

ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASS:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

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ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASS:  
A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNER ENGAGEMENT

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis hereby submitted by me for the Master of Education Degree, at the University of Free State, is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university.

18/July/2014

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Gailele L. Sekwena (Mr)

Date

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Gailele L Sekwena (Mr)

Date

## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother, Mrs Madithole Elizabeth Sekwena and my late father Mr Loeto Simon Sekwena, who against the odds, ensured that me and my siblings work hard to finish schooling. I want to thank them for the foundation they laid in our lives and I also thank GOD for blessing us with them as our parents.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CAPS	=	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CDA	=	Critical Discourse Analysis
CEE	=	Council on Economic Education
DoE	=	Department of Education
EMS	=	Economic and Management Sciences
FAI	=	Free Attitude Interview
FE	=	Faculty of Education
LPG	=	Learning Programme Guideline
NCEE	=	National Council on Economic Education
OBE	=	Outcomes Based Education
PAR	=	Participatory Action Research
PBL	=	Problem Based Learning
STAD	=	Student Team Achievement Divisions
SWOT	=	Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats
TR	=	Transcripts
US	=	United States
USAID	=	United States Agency International Development

## ABSTRACT

The aim of the study was to develop an active learning framework in a high school economics class. The research project intends to create an active learning environment to enhance learner engagement. The study argues that active learning approach seems to help the learners to understand the abstract economics concepts better, compared to the heavy reliance on the chalk-and-talk approach, which often leads to learner passivity in the classroom and rote learning. This study is located in the critical theoretical framework, which aims at promoting critical consciousness, empowerment, emancipation and transformation. It is the aim of this active learning framework to assist in changing the current teacher role in class from that of a knowledge transmitter to a role of facilitator and guide in the teaching and learning environment, and assist the teachers to become self-reflective practitioners. The framework will also empower the learners to become active participants and co-constructors of knowledge in class, thus freeing them from their usual passive role in the economics class. The study was conducted using a Participatory Action Research methodology (PAR). The choice of this methodology was informed by the notion that people who experience a common problem in their daily lives are better positioned to investigate the problem and propose solutions to that problem. A team comprised of the economics educators and learners participated in this collaborative effort to generate the data that were used to create the active learning framework. The study found that learners seem to gain a deeper understanding of the economics concepts when they are engaged in illustrating them practically in class. The study also found that willingness to change from the traditional way of teaching seems to be a major challenge in adopting this learner-centred active learning approach. The study, however, recommends that a gradual and sustained implementation of this approach in class is necessary for both teachers and learners to develop confidence in it and realise its value.

## ABSTRAK

Die doel van die studie was om 'n aktiewe raamwerk vir leer in 'n hoërskool ekonomieklas te ontwikkel. Die navorsingsprojek probeer om 'n aktiewe leeromgewing te skep ten einde leerderbetrokkenheid te verhoog. Die studie gaan uit van die standpunt dat 'n aktiewe leerbenadering leerders skynbaar help om die abstrakte ekonomiebegrippe beter te verstaan, in teenstelling met die swaar steun op die benadering om 'n lesing te gee en op die skryfbord te skryf, wat dikwels tot masjinale leer en passiewe leerders in die klas lei. Hierdie studie is op die kritiese teoretiese raamwerk gebaseer, wat daarna strewende om 'n kritiese bewussyn, bemagtiging, emansipasie en transformasie te bevorder. Die oogmerk van hierdie aktiewe leerraamwerk is om te help om die huidige rol van die onderwyser in die klas te verander na 'n rol van fasiliteerder en gids in die onderrig en leer-omgewing en om die onderwysers te help om selfreflekerende praktisyns te word. Die raamwerk sal ook die leerders bemagtig om aktiewe deelnemers en medebouers van kennis in die klas te word, wat gevolglik hulle sal bevry van hulle gewone passiewe rol in die ekonomieklas. Die studie is onderneem deur van die Deelnemende Aksienavorsingsmetodologie gebruik te maak (DAR). Die keuse van hierdie metodologie is as gevolg van die begrip dat persone wat 'n algemene probleem in hulle daaglikse lewens ervaar, beter ge-positioneer is om die probleem te ondersoek en oplossings vir daardie probleem te bied. 'n Span bestaande uit die ekonomie-opvoeders en -leerders het saam aan hierdie studie deelgeneem om die data te genereer wat gebruik is om die aktiewe leerraamwerk te skep. Die studie het bevind dat leerders skynbaar 'n meer diepgaande begrip van die ekonomiekonsepte verkry wanneer hulle by die praktiese illustrering daarvan in die klas betrokke is. Die studie het ook bevind dat 'n gewilligheid om weg te beweeg van die tradisionele denkwysse skynbaar 'n groot uitdaging is om hierdie leerder-gesentreerde aktiewe leerbenadering te implementeer. Die studie beveel egter aan dat 'n geleidelike en volgehoue implementering van hierdie benadering in die klas vir sowel die onderwysers as die leerders nodig is om vertroue daarin te ontwikkel en die waarde daarvan te besef.

## CHAPTER 1

### ORIENTATION TO ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASS

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The study examines the design of an active learning framework in a high-school economics class, which is aimed at enhancing learner engagement. The study argues that active learner engagement seems to improve the understanding of economics concepts, which are often taught in an abstract manner that learners find difficult to understand. Chapter 1 provides the background to this study and a brief review of the literature related to the problem under investigation. The problem statement, research question, aim of the study and the objectives of the study are also introduced. The chapter briefly describes the theoretical framework in which the study is located and introduces the research design and methodology that was followed in conducting the study. Lastly, the chapter demonstrates what the potential value of this study is and highlights the ethical issues that the researcher had to consider and take care of in conducting the study.

#### 1.2 Background and review of related literature

In economics education, the majority of the subject matter that the students will encounter can be traced to three general curriculum topics, collectively known as the elements of economic education, which include economic choices, economic concepts and economic goals (Wentland,2004:641). The focus of this study is on the methods teachers use to teach basic economics concepts in high school.

Economics teaching in high school seems to have features of a predominantly teacher-centred approach with minimal learner engagement, resulting in learner passivity in the classroom. Bonner (2010:187) argues that good practice encourages active learning, where learners are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but actively engaged in their learning. According to Powner (