessons have benefitted me also for success in other subjects I am doing here". However, participants believed that there was a need for "more examples which are relevant to life experiences". This suggests that participants believed in the value of authentic learning, where they could discuss, explore and meaningfully construct understandings in contexts that involve real-life problems that are relevant to their lives. Participants believed that this would enable them to export the skills learned in English language classes to other real-life contexts. For instance, they believed that they would be able to "Skim and scan newspapers …before buying them", and "Solve interpersonal and intrapersonal problems which I face in life".

Participants across the learning styles believed that activities that allowed them opportunities to learn by doing rather than by listening and observing, prepared them better for real-life demands. This suggests that participants believed that it is important to connect what is learned in class to the demands, problems and issues of the real world. That is, participants believed that, for learning to be effective, it needed to relate directly to the challenges and complexities of real life. Therefore, for them, learning was not just learning for the sake of it; it was learning in order to live.

Participants also reported that the use of different teaching styles "helped us because we are different". For them, it was important for lessons to be framed and formatted in such a way that all learners have an opportunity to succeed.

STEP 6: Reflect

It is important to remember that action research is not only about the researcher in the conventional sense of the research; it is a collaborative activity that could involve other individuals. For instance, for this study, students were part of the research process; their participation in the action research study was in, for instance, providing input on how lessons could be improved to ensure that they could benefit from them. Therefore, reflection sessions provided a space for students to provide input on what changes to make in order to improve the teaching and learning of English.

McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.82-73) contend that effective reflection should involve asking specific questions of one's practice and intervention, namely: *What have I done? What have I learned? What is the significance of this learning? How will my new learning generate new actions?* For this study, I used the same questions to guide my reflections as discussed below.

What have I done? In the first cycle, I expected students to still struggle with the new arrangement of lessons. Although it was the first time that I taught in a way that aligned with the preferred learning styles, students reported having benefitted significantly from the way in which lessons had been reconfigured. However, although students reported positive experiences, on my part, I had to constantly adjust my own behaviours in order to align them with the new way of teaching. I had to constantly remind myself that I was teaching to a range of learning styles for the benefit of all my students. This suggests that I had to ensure that I understood what ways of teaching would benefit all my students. I believed that, during the first cycle, I had to teach according to the script in order to ensure that no student was excluded. It is therefore evident that the first lesson was a learning curve for me, which provided me with the awareness of my teaching that I did not have before reflecting on my teaching in respect of these students.

What have I learned? The first thing that I became acutely aware of was the fact that teaching and learning in a new way requires time and patience; it is not a once-off experience. Both the teacher and students require sufficient time to become familiar with the new way of doing things. In some cases, I found that I was still trapped in my old understanding of teaching and learning. For instance, sharing the control and shape of the lesson with students was initially scary, as I had been accustomed to the belief that the teacher must drive the lesson the way they know best, and that students must follow instructions from the teacher. For instance, one of the most difficult experiences for me was the need for me to get feedback from the students and to make use of it to shape future lessons. Given my professional training as a teacher, I had to learn to accept the ways that students said would work for them even though these contradicted what I 'knew' as a professional about learning and teaching (as is reportedly a common issue, as discussed in Chapter Three (Yassin & Almasri, 2005)). In some cases, I expected them to say things in particular ways and/or expected them to report challenges according to how I understood them. This suggests that part of what I learned was

to trust the feedback that was given to me by the students; they were the ones experiencing the lesson from a learning point of view.

However, there were also aspects of the lessons that worked well that I had not expected. For instance, students liked the idea of serving refreshments as some of them had to come to class without having eaten anything. The idea of teaching students about using a dictionary, which could be taken for granted at that level, was one of the important things students mentioned as a benefit from the first lesson. Also, the issue of transferability and/or application of skills learned (such as scanning reading material) in class to other contexts was one of the major benefits mentioned by students. The use of examples that students could relate to, instead of examples that are "removed" from their contexts, provided a useful springboard for students' learning. In some cases, it was not always the "big issues" that students experienced as benefit, but sometimes things that are easy to dismiss as insignificant. What I learned from this was that often it is these things that we cast as minor that form the foundation of learning and teaching. I also learned that it is important to think about simpler ways of providing explanations, rather than using ready-made explanations. That is, I learned that explanations must take cognisance of the level of students about what the lesson entailed. Lastly, a positive result is that the feedback provided by the students implied or served as an indication that students were beginning to understand how English language learning worked.

What is significant of the learning I drew from the first cycle in this study? This was my first attempt to use action research to improve my teaching practice. Therefore, it provided me with an opportunity to understand important aspects of my teaching practice, which were previously unknown to me. When I conducted the first lesson, I realised how inured I had become to teaching for the sake of teaching, without any real benefit for my students. For instance, although I knew about learning styles, I had hardly utilised such knowledge to make learning accessible for my students. I believe I became absorbed by how things were done at the college – the entrenched culture of the institution. Sticking to the ways of teaching I had learned is typical, according to the literature as I discussed in Chapter Two; teachers often tend to teach in the ways in which they were themselves taught. What is therefore significant about the first lessons is that it presented me with an opportunity to reflect on my teaching and the degree to which it was of benefit to my students. For instance, I learned that it was important to align my teaching to the learning styles of my students, and to take their feedback about how they were learning seriously. I learned that one size does not fit all when

it comes to learning and teaching; students can come from radically different background and contexts, but also with radically different approaches and emotional responses, as discussed in Chapter Three. I also became aware that my teaching had to take cognisance of the fact that my background was different from that of my students regarding exposure to English. This is the reason why feedback and input from my students became an important source of guidance.

In addition to the above point on the importance of students' feedback and input, was the issue of the participation of students in the act of learning and the implications thereof for my role and that of my students. For instance, for my students to learn effectively, it seems from the data that they had to actively participate in their own learning. In other words, my teaching had to provide students with opportunities to participate actively in order to gain gradual independence. This was important in that over time, students must be able to assume responsibility for their own learning. The implication is that students' reports of seeing possibilities for using what had been learned in class in other contexts formed the basis of how I shaped learning as an opportunity for guided participation, where students could participate in skilled opportunities of learning (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Rogoff, 1991). What this meant for the way forward into the next cycle was that students must be exposed to a variety and/or range of opportunities for learning that matched their learning styles, for them to internalise lessons and acquire independence.

However, having said that, it was important for me to understand the significance of my role as a teacher in the process of learning and teaching. That is, it was important for me to be clear about what role I would play in relation to the role that my students were going to play. For instance, I had to be acutely aware of the fact that my students depended on me, as a more capable other, with more experience and expertise than them, to benefit from the lessons. This implies that my understanding of learning styles and how to match my teaching to these formed the foundation of what I could reasonably expect to come from the lessons. However, this had to be balanced with the understanding of the learner is an active meaning-maker and problem-solver in any given learning situation (Turuk, 2008).

How will my new learning generate new actions? From the above reflections and my students' feedback and input, there were a range of things I had to do differently to ensure that my students benefitted maximally from my teaching. For instance, I had to ensure that there were more opportunities for group activities, and more information-providing materials

were made available for students. However, there were also several things that I had to maintain, which could be considered as being the strengths of the lessons. For instance, I had to continue providing them with refreshments and using examples that related closely to my students' real lives. This implies that I had to allocate more time for planning lessons that would make it possible for my students to learn effectively. Therefore, the first cycle revealed that although the lessons went relatively well, there were issues to which I needed to pay attention for my students to draw maximum benefit from my teaching.

From the point of view of improving my teaching practice using action research, I felt that after completing the first cycle, I was much more confident and had better understanding of what action research was and how I could apply it to improve my teaching practice. On the other hand, I must admit that what made it possible for me to improve my practice was that the first action research cycle assisted me to identify and confront my weaknesses as a teacher or lecturer. This implies that I was now in a better position to learn from how my students were learning and adapt my teaching practice to ensure that my students benefitted maximally from my lessons.

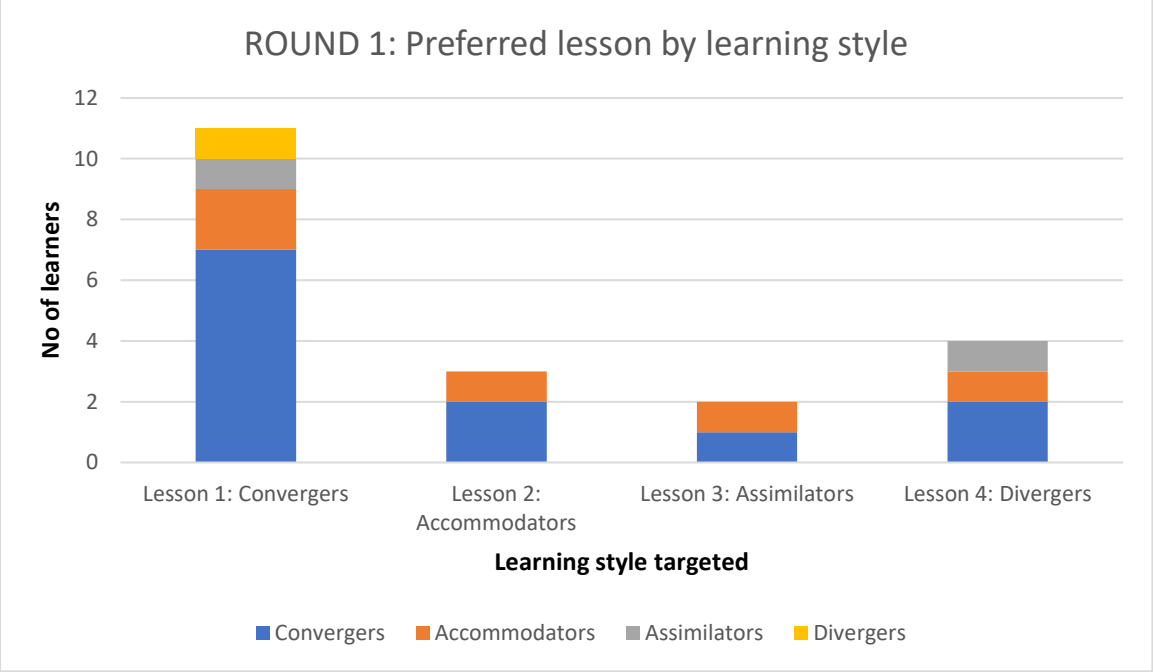

Figure 11: Preferred lesson by learning style, Cycle 1

It was clear that students had not always identified the lesson targeting their learning style as the one they had enjoyed most, or learned most from. In fact, students across all the learning styles reported enjoying Lesson 1 the most. It seemed to me that there were three possible reasons for this:

- For whatever reason, their learning style had not been correctly identified in Cycle 1.
- I had not aligned my teaching method closely enough to their learning styles.
- The particular content of a lesson may have affected how they felt about it.

STEP 7: Planning

I do not regard the weaknesses that emerged from the first cycle of action research as a failure, but as important aspects that required improvement in my own teaching practice. This is in line with the point that McNiff and Whitehead (2005, p.53) make about the source of good practice: that it comes from a process of "constantly monitoring, evaluating and changing …" one's practice in line with the emerging evidence about what needs to be done.

Based on my reflection, I tried to take the three possible reasons about why students did not choose the lesson targeting their learning style as their preferred lesson. Firstly, I decided to re-administer the KLSI, to confirm my learners' learning styles, so I could be sure that feedback received from learners related to teaching methods targeting their specific learning style. If, for example, a student who had been identified as a Converger reported that s/he had not enjoyed, or learned from, the lesson targeting Convergers, this feedback would be compromised if the learner was not in fact a Converger.

Secondly, I determined what changes needed to be made to the lessons. In the next cycle of lessons, I wanted to provide more opportunities for my students to experience the lesson that, in my own opinion, would more closely align to their learning styles. I thus paid much more attention to closely matching teaching style with the characteristics of the learning style I was targeting, and the preferred learning methods of participants with that learning style.

However, for this phase, I also wanted to maintain and sustain those areas of my teaching that were working well according to the feedback I had received and adapt those aspects of my teaching that required work:

- **Availability of and access to more reading material**: Given the usefulness of the articles, as reported by the students, I approached the library for more articles that I could use in my lessons. My colleagues also made available newspapers and magazines that they were no longer using for use in my next lesson(s). The intention was to expose students to the different uses of English, and to different real-life situations and issues.

- **Intervals for refreshing**: Some students complained about getting tired. Thus, in allocating the time for different activities in the lesson, I planned to introduce a bit of play activities to allow students some time to refresh.
- **Use of real-life examples**: Students reported that they believed there was real value in the use of "more examples which are relevant to life experiences". In my planning, I therefore ensured that more examples from real life were used in the lesson. This was also made possible by using newspapers and magazines.
- **Group work**: In the individual interviews and focus groups, learners across different learning styles spoke again and again about how much they valued sharing ideas and information in group work. I thus planned my lessons to include considerable group work.
- **Lesson duration**: The need to extend the duration of the lesson was made possible by speaking to my fellow colleagues to loan me some of their time until students had consolidated skills and understandings.

Thirdly, I wanted to exclude any personal sharing of sensitive content that might skew the feedback from students – in other words, I wanted feedback more directly related to my teaching methods, rather than the content of the lesson.

STEP 8: Acting

The first step was to administer the new KLSI as a basis for the planning of the next cycle of lessons. However, this time I considered the fact that students were now relatively familiar with the inventory. Therefore, less time was required to explain how the inventory worked. The same KLSI was used.

Again, after completing the inventory, participants were allowed an opportunity to share the reasons for the choices they had made in terms of their preferred learning styles in small groups. For this cycle, it was also important for students to share reasons as to why they had, in some instances, chosen another preferred learning style, where applicable. Thereafter, group representatives were given an opportunity to share the key points of their group discussions with the whole class. During these presentations, I took notes for my own analysis, reflections and shaping of the subsequent lessons. I then collected the completed inventories for capturing and analysis.

The table below shows the participants' preferred learning styles as identified in the second administration of the KLSI, compared to their initial learning style:

Table 9: Learning Styles of participants, KLSI 1 vs KLSI 2

Participant	Learning style 1	Learning style 2
1	Converger	Assimilator/Diverger
2	Converger	Accommodator
3	Converger	Diverger
4	Converger	Accommodator
5	Accommodator	Converger
6	Converger	Accommodator
7	Converger	Converger
8	Accommodator	Converger
9	Assimilator	Assimilator
10	Accommodator	Accommodator
11	Diverger	Accommodator
12	Converger	Converger/Assimilator
13	Converger	Assimilator
14	Assimilator	Converger
15	Converger	Converger
16	Accommodator	Accommodator

I reflect on the implications of this under ***Step 10: Reflection***, below.

As mentioned above, the next cycle of classes tried to more closely match the teaching method to the learning style; to build on those general aspects of the lessons that worked well according to student feedback; and to avoid asking learners to share personal experiences that they might find unduly sensitive. I also made provision for recapping the previous lesson to focus students on what the current lesson sought to achieve and the aspects (from the previous lesson) which informed the shape the current lesson was going to take.

During the lessons, I also intervened more in the lesson. I used a variety of techniques to understand the experiences of students. For instance, I walked around the classroom to see if the students were comfortable with the activities; where students seemed to experience difficulty, I requested them to explain to me what they found difficult; I informed students that they were free to stop me and ask me questions and raise their concerns if they felt they were not benefiting from the lesson; I allowed students to communicate with each other to enhance their learning and clarify their misunderstanding; and I asked students to be honest and to tell me if they felt that they were not benefitting from the lesson.

Table 10: Learning style, characteristics, method preferred, method used, Cycle 2

Learning style	Characteristics	Preferred method	Class targeting this learning style
Diverging (feeling and watching): ***One learner (plus one Assimilator and Diverger)***	Learners: • can view phenomena from different viewpoints or dimensions – they are open-minded and imaginative; • learn by watching rather than doing; • tend to absorb information and use imagination to solve problems.	Learners perform better: • in situations that require generation of divergent views and new ideas, such as brainstorming; • in group contexts; • when they can listen without being prescriptive in their thinking; • where concrete situations are presented for them to view from different perspectives.	**LESSON 5:** TOPIC: Reading and viewing OUTCOME: Read and view in order to determine meaning METHOD: 1. I divided the class into two groups of eight learners, 2. Group B sat in the centre of the room, facing outwards, and surrounded by Group A, facing them. 3. Each Group A learner interviewed a Group B learner about an experience or example of sending a non-verbal message. 4. Group A rotates by one place, and interviews the next Group B person on the same subject. 5. Once every Group A member has interviewed every Group B member, roles are swapped (i.e. Group B members interview Group A members, on the same topic). 6. I then gave a short lecture on non-verbal communication, with learners matching what they had heard in the interviews with what they were hearing about in the lecture 7. Individuals were given an individual worksheet on non-verbal communication to complete 8. I went around assessing this individual work with each learner.
Accommodating (doing and feeling): ***Six learners***	Learners: • prefer tasks that allow them to be 'hands-on'; • enjoy carrying out plans; • rely more on solving problems through intuition than logic;	Learners perform better: • when they can work with others to get tasks and assignments done, • when they can do fieldwork; • when they can try out approaches. • when they can participate in new, unfamiliar and challenging learning situations.	**LESSON 6:** TOPIC: Listening and speaking OUTCOME: Organise and present information and data in a focused and coherent manner METHOD: 1. Individual learners collected a role play scenario (each one was different). Each one was about requesting information in a different context.

Learning style	Characteristics	Preferred method	Class targeting this learning style
	• prefer to deal with people rather than abstract concepts; • rely more on other people's analysis for information rather than their own technical analysis.		2. Learners were given a few minutes to think about their scenario, with them playing the role of the requester. Each then chose a peer to practice the scenario with. 3. Each pair then presented their two role plays. 4. The class was then asked to rate the scenarios, and explain the basis on which they had done this. 5. I then gave a brief lecture about effective communication when making a request. 6. Learners when then asked to consider how the scenarios could have been done better, and how, in the light of this input. They were given a chance to redo their scenarios if they so wished.
Assimilating (watching and thinking): ***Two learners (plus one Assimilator and Converger; and one Assimilator and Diverger)***	Learners: • tend to be more interested in ideas and abstract understanding than in people; • focus more on logical soundness than practical value.	Learners perform better: • when there are good and clear explanations rather where they are required to act out their learning; • in situations where they have to assimilate new experiences into new understandings or concepts; • when they have to engage with readings; • when they attend lectures, • when they can explore analytical models; • when they have time to think things through.	**LESSON 7:** TOPIC: Language and communication OUTCOME: Use a variety of theoretical principles to improve effectiveness of communication in social and academic settings METHOD: 1. In pairs, learners were given one example of a letter (e.g. Letter of complaint, application letter, etc) 2. Each pair was asked to look at the content of the letter, and identify the type of letter; to identify the sender and receiver; and to look at how the letter was structure 3. Each pair reported back to class 4. Learners then looked at all of the examples of the letters, now spread out on a desk. 5. I gave brief input on formatting formal and informal letters. I asked the learners if they had ever written any such letters. 6. For homework, learners were asked to write a letter applying for a bursary from the college.

Converging (doing and thinking): ***eight learners (plus one Assimilator and Converger)***	Learners: • Like finding practical solutions to problems, or practical uses for ideas; • like to process information by taking part or doing an action; • are problem solvers and decision; • prefer to deal with technical tasks and problems, and not so much with social and interpersonal; • prefer to work by themselves thinking carefully and acting independently.	Learners perform better: • when they are required to find practical uses for ideas and theories; • where there is a solution to a question or problem; • when they are in simulating situations, such as role plays; • when they work with practical applications; • when they can perform laboratory experiments; • when they can experiment with new ideas; • when they can think about things and try out ideas to see if they work in practice.	**LESSON 8:** TOPIC: Listening and Speaking / Reading and viewing OUTCOME: Listen and speak accurately in social and academic contexts for a variety of purposes / Read in order to determine meaning, and formulate responses to the intended message METHOD: 1. I gave a brief lecture about the sender's purpose of communication in the message sent (i.e. to inform, remind, persuade etc.), looking at the target audience, the register and style used by the sender. I used examples from the textbook. 2. In groups of four, students had to look at a newspaper article (each group had a different one), and identify the sender's communication purpose, target audience, message itself, style and register used. 3. Groups reported back to the rest of the class, reading the article aloud before giving their analysis. The rest of the class, and myself, gave additions and comments. 4. I gave a brief lecture on how to write for different audiences

STEP 9: Observing

As before, I closely observed my students during the lessons, to gauge their reactions to the methods I was using. For example, I observed group discussions, and watched as students read articles they had been given. I also took photographs. I looked to see which students were actively participating in activities. I also observed presentations and group feedback to assess the learning that students had made.

Figure 12: Students choose a scenario to roleplay, Lesson 6

Figure 13: Thinking about their scenario individually, Lesson 6

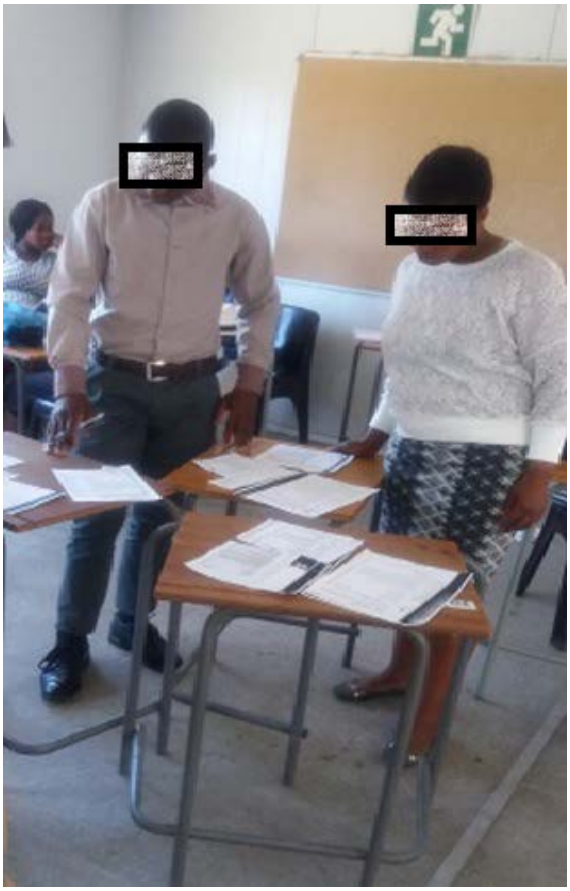

Figure 14: Looking at different types of letters, Lesson 7

As before, learners completed an evaluation at the end of each class. Again, all the learners felt that they had learned something from each lesson. The few who suggested improvements asked for things like providing refreshments before the lessons started (rather than after), and giving the learners even more time.

A second cycle of individual interviews was held once I had completed the second cycle of classes. Students were asked to say which lesson they had enjoyed most; and which they had not enjoyed, or had found difficult. The table on the following page summarises their responses:

Table 11: Interview responses, Cycle 2

Participant	Learning style	Lesson targeting this style	Lesson most enjoyed	Lesson found most difficult/ did not enjoy
1	Assimilator/Diverger	7 / 5	7	None
2	Accommodator	6	6	None
3	Diverger	5	6	None
4	Accommodator	6	6	None
5	Converger	8	6	None
6	Accommodator	6	6	None
7	Converger	8	7	None
8	Converger	8	7	None
9	Assimilator	7	5	None
10	Accommodator	6	6	None
11	Accommodator	6	7	None
12	Converger/Assimilator	7 / 8	6	None
13	Assimilator	7	7	None
14	Converger	8	6	None
15	Converger	8	7	None
16	Accommodator	6	6	None

Once again, learners did not always identify as their favourite class the class specifically targeting their learning style (I reflect on this under ***Step 10: Reflection***, below).

I again asked them what they had enjoyed about the lesson they chose as the most enjoyable; what they did not like about any lesson that they had found difficult or had not enjoyed; what they had learned; and what they would like changed in their classes in the future.

- **Accommodators**: Those learners that had enjoyed Lesson 6 reported that the lesson was "very enjoyable" and that the content of the lesson (i.e. how to make requests politely) was useful in their daily lives. Students reported that learning about this had helped them with many personal issues, including making requests in a manner that does not lead to conflict. They felt that the lesson not only benefited them with English but with other critical life skills. This is how one of the students described the potential benefits of the lesson:

> *"I have gained confidence in myself and will share what I have learnt to others … I was not successful because of the wrong method I used when making requests. This was the most important lesson to me; I wondered why when I request something to my parents I would not succeed; the request was not made in a good manner …"*

- **Assimilators:** Two of three learners in this group said that they had most enjoyed Lesson 7. They reported that they had benefitted significantly from the lesson, and that they would also "share the information [about what they had learned] with my family members because others are applying for employment". Therefore, students believed that the benefits from the lesson were beyond the learning of English, and that it extended into their personal lives and that of their families. In addition, the students believed that what they had learned potentially prepared them for entering and functioning in the job market. One student put it as follows:

  > *"I did not know the difference between formal and informal letters. I learnt that from this lesson. Maybe that is the reason why I could not get a job until I decided to come here; I learnt a lot from different types of letter writing both formal and informal letters. Since I will be doing job applications after finishing my studies, I will do it confidently because I know how to write an application letter…"*

After all of the interviews, I ran three focus group interviews, each comprised of learners with the same learning style, to allow for deeper discussion.

- **Accommodators**: Students reported that the lessons not only benefited them in terms of their English language skills, but that the benefits of the lessons extended into other subject areas:

  > *"All of the lessons we did here links well to other subjects we are doing in the college; English is an important subject because it is the language of teaching and learning of all subjects at the college…"*

  The students echoed the significance of the lessons having benefited them far beyond the learning of English; it helped "us with strategies of learning in our other subjects"; and they believed that the lessons also enhanced their life skills. For instance, one student reported that:

  > *"As I want to be a motivator I gained confidence of standing in front of people and sharing, which we learnt from this project: give advice, encourage … Learnt different ways of communicating with people"*

  However, students felt that I had to increase the time for the lessons as they found some of the aspects difficult to understand because "I am a slow learner; I need time to understand what is taught". The students felt that the methods and techniques I used

made things easier for them. For instance, "…. Getting information, discussing it in groups and sharing it helped my shyness"; and the student above who found that presenting in class built their confidence.

Students also mentioned other things that might seem insignificant from a teacher's point of view, but which students regarded as important such as the issue of relationships, especially power relations, where I treated them like they mattered as individual human beings. For instance, one student puts this as follows:

> *"Since we come from different family backgrounds food after lesson helped us, we come to college without breakfast, we knew we will get food when we come here, thank you may God bless you madam"*
>
> *"…you helped calm us down after seeing a dead person for the first time in our lives. You told us it is part of life. I was shivering but after communicating with you forgot about what I saw…"*

- **Assimilators**: Students reported that they had benefitted significantly from the lessons, and that the lessons:

> *"Gave us a lot of skills and strategies to achieve in this college and in our future"*
>
> *"We now know how to solve problems, how to overcome life challenges, how to stand in front of people and deliver a message or rather give feedback"*
>
> *"I do not have problems in other subjects now because of attending these classes; I now have an inner drive which makes me enjoy all my studies at the college"*

However, students report benefits other than those that are academic:

> *"Thank you for the refreshments, we struggle to get food especially towards month end, we go and sleep after attending these classes because there is nothing more to eat, no money to buy in the house"*

Students reported that activities that allowed them to work in groups assisted with ideas, information and boosted their confidence. However, students felt that the lessons could have been much better if it included “more practical examples” that would empower them to “tackle our life situations and that of others around us”. Students reported that they felt confident to “step up the ladder in our own lives”. They felt that the lessons, in addition to developing their English language skills, prepared them for real life. For instance, as reported by one of the students above, the skills they acquired from the lessons assisted them to do well in their other subjects as well. In other words, the benefits were not confined to English lessons; one student reported enjoying “all my studies at the college.

- **Convergers**: Students reported that the lessons were interesting although they felt the time given to the lessons was still too short, that there was a need for more articles and that there was a need to explain more. Some of the students felt that, as “English is not only a language for communication, but the core of all subjects” it was an important bridge into other subject areas. As indicated above, this also helped them with other studies at the college.

  Students reported that the lessons also helped them to develop a love of reading, “which I hated before the lesson”. They believed that they were now able to “share what they have read, read a magazine and share what I read about to my family”. They reported that they felt more inspired and encouraged to pursue their dreams as the barrier of English was beginning to dismantle. They reported that they enjoyed working in groups, sharing ideas with and listening to and engaging with different ideas, opinions and suggestions, because:

  > *“I really like group work. I do not understand when the teacher is in front teaching in class. I don’t feel comfortable to engage in discussion with the teacher. However, when I am in a group, I am able to learn more effectively”*

  Some students felt that “everything is now left on us to do our work” and that as far as they were concerned, I had done what I was supposed to regarding equipping them with skills required to do well in English. They felt that they had learned a lot:

"I am now able to write different types of letters, make requests politely, and understand verbal and non-verbal communication and how to communicate for different purposes. We learnt a lot here"

STEP 10: Reflection

As in the first cycle, at the end of the second cycle I reflected on what I had seen and experienced, and on my learners' feedback. This time, I reflected across both cycles. I used the same questions: *What have I done? What have I learned? What is the significance of this learning? How will my new learning generate new actions?*

What have I done? As discussed above, I re-administered the KLSI, although it had never been my intention to do so.

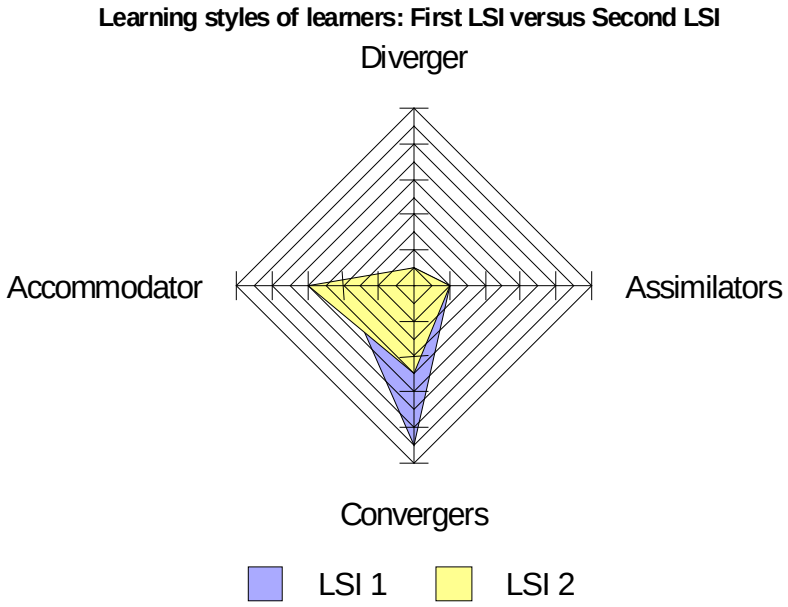

Figure 15: KLSI results, Cycle 1 versus Cycle 2

Only five out of 16 learners re-identified themselves as the same learning style – in other words, over two-thirds of the learners identified themselves as a different learning style six weeks later. Those that shifted tended to be on the same continuum; one student, however, completely changed learning styles.

In this cycle, I found it far easier to integrate the feedback I got from the learners, so that my lessons became much more responsive. In the previous cycle of classes, students requested that I include more real-life situations. That is, they reported that the inclusion of real-life examples equipped them with skills to deal with real life situations. In this cycle, I

consciously did this, and it was clear from the feedback as reported above that the students valued this.

What have I learned? All sixteen learners learned something from all lessons. However, a significant number of learners enjoyed Lesson 6 (10 out 16 learners) and Lesson 7 (eight out of 16 learners). Lesson 6 involved individual learners conducting a role play scenario about requesting something. Lesson 7 involved learners looking at different kinds of letters. For homework, learners were asked to write a letter applying for a bursary from the college.

A significant number of learners emphasised the usefulness of Lesson 6 and 7 in their own lives. They reported that they had learned life skills, which they were going to use or apply to their life situations. For instance, one learner pointed out that "I am no longer communicating like before with other people now". This is true in that experiential learning is about learning and re-learning, and creation and recreation of knowledge (Kolb & Kolb, 2008). After Cycle 2, only learners with Assimilator and Diverger learning styles suggested improvements to the lessons. I understood this to suggest the cyclic nature of improving practice and learning as exemplified in the use of the action research design (McNiff, 2002) and the understanding of learning as a continuous adaptation (Kolb & Kolb, 2013).

I learned as a lecturer that I do not have to concentrate on my previous method of teaching; that is, I learned to become a facilitator whilst my learners took control of their learning in group work. I learned that my students' socio-economic backgrounds made a significant impact on their learning, and providing refreshments became a key strategy in fostering learning. The fact that many of the students specifically raised the issue of the refreshments I provided brings to mind Papier's (2009) discussion of the three different factors which influence high learner dropout and failure. As discussed in Chapter Two, Papier raises a number of learner-related factors such as finances, health, problems at home, and so on. From student feedback, it became clear that many of my learners simply do not have enough food to eat, and this impact on their ability to learn.

My understanding that making my teaching as practical and relevant to learners' lives is critical was deepened in this cycle. My experiences in this cycle also made me call into question Kolb's LSI.As discussed above, the learning styles of my learners changed over a relatively short period of time. There was also very little correlation between learners' reported learning and enjoyment and my specifically targeting their particular learning style:

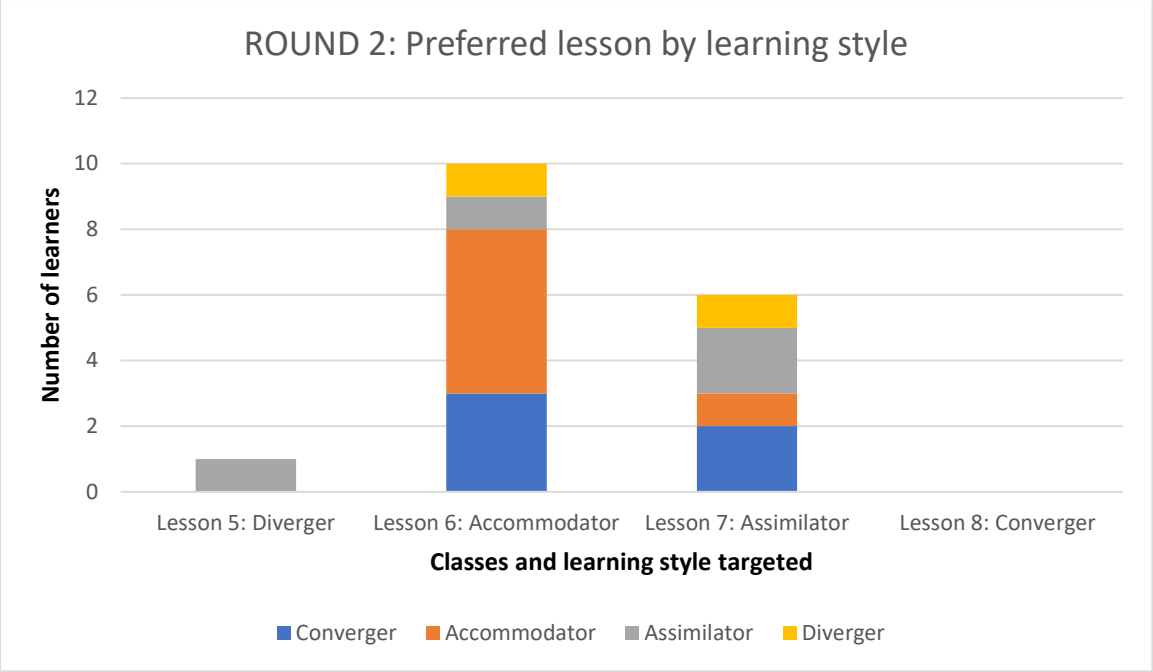

Figure 16: Preferred lesson by learning style Cycle 2

It is clear from the graph that once again there is no clear correlation between the learning style of the students and the lesson they most enjoyed/felt they had learned most from. In other words, Assimilators did not all enjoy the lesson specifically targeting them. Only six of the 16 learners (i.e. less than half) reported that they had most enjoyed the lesson specifically targeting them. What is also clear is that most students in the class – across all four learning styles – liked Lesson 6; whilst students across all four learning styles also enjoyed Lesson 7. It should be noted that although only one student said that Lesson 5 was the class they had enjoyed most, and no students identified Lesson 8 as their favourite, none of the students reported that they had not enjoyed a class.

What is the significance of this learning? The fact that when I re-administered the KLSI, the learning styles of many of my students changed, raises a number of questions for me. Firstly, it is possible that this outcome reflects that each learner may have multiple learning styles, as suggested by Jahiel (1982, cited in Yassin & Almasri, 2015). Secondly, it could reflect that learners' learning styles might shift and change over time, or in response to particular learning situations (Kozhevnikov, 2007). Thirdly, it is possible that learners were inaccurate in their answers (as Bishka (2010) cited in Wilson (2012) claims can happen), or chose answers that they thought I would like or thought would reflect well on them. A final possibility, which I tend to support, is that Kolb's LSI is unreliable (as test-retest studies on

previous versions of his LSI have shown (Kolb & Kolb, 2013b), or his overall learning styles theory is problematic (as a number of studies reported on by Martin (2010) have argued).

What was clear from my research is that starting with learners' experiences is key, as Kolb (2015) has argued in his Experiential Learning Theory (ELT). Thus, lessons requiring students to reflect on actual experiences seem to have been highly valued by the learners (although, as noted, some were uncomfortable with sharing personally sensitive information).

It was also clear that the content of a lesson is critical – no matter what method is used; particular content may engage or negatively affect students. In their feedback, it became clear that many of my learners liked or disliked classes purely because of the content covered. Contrary to what Pithers and Lim (1997) comment (that a lack of English proficiency makes it hard for learners to effectively engage with subject content), I found that my learners actively engaged when given the opportunity to do so, even with relatively limited English proficiency. What seemed to be of most importance in terms of learner engagement was the extent to which they felt the content was directly relevant and practical to their lives, now and in the future. In the second cycle, as reported above, students across all learning styles particularly enjoyed Lesson 6 (role plays on requesting different things in different contexts), and Lesson 7 (letter writing).

From my students' feedback, and the fact that all of them passed all their subjects at the end of the year of my intervention (14 of them, as reported earlier in this chapter, having failed the English component of the CAP test), it is clear that my intervention did make a difference. However, I am not convinced that matching my teaching style to my learners' individual learning styles was the crucial factor, because, as shown above, learners did not always respond most positively to the class targeting them; and their learning styles did not remain constant. From my reflection, I would argue that the following factors are more likely reasons for my students' positive response:

1. What they were learning in class related directly to their lives and experiences, giving them practical, useful skills (for example, how to communicate better in their families and communities);
2. What they were learning was helping them cope with the rest of their college work; and they could see its direct relevance to the world of work;

3. I provided refreshments, which were clearly of importance to them, not only because my students' home context meant that they did not have enough food to eat, but because they saw this as me caring about them as people;
4. The methods I was using allowed a high level of engagement and sharing. All of the students, no matter what their reported learning style, commented on the group work, and requested more of this, and the lesson that used a lecture format was barely commented on, which suggests that when learners have a high degree of control over their own learning, and are able to work collectively, their learning is enabled.

I must acknowledge the fact that reflection on my teaching practice constituted a fundamental aspect of my efforts to improve my teaching through action research. Amongst the many lessons that I learned, I learned the importance of honest reflection and being prepared to accept that it may take time to achieve one's goals for improved practice. Therefore, I understand and accept that I may not have been completely successful in my efforts to accommodate different learning styles through my teaching, but I take comfort in the fact that I was able to begin the process of improving my teaching practice. Therefore, I understand the process of improving my teaching practice as going beyond the duration of this action research project.

The feedback I received from my students made me aware of both my strengths and weaknesses. However, most importantly, it taught me not just to identify my weaknesses but to effectively use action research cycles to develop ways to address them. The feedback I received from the students about their experiences of the lessons not only assisted me to adapt my lessons, but to take their feedback seriously and to open space for them to provide input for the success of the teaching and learning process. The feedback and input from students on my teaching practice provided me with more insight into both my teaching practice and what was best for my students.

How will my new learning generate new actions? Although my action research study ended at this point, the process of learning I have undergone, as discussed above, means that I will continue taking learner feedback into consideration as an on-going part of my teaching practice. This includes recognising even more the contexts within which they live and learn. It also includes recognising that enabling my learners to have more control over what they learn and the manner in which they learn it is of great importance.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study, drawn from the different data collection methods included in the research components of my action research project. I also included my reflections on the data, drawing on the literature and my theoretical framework, to help me understand the implications of the findings. I now turn to the conclusion, and the answers to my research questions.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Introduction

The intention of this study was to consider how I might support my Level 2 English First Additional Language (EFAL) students through matching my teaching styles to their learning styles, and exploring the effects of this. The previous chapter presented and discussed findings that emerged from the data gathered through the two action research cycles I undertook.

The object of this chapter is to consolidate and elevate the implications of the key findings that emerged from the study. The intention is to reflect on the value of the theoretical framework, the research methodology as well as the contribution of the study towards personal and professional development. The chapter will close off by presenting some possibilities for further research that this study could not address.

6.2 Consolidation and Summary of the Main Findings

6.2.1 Problem statement, objectives and key research questions

As presented in Chapter One and Chapter Two, the key problem identified is the high dropout and failure rate of Level 2 National Certificate (Vocational) NC(V) students at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. A review of the literature shows that a number of factors are seen to contribute to this, including the fact that students are taught in English, a language that is not the mother-tongue of the majority of them, and which many of them struggle with; and lecturer teaching and assessment methods.

As a TVET College lecturer teaching EFAL, in my study I sought to explore how I might assist my students, within the broader context of programme-, college-, and learner-related issues. The research literature suggested that learners have different learning styles, and that matching teaching methods to these can help learners learn. It seemed clear that exploring my teaching methods might prove useful; and, the research study suggested that learners have different learning styles and that matching teaching methods to these could benefit learners. Using Kolb's Learning Styles theory (KLSI), I decided to undertake an action research exploration of the possible effects of matching my teaching methods to my learners' learning styles.

I thus identified two key research questions:

1. What different teaching methods can I use to meet different learning styles of Level 2 learners?
2. What effects can there be when matching learners' different learning styles with the teacher's teaching methods?

6.2.2 Summary of Key Findings

This research study sought to explore ways in which I could harmonise my teaching methods with my NC(V) Level 2 EFAL learners' learning styles, and the possible results of doing this. During the lessons, which were part of the cycles of action research, students' behaviour and responses and reflections in class, interviews and focus group discussions generated the data that I used to reflect on my own teaching practice and gain insights into what needed to be maintained and sustained and what needed to be improved. The insights I gained from the feedback from the students assisted me adapting my lessons, attitudes and behaviours to ensure that all the students were accommodated. In some cases, this required me to question my preconceived ideas about learning and teaching. For instance, in some cases I expected students to include specific things in their responses, and when they did not, I came close to dismissing what they were saying. In some cases, their responses could be regarded as having nothing to do with teaching and learning, particularly when viewed from a superficial point of view; but are in fact critical to successful teaching and learning. For instance, the refreshments that I provided became a major issue in the students' reflections because it addressed an issue that teaching and learning in a narrow sense was unable to address, but which profoundly affected my students and their learning – this is, poverty and hunger – in which many live and the impact of this on food/hunger.

The other dimension of the usefulness of the students' responses lay in their impact on my subsequent lessons. For instance, for the first time since I joined the teaching profession, my teaching focused on making my lessons work based on the comments and input from my students. In other words, the shape and structure of my lessons was a result of my own reflections on what I had experienced during lessons and what the students were reporting as their experiences of the lessons. This ensured that there was a connection between my lessons and that my lessons could be regarded as some form of intervention based on what the students reported as their needs. This suggests that although I was initially defensive, I was

gradually beginning to learn to listen with an intention of considering what the students were saying. Therefore, my lessons could have become effective because students were also beginning to "see their views and opinions" in what I was doing with them.

As reiterated above, this study was guided by two key research questions. Below, I provide a discussion of the key issues that emerged under each of the questions. The intention is to highlight and underline the main findings of the study, which I am taking away to inform my future approaches to the teaching of English to NC(V) Level 2 students.

Research Question 1: What different teaching methods can I use to meet different learning styles of Level 2 learners?

An important part of the process of improving the performance of NC(V) Level 2 students lay in me first understanding and acknowledging that there was a problem in the way things were. That is, instead of living with and trying to adapt to the situation, I was concerned about the fact that my lessons potentially were not benefitting my students. The conventional approach to this could have been to blame the students for not taking their work seriously or to blame their previous teachers for not having done a good job teaching the students. This suggests that before doing anything, I had to break normative understandings of the "problem and solution" as being located somewhere else. That is, I had to accept that the problem was in my class and my teaching, and that the solution of the problem was in our hands, as lecturer and students. I had to realise that I had to refrain from thinking that somebody somewhere should have done something about the problem, and begin to use the power that I have to improve the situation. Therefore, as much the process of changing the situation for the better lay in the hands of students, I also had a major role to play as a professional to ensure that my students were benefitting from what I was paid to do.

Based on the research literature, I accepted as a premise that there are teaching styles and learning styles, and that these two should match for effective learning and teaching to become a reality for students. This meant that I had to start thinking about my students as individual human beings who might learn differently. However, although the matching of teaching methods to my students' preferred learning styles was useful, the issue was much more complex than this. When I administered Kolb's LSI (Kolb, 1974; McLeod, 2013) to the students I initially thought that once the students' preferred learning styles have been determined, all that I needed to do was to match teaching methods to the students' learning

styles. I was not aware that learning styles are in a constant state of flux – that they were going to change according to the nature of the task at hand. My assumption that when students learning styles are known to teachers, students are likely to benefit more from teaching, and that therefore basing teaching on learning styles has advantages and benefits for both teachers and students (Kara, 2009; Yassin & Almasri, 2015; Zhou, 2011). For instance, in this study, I found that some students had more than one preferred learning styles, and which learning style students used, depended on several issues, including the nature of the task at hand.

Therefore, although my teaching began to address and accommodate a range of needs of my students, I constantly had to be conscious of the reality and possibility that students' preferred learning styles were not static. That is, students used different learning styles to cope with the demands of each lesson. My awareness of the changing nature of the students' preferred learning styles enabled me to adapt my teaching to respond to the varying approaches students were using in each instance, ensured that students were not frustrated by the inaccessibility of what was being learned. I used various teaching methods and techniques to ensure the active involvement of my learners in the lessons (e.g. group work, role play, working in pairs).

However, the understanding of my students' preferred learning styles was useful in developing an initial sense of ensuring that learning opportunities were more appropriate for my students' learning needs. I used this knowledge to ensure that all my students had a chance to actively participate and benefit from learning situations provided by lessons that were informed by their feedback and my own reflections. This suggests that trying to understand my students' learning styles assisted me to adapt my teaching styles to make my teaching more inclusive. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, it became clear that my learners were not clearly identifying the class targeting them as their preferred class. That is, the changing learning styles made the practice of teaching and learning much more complex. This was evident in that the things students said in their class evaluations, interviews and focus groups did not always match the characteristics of the learning styles they were supposed to prefer.

As reported, I thus reapplied the KLSI at the start of the second cycle, to check my learners' learning styles; and worked to more closely align my teaching methods to learning styles. What I found was that, firstly, most of my learners identified themselves as a different

learning style; but, secondly, that once again they did not choose the lesson targeting their (new) style. This calls into question some of the underlying claims of learning styles theory, including the fact that a preferred learning style may be preferred for a particular task and lesson, and will not apply to all lessons and tasks. This forced me to think deeply about exactly why my students were preferring particular lessons, and which learning styles they preferred in each instance.

Research Question 2: What effects can there be when matching learners' different learning styles with the teacher's teaching methods?

What emerged sharply from the study is the importance of listening to what students think will work for them. This refers to the strategies and techniques they believed would work for them based on their experiences of the lessons. These included the use of more practical, real-life examples, more opportunities for group activities and sharing, play activities, the use of more articles from magazines and newspapers, group feedback sessions to the whole class. Although I had been teaching for more than five years, I had not consciously thought about what methods and techniques would work for my students. I took those decisions unilaterally, with the hope that they were the best for the lesson. In other words, my decisions about what methods and techniques to use were largely content/curriculum-based rather than informed by what would work for my students.

However, for this study, teaching methods and techniques were informed by feedback from students and my reflections on the lessons and what students were saying would work for them. For instance, after the first lesson, students suggested that I provide more articles that dealt with real-life issues. I included activities such as public speaking and making requests, which students found useful, not simply for purposes of learning and improving their skills in English, but as important skills for their daily life. For instance, one student pointed out that they had always found it difficult to understand why their requests were often declined, but that they now understood that they were making their requests in a manner that made it difficult for them to be accepted. This made me realise that part of my previous lessons might not work, and my teaching might not be as effective as it was supposed to be, because I may have been using inappropriate methods and techniques. I used methods and techniques that did not assist students to participate actively in lessons, using examples that were largely removed from their real lives. It is telling that with the many years of experience as a teacher, I only realised that from what emerged from this study.

What also emerged was the importance of issues that I had not thought would be part of what would make my teaching effective. I had always believed that I must use all the time available to teach. However, students mentioned that they sometimes became tired during the lesson such that it was difficult for them to follow what was being done in the lessons. They therefore suggested rest intervals during the lessons to refresh their thinking. I then introduced play activities, which served as intervals for students to refresh. When I did this I often realised that students would participate actively throughout the lesson. Previously, I would notice that it seemed that students could not wait for the end of the lesson. However, when I introduced the rest intervals, students almost always wanted lessons to continue. That is, they showed more interest in continuing with the lessons.

My study calls into question the importance of matching teaching styles with learning styles. I would still argue that teaching methods are crucial to helping learners' learn, but from my study it appears that their importance is rather in allowing a high level of engagement and sharing. All of the students, no matter what their reported learning style, commented on the group work, and requested more of this, which suggests that when learners have a high degree of control over their own learning, and are able to work collectively, their learning is enabled.

As well as teaching methods, however, other factors emerged as critical to the learning process. Firstly, what learners learn in class needs to be related directly to their lives and experiences, giving them practical, useful skills (for example, how to communicate better in their families and communities); and needs to help them cope with the rest of their college work. They need to be able to see how what they learn in class will be directly relevant now and in the future (for example, to the world of work). Secondly, learners need to feel that they matter, as individual human beings. As reported, my learners identified that fact that I provided refreshments as of great importance to them. I would argue that this is not only because my students' home context meant that they did not have enough food to eat, but because they saw this as me caring about them as people.

Since the finding indicates that if students can suggest what would work for their learning, and those suggestions are taken on board by teachers it will benefit students. Therefore, students must be understood as active meaning-makers and problem-solvers in any given learning situation (Turuk, 2008). In other words, students often have a good idea of what will work for their learning. What this also suggests is that listening to students about what would

work for them could assist in exposing them to a variety of activities that would make learning enjoyable and accessible for them. Therefore, for this study, effective learning and teaching was not about matching teaching methods to learning styles; it was about methods that are capable of affording learners more control over the learning process, using content/teaching skills, knowledge and attitudes that are of direct relevance and that are transferrable.

The implication of the above for my own teaching practice is that no one teaching style and/or teaching method fits all learning styles. Therefore, for students to benefit from my teaching, I needed to use a variety of methods and/or teaching styles, and to be conscious of my learners' individual learning needs, in order to ensure that my teaching benefitted all my students. This also suggests that I must observe students' behaviours during lessons and listen to and consider their comments and feedback about lessons, for me to be able to match my teaching to how they learn. Without this, it may be difficult for all my students to enjoy and access learning. However, as pointed out above, although the matching of teaching styles to learning styles was useful, it was not without complexities and was not a straightforward process, where learners' preferred learning styles are identified, and teaching methods are matched to the. Preferred learning styles were dynamic and contextual, which means that they changed from lesson to lesson, in tandem with the type of task and learning demands made by the lesson to learners. Obviously, I did not expect to get everything right from a few lessons. Therefore, from the perspective of this study, I understand that this is just the first step in a long journey of effective teaching and learning, and discovering what is best for my students.

6.3 Reflections on Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

As stated in the previous chapters, this study was framed within Kolb's learning styles theory (Kolb, 1984). The investigation was done using action research methodology, which involved a series of cycles of planning, acting, reflection and improving. This section presents reflections regarding the theoretical and methodological framing of the study and the shaping and changing of my teaching practice.

6.3.1 Implications for theories of learning and teaching

The underlying intention of this study was to use the improving of my teaching practice as a as a springboard for improving my NC(V) Level 2 students' proficiency in English. Therefore, the study sought to open opportunities for student feedback, critical reflection on my teaching practice and their learning, using English as a platform. This stemmed from the fact that I had realised that my students were not benefiting from the way in which I was conducting my English lessons, and I therefore made a decision to try to improve opportunities for them to learn effectively.

For this study, I borrowed the concepts of experiential learning and learning styles from Kolb (1984; 2005). These concepts imply that learning and teaching has a context. The process of learning and teaching happens within a specific milieu and is therefore embedded within the prevailing contextual influences. Therefore, for this study, I learned that students have diverse backgrounds, circumstances and learning needs, and that for teaching to be effective, we need to take cognisance of these and other factors. I learned that the main intention of teaching is effective learning, and that teaching is nothing without learning – teaching cannot be without learning. In this way, teaching is about expanding and enriching learning experiences for all students, irrespective of their diverse backgrounds, learning needs and circumstances. For instance, students taught me that my teaching practice could be improved by listening to and reflecting on how they were experiencing my teaching.

As a result, the research study taught me that students are active actors in the process of effective teaching and learning. As Freire (1973) would put it, education is not about banking knowledge; it is about active engagement in the production of knowledge. Therefore, students must not be expected to be passive spectators in the learning and teaching process; they have an active role to play in shaping and enriching teaching and learning experiences. In this study, students provided valuable feedback and input that was useful in shaping and enriching teaching and learning experiences. This was not only useful for my students; it assisted me in improving my teaching practice.

In my experience as a teacher, for many years, despite my training as a teacher, I was not aware of the students' importance in informing the structure and shape of learning experiences. For me, students had to receive the lesson as decided by the teacher; the teacher knows what is best for students. That is, the responsibility to teach was mine and students'

responsibility was to learn, whatever learning means in this context. However, for this study, I became acutely aware of the importance of the students' views and feedback in improving access to my lessons. In other words, students became an important resource or sounding board for the effectiveness of my lessons. The interventions and adaptations that contributed to the improvement of teaching and learning experiences were in response to and because of the feedback and input I received from students.

6.3.2 Implications for methodology

This study adopted action research methodology. For this reason, the study moved from the identification of an area of development (i.e. how to support NC(V) Level 2 students in English through using teaching methods that matched their learning styles). I therefore set out to improve my teaching practice in respect of teaching English to the students, with a view to improving their performance in English. This suggests that I was concerned about the performance of the students in English, which linked back directly to how I was teaching them. In other words, my teaching did not lead to the result that I wanted to see; students were failing and struggling in other subjects that were taught through the English medium. The teaching strategies, methods and techniques that I was using were not leading to effective learning for students, and I needed to do something to turn the situation around. Although, as I have indicated above, I still have areas of concern, I believe that, through the study, I was able to improve some important aspects in my teaching practice. For instance, the feedback I received from the students revealed signs of the beginnings of such a process.

Like many other action research studies, this study followed a model that involved problem identification, planning for action, implementing the plan for addressing the problem, observing the implementation, analysing and reflecting on the data (generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews for this study), which led to the next cycle of action (Hendricks, 2009; Johnson, 2008; Koshy, 2005; McNiff, 2002; McNiff & Whitehead, 2005; Mills, 2011; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). This model made it possible for the improvement of my teaching practice to happen in what I call cycles of perfection, where each cycle represents an attempt to perfect practice based on the outcomes of the previous cycle. This understanding of action research is important for the point I have made above, namely, that the improvement of practice has only started, and that there is still a long way to

go. However, the important point to consider within this understanding is that each cycle must represent a deliberate attempt to make things better than the previous one.

Action research has its roots in participatory research methodology (MacDonald, 2012). Therefore, for this study, action research was utilised to improve practice from the basis of my reflections and feedback and input from students. Therefore, what happened in the next cycle of action research was a collaborative effort of the students and myself, as their lecturer. The collaborative relationship between myself and my students challenged the normative understandings of the teacher and student as having an exclusive role in teaching and learning respectively (that a teacher must teach, and students must learn). For this study, both myself and students were learning and teaching, and collaboratively contributed to the teaching and learning experiences. Therefore, what I have reported as a study in this dissertation could, to a large extent, be better understood as a collaborative project between myself and the students.

As I reflect, I have realised that I also needed to keep a reflective journal as part of my sources of data, in which I could have recorded all my reflections of the research process as it was unfolding. However, I attempted to constantly reflect on what was happening, as is shown in your reflective discussion, but I concede that a reflective journal, as is commonly used in action research, would have been useful, and I would ensure that I keep next time I undertake an action research study.

6.4 Implications for Praxis: Shaping and changing my teaching practice

As indicated elsewhere in this study, the underlying intention of this study was to improve students' learning, using the improvement of my teaching practice as a springboard. Therefore, it was expected that the study would result in the improvement of my teaching practice, which would lead to enriched learning experiences for my students. However, I must hasten to caution that, although the study registered significant progress in improving my teaching practice, it was only a beginning. Achievements of the study must nevertheless not be trivialised; the study impacted significantly on the changes I witnessed in my teaching practice. For instance, this study taught me the significance of listening to, considering and incorporating feedback from students in shaping learning experiences intended to benefit them. Without this, I would not have known how my lessons were being experienced by

students and what they believed could work for them. Conversely, I would not have been able to improve my teaching practice with feedback from students.

Reflection on my teaching practice was an important activity in transforming and shaping my praxis. For instance, although I still regarded myself as qualified to teach, this did not blind me into believing that I knew it all. This awareness assisted me to reflect on the strategies and techniques that I was using for my teaching, and to be willing to adapt them if they were not working. That is, instead of believing in their tried and trusted nature as a given, I realised that lesson planning and implementation was a lot more than these strategies and techniques. For instance, I realised that I may have overused some of the strategies and techniques without reflecting on their usefulness. I was made aware of this when suggestions from students resulted in more enriched learning experiences for my students. I learned that each lesson built on the previous lesson, and that any two consecutive lessons were tied together by honest reflection on the experiences of the previous lesson. This awareness made me realise that learning and teaching process is a living process, whose predictability unfolds as it happens. In other words, how the lesson is going to turn out can only be known after it has happened, which places reflection at the centre of the efforts to improve teaching practice.

Another issue, linked to the title of the study, is the fact that I worked out beforehand what I thought I should do, rather than allowing this to emerge from the data I generated from my students, their documents and results, my own experiences and literature. I know that I was supposed to identify the aspect of my teaching practice I wanted to study through this process, and then go on to find out how best to improve my teaching practice to ultimately improve learning of my students. I realise that it is only then that I could have justified using a specific strategy (for example, teaching to learning styles). I realise that beginning with a specific strategy as I did, meant that I was going into the study with a predetermined position, a hypothesis of some kind, and trying to prove it. This is not how an action research study must unfold. This is one of the learnings that I am taking away from this study.

I have indicated that this study was only the beginning of a long journey of practice improvement. Therefore, as I close the study, I am resolute that the process of improving my teaching practice will continue beyond the life of this study. However, the importance of this study lies in its ability to provide a seed for taking this journey of continuous improvement forward. In my next lessons with my students, I intend to regularise the act of honest reflection, as an important factor in the improvement of my teaching practice. I hope that this

will ensure that I constantly work with my students to enrich their learning experiences and improve my teaching practice.

6.5 Limitations of the Research Study

The fundamental premise of any research endeavour is that it is likely to have limitations. This study was thus also had its own limitations. Therefore, it was important for this study to evaluate and own limitations to ensure that I was, as far as possible, to justify the trajectories and conclusions pursued, and provides a better perspective on the issues I reported based on the findings. A significant limitation is that discussed above - that I worked out beforehand what I thought I should do, rather than allowing this to emerge from the first cycle of enquiry. I also realized after going a long way with my study that perhaps a critical, transformative paradigm would have been more appropriate. Another important limitation of this study is that conclusions were made based on the data that was collected from a small sample of participants from a specific geographical context, which was one TVET college campus. Consequently, the findings and conclusions made based on these are unlikely to be characteristic of what may prevail in other TVET college settings. However, the object of the study was not to generalise and apply findings to other TVET college contexts. Instead, the intention was to use the improvement of my teaching practice as a point of departure for the improvement of my students' learning, using the concepts of learning styles and experiential learning.

An additional limitation to this study was that the timeline of the study was based on the requirements in terms of its duration, which is the amount of time within which I was expected to finish the qualification. Therefore, time frames were often tight and hardly considered the natural flow that was sometimes required for sufficient depth. This invited a barrage of constrains for the study, which included the fact that there was sometimes insufficient time to follow up on issues where there was a need to explore patterns in greater depth. Hence, it is for this reason that I provided provide possibilities for further research, which are those areas that I could not covered within the parameters and focus of this study.

6.6 Possibilities for Further Research

Based on the discussion from the previous section on the limitations of the study, I would like to suggest the following possibilities for further research, based on what this study sought to achieve and the findings emerged from the study:

- After carrying out this study, there is a need for the exploration of the role of action research as a vehicle for transforming understandings and configurations of classroom arrangements. For instance, there is a need to understand what it would take for student feedback and input to be taken seriously as a useful resource for enriching learning experiences and improving teaching practice.
- Emanating from my study, more research may be needed to explore more ways of affording learners control over their own learning, and working collectively, to enable their learning
- Students reported that what they were learning helped them to cope with the rest of the college work and experiences. There may therefore be a need to dig deeper and establish how learning from other areas of work may be strengthened to ensure its transferability to other areas of their learning.

6.7 Concluding Thoughts

The underlying aim of this study was to improve my teaching practice so that it could lead to more improved opportunities for student learning for NC(V) Level 2 students, using English as a platform. However, this must be understood within the context of what it is: This study only began to scratch the tip of the iceberg; there is still a long way to go. The study, however, assisted me to recognise areas of my practice that required development and improvement, and the interventions that I needed to implement to make this happen. The study also assisted me in reflecting on my own understanding of the collaborative relationships that needs to characterise the learning and teaching process for it to succeed. For this study, critical reflection became a major issue for improving my teaching practice and enriching students' learning experiences. It emerged that, for effective learning and teaching to happen, my teaching styles needed to correspond with my students' learning styles. However, findings of this study revealed that this was not a simple matter, as students'

learning styles were not fixed and tended to change in tandem with the type and complexity of the tasks.

I learned that, for the above to happen, there are sacrifices that needed to be made in terms of shifting normative understandings of the teaching and learning processes. As a teacher, I needed to see students as part of the process, and students needed to see themselves as part of the process. It also emerged that there are some issues that may be understood to be peripheral, but which, in my opinion, are central to effective teaching and learning. For instance, the issue of the "breakfast and refresher interval" became a major issue for students in this study. It was important for me to provide participants with refreshments, as I believe that if students are hungry, it is harder for them to learn – hence how they reacted to the food. Therefore, the provision of refreshments was clearly a critical issue. I recognise that refreshments cannot make up for bad teaching methods. As such, providing refreshments, whilst important, is not going to solve the issue of poor learner performance. However, the provision of refreshments was important for the effective participation of students in the learning and teaching process. In addition to other core issues for critical reflection, students elevated the importance of the authenticity and meaningfulness of learning. That is, students wanted to learn things that are directly related to their real lives – they wanted to learn things that would assist them to survive and to flourish in life. For them, learning had to lead to self-development and improvement rather than learning for the sake of it.

All of the above implies that effective learning and teaching must be about opening spaces for students to have more control over their learning, and listening to the feedback that they provide about their experiences of the lesson, and how the lesson could work for them. Listening to student feedback is important in that it potentially points to what students are finding difficult and what they believe will make learning effective and successful for them. This suggests that the teacher must be prepared to listen to and take student feedback seriously. Taking student feedback seriously implies utilising it to adapt lessons according to what students believe will make learning successful for them. For this to happen, teachers must be open to new ways of thinking about their teaching and students' learning. That is, they must be prepared to learn from student feedback and integrate these learnings to how they respond to students' learning needs.

Overall, from a personal perspective, what I learned from participating in this study was that effective student learning can only happen where, as a teacher, I am also prepared to critically

reflect and learn from my own teaching. Frankly, what I learned was that effective teaching can only be signalled by effective learning. That is, there can be no effective learning without effective teaching. Students' voices were a critical enabler for me to reflect on and improve my teaching practice; without their feedback and suggestions, I would not have been able to make the necessary adjustments to my teaching practice. As I conclude, that is one of the major lessons I am taking away from the conduct of this self-reflective endeavour.

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Appendix 1: After lesson evaluation questionnaire

Put a cross(x) where it is applicable to you

1. Have you learned anything from this lesson? If so, what?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

2. Did you enjoy this lesson?

YES	NO

3. If NO, what is it that you did not like? Why?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

4. If YES, what did you enjoy? Why?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. What do you think I could do differently to make this lesson better?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

Inhlolovo ngesifundo sosuku

1. Ngabe kukhona okufundile kulesisifundo na ? Uma kukhona kuyini ?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Faka isiphambano kuloko okuqondene nawe kulombuzo ongezansi

1. Ngabe usijabulele lesisifundo na?

YEBO	CHA

2. Uma uthe CHA kulombuzo ongenhla, chaza ukuthi yini engakujabulisanga kuso

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Uma uthe YEBO kulombuzo ongenhla chaza ukuthi ujatshuliswe yini kulesisifundo

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. Yikuphi okuhlukole engingakwenza kulesosofundo ?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix 2: Kolb Learning Styles Inventory 3.1

Introduction

The Kolb Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) is designed to help you understand how you learn in the classroom and in everyday life situations. We all learn in different ways. This inventory can help you think about the ways you learn best. According to Kolb, we learn in a cycle which takes us through four different stages. The LSI uses the four different stages of the learning cycle to help you understand how you learn. Knowing more about your learning style can help you better understand:

- How to make the most of your classroom learning
- How you solve problems
- How you work in teams
- How you manage disagreement and conflict
- How you make choices about your career
- How you can improve your professional and personal relationships

Instructions

On the next pages, you will be asked to read different sentences about how you learn. Each sentence has four different endings-you must choose which ending best describe you, and then which is second, which is third, and which one is least like you. Put 4 for the ending that is most like you, and 1 for the ending that is least like you.

When you are working out on how to rank the different endings for each sentence, think about practical examples from class, or from when you learned from your life experience. Some people find easiest to work out which ending is most like them(4); and then which is least like them(1); and then give 3 to the left over ending that has a word that is most like them, and give 2 to the last one.

1. ***Make sure you rank the four endings for every sentence***

2. ***Each ending must have a different number (you can't choose 4 for more than one, for example).***

For example:

When I learn:

I like to deal with my feelings	(I am quite like this)	3
I like to watch and listen	(I am not really like this)	1
I like to be doing things	(This describes me best)	4
I like to think about ideas	(I am least like this)	2

1. When I learn:

I like to deal with my feelings	
I like to watch and listen	
I like to be doing things	
I like to think about ideas	

2. I learn best when:

I rely on logical thinking	
I work hard to get things done	
I trust my hunches and feelings	
I listen and watch carefully	

3. When I am learning:

I tend to reason things out	
I have strong feelings and reactions	
I am responsible about things	
I am quiet and reserved	

4. I learn by:

doing	
feeling	
watching	
thinking	

5. When I learn:

I analyze ideas	
I like to try things out	
I examine a lot of information	
I am open to new experiences	

6. When I am learning:

I am an active person	
I am an intuitive person	
I am a logical person	
I am an observing person	

7. I learn best from:

Observation	
Rational theories	
Personal relationships	
A chance to try out and practice	

8. When I learn:

I take my time before acting	
I feel personally involved in things	
I like ideas and theories	
I like to see results from my work	

9. I learn best when:

I can try things out for myself	
I rely on my feelings	
I rely on my observations	
I rely on my ideas	

10. When I am learning:

I am a responsible person	
I am a rational person	
I am an accepting person	
I am a reserved person	

11. When I learn:

I am practical	
I evaluate things	
I get involved	
I like to observe	

12. I learn best from:

Seeing the results of my actions	
Classroom education	
Reflecting on what I hear and see	
Real life experiences	

In the last 8 questions look at how you learn in different situations in your life. For each of these, think about an actual situation in your life before you rank the sentence endings.

13. When I start something new:

I try to be practical and realistic	
I imagine different possibilities	
I analyze the situation	
I rely on my feelings to guide me	

14. When I decide between two alternatives:

I establish a criteria to evaluate them	
I collect information about them	
I try them out	
I rely on what feels right to me	

15. When I plan something:

I am organized and logical	
I consider all possibilities	
I am open to making changes	
I am goal and action oriented	

16. When I learn in a group setting:

I get to know everyone	
I jump in and contribute	
I look for experts	
I sit back and listen	

17. When I try to influence someone:

I explain my ideas logically	
I try to understand their point of view	
I share my feelings with them	
I take initiative to talk with them	

18. When I evaluate an opportunity:

I act without delay	
I weigh the costs against the benefits	
I consider different opinions	
I trust my sense of what is best	

19. When I analyze something:

Intuition is often my best guide	
I look at it in different perspectives	
I think about how the basic principles relate to each other	
I search for its practical applications	

20. When I want to know someone better:

I do things with them	
I analyze why they act the way they do	
I listen to them	
I pay attention to their feelings	

Uhlu luka Kolb lwezindlela zokufunda 3.1

Isingeniso

Uhlu luka Kolb lwezindlela zokufunda lwenzelwe ukuthi lukusize ukuqondisisa ngokufunda egunjini lokufunda nakuzo zonke izinkinga empilweni. Sonke sifunda ngezindlela ezahlukene. Loluhla lwezinto lungakusiza ekucabangeni ngezindlela zokufunda kahle/nakangcono.

Kuloluhlu lokufunda sifunda ngomjikelezo ohlukene izigaba ezine. Lezizigaba zisiza ukuthi uqonde ukuthi ufunda kahle ngayiphi indlela, kanti futhi wazi kangcono, futhi uqonda kahle ukuthi:

- Ungakwenza kanjani okuningi egunjini lakho lemfundo
- Ungazixazulula kanjani izinkinga
- Ningasebenzisana kanjani ningamaqembu
- Ungaziphatha kanjani izinto ezimayelana nokungavumelani nokungezwani
- Ungathatha kanjani izinqumo mayelana nomsebenzi ongawufundela
- Ungabuthuthukisa kanjani ubungcweti kanye nobudlelwano bakho nabanye abantu.

Imiyalelo

Kulamakhasi alandelayo uyacelwa ukuba ufunde imisho eyizinhlobonhlobo mayelana nokuthi wena ufunda kanjani.Umusho ngamunye uneziphetho ezahlukene ezine. Kumele ukhethe ukuthi isiphi isiphetho esichaza wena kangcono, esilandela leso (esesithathu), esilandela leso futhi (esesibili) nongesiko nhlobo. Faka okune (4) esiphethweni esichaza wena ngqo, bese ufaka okukodwa (1) esiphethweni esichaza ongekona nhlobo.

Uma ufuna ukubona ukuthi ubonakala kanjani umgomo womusho ngamunye, cabanga ngezibonelo zezinto okwazi ukuzenza egunjini lokufunda noma la wathola khona isifundo ngenxa yezimo zempilo owabhekana nazo. Abanye bakuthola kulula ukuthola umgomo osho ngqo ngabo (4) nosho abangekona nhlobo (1); faka ke u 3 kwesisodwa saleyomigomo esele uma kunegama elilodwa elicishe lifane nawe bese ufaka u 2 kumgomo osele.

Qikelela ukuthi zihleleke kahle iziphetho ukuya ngokwezigaba zazo kuyo yonke imisho. Isiphetho ngasinye masibe nenombolo ehlukile (ngeke ukhethe u 4 kabili emushweni owodwa)

Isibonelo:

Uma ngifunda:

ngithanda ukuvumelana nemizwa yami (ngicishe ngibenje)	3
ngithanda ukubuka nokulalela (anginjena mina)	1
ngithanda ukwenza (loku kungichaza kahle kakhulu)	4
ngithanda ukucabanga ngemibono (nginjena kancane)	2

1. Uma ngifunda:

Ngithanda ukuvumelana nemizwa yami	
Ngithanda ukubuka nokulalela	
Ngithanda ukuzenzela izinto	
Ngithanda ukucabanga ngemibono	

2. Ngifunda kangcono uma:

Ngithembela ekucabangeni izinto ngokulandelana kwazo	
Ngisebenza kanzima ukuqeda engikwenzayo	
Ngithembela emizweni engenasiqiniseko ukuthi kuzokwenzeka	
Ngiyalalela ngibuke ngokuqikelela	

3. Uma ngifunda:

Ngiyazicabangisisa izinto	
Ngamukela ngamandla imizwa	
Ngiyabhekana nazo futhi ngizenze nezinto	
Ngiyathula kodwa ngiyazibekisa izinto	

4. Ngifunda:

Ngokwenza	
Ngemizwa	
Ngokubuka	
Ngokucabanga	

5. Uma ngifunda :

Ngiyayicubungula imibono	
Ngithanda ukuzama ukwenza izinto	
Ngihlola kakhulu kulwazi olunzulu	
Ngivulelekile ekutholeni ulwazi olusha	

6. Uma ngifunda:

Ngingumuntu onomdlandla	
Ngifuna ukuzizwela enhliziyweni yami	
Ngingumuntu ozicabangayo izinto	
Ngingumuntu ozibhekayo izinto	

7. Ngifunda kahle uma:

Ngizobheka	
Kumhlahlandlela wolwazi ngenqgondo	
Ngikubudlelwano obuqondene nam	
Nginethuba lokuzama nokuzijwayeza ukwenza	

8. Uma ngifunda:

Ngithatha isikhathi sami phambi kokuba ngenze	
Ngizwa kufanele ngizimbandakanye ekwenzeni izinto	
Ngiyayithanda imibono kanye nemihlahlandlela	
Ngithanda ukubona imiphumela emsebenzini wami	

9. Ngifunda kahle uma:

Ngizizamela mina ukwenza izinto	
Ngithembela emizweni yami	
Ngithembela ekuboneni nasekubhekeni kwami	
Ngithembela emibonweni yami	

10. Uma ngifunda:

Ngingumuntu oqotho ekubhekaneni nezinto	
Ngisebenzisa inqgondo ukucabanga	
Ngingumuntu owamukelayo	
Ngingumuntu ozibekisayo izinto	

11. Uma ngifunda:

Ngizimbandakanya ukwenza izinto	
Ngiyazihlola izinto	
Ngiyazimbandakanya	
Ngiyathanda ukubuka	

12. Ngifunda kahle uma :

Ngibona imiphumela yezinto engizenzayo	
Ngifunda egunjini lokufunda	
emifanekisweni emayelana nengikuzwayo kanye nengikubonayo	
ezintweni ezenzeka ngqo empilweni yami	

Emibuzweni eyisishiyagalombili yokugcina bona ukuthi ufunda kanjani ezimweni ezinhlobonhlobo empilweni yakho. Kokunye nokunye phakathi kwalokhu, cabanga ngesimo empilweni yakho phambi kokukhetha uhlu lweziphetho kulemisho.

13. Uma ngiqala into entsha:

Ngizama ukwenza ngempela nangeqiniso	
Ngicabanga ngezinto ezinhlobonhlobo zokwenza	
Ngiyasihlaziya isimo	
Ngithembela emizweni yami ukungibonisa indlela	

14. Uma ngithatha isinqumo phakathi kwezinto ezimbili:

Ngikhanda isimo sokukhetha ukuzihlola	
Ngiqoqa ulwazi ngazo	
Ngiyazizama	
Ngithembela kuloko engikuzwa kungigculisa	

15. Uma ngiceba ukwenza into ethize:

Ngiyahlela futhi ngihlaziye	
Ngiqaphela konke okungenzeka	
Ngivulelekile ekwenzeni ushintsho	
Ngiphokophelela ukwenza konke okuzongifinyelelisa esiphethethweni	

16. Uma ngifunda ngiseqenjini:

Ngazana nawo wonke umuntu kuleloqembu	
Ngivele ngingenelele ngenezelele	
Ngibheka ukuthi ubani onolwazi olungcono, ohlakaniphile	
Ngiyazihlalela nje ngilalele	

17. Uma ngizama ukunxenxa omunye:

Ngichaza imibono yami ngokulandelana	
Ngiyazama ukuqonda indlela akacabanga ngayo	
Ngichaza imizwa yami kuye	
Ngenza ithuba lokukhuluma naye	

18. Uma ngihlola ithuba:

Ngivele ngenze ngaphandle kokuzibambezela	
Ngikala ukuthi ikuphi okunesisindo phakathi kwentengo yezindleko nenzuzo	
Ngiqaphela imibono eyahlukene ngaloko	
Ngethemba indlela engibona ngayo ukuthi ikuphi okungcono	

19. Uma ngihlaziya into:

Ngiholwa yiloku engikuzwa enhliziyweni yami	
Ngikubuka ngokwezinhlobo ezahlukehlukene	
Ngicabanga ngezisekelo zomgomo nokuthi zihlobana kanjani	
Ngibheka ukuthi kungenzeka kanjani	

20. Uma ngifuna ukwazi umuntu kangcono:

Ngenza izinto naye	
Ngihlaziya ukuthi yini indaba enze izinto ngalendlela azenza ngayo	
Ngiyamlalela	
Ngiyaqikelela imizwa yakhe	

Appendix 3: Individual learner interview

A. OPENING

- As you know, I am Ms J.D Nene, your English First Additional Language lecturer here at this TVET College. On the other hand I am a registered Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a student I am required to do a research study.
- The reason for interviewing you is to get your feelings about whether any of the methods I have used helped you to learn better or not in English First Additional Language.
- I hope to better match your preferred learning styles with my teaching methods.
- The interview will take about 30 minutes

B. BODY:

1. Which of the classes I taught you over the last 4 weeks did you enjoy most? Why?

2. Which class do you think you learned the most from? Why?

3. Which class did you find boring? Why?

4. Which class did you find difficult? Why?

5. [I will probe answers on evaluation questionnaires the student has completed]

C. CLOSING:

I will briefly share with the learner my understanding of what he/she has said and then thank the learner for being part of this interview process.

Appendix 4: Focus Group Schedule

A. OPENING : Introduction

- I am Ms J.D Nene, your English First Additional Language lecturer here at this TVET College. On the other hand I am a registered Masters student with the University of KwaZulu-Natal. As a student I am required to do a research study.
- The reason for interviewing you is to find out similarities and differences in what you said in the individual interviews.
- I hope to better match your preferred learning styles with my teaching methods.
- The interview will take one hour.

B. BODY:

1. Based on the classes I've taught you so far, what things do you think I should do more, to help you learn? Why?
2. Is there anything else you think I could do to help you learn better? Why?
3. Do you think anything you have learned in the last 4 weeks has helped you in any of your other subjects? If so, explain more?
4. [I will probe answers on evaluation questionnaires/interviews of the students]

C. CLOSING:

I will briefly share with the learners my understanding about what they have said and then thank them for being part of this interview process.

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

06 July 2016

Ms Joyce Duduzile Nene 212514809
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Ms Nene

Protocol reference number: HSS/0844/016M
Project Title: An action research exploring of whether matching different teaching methods to learner's learning styles can support Level Two learners studying in English First Additional Langauge at a South African TVET College

Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 09 June 2016, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL.**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Cc Supervisor: Dr Anne Harley & Zamo Hlela
Cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
Cc School Administrator: Ms Tyzer Khumalo & Ms B Bhengu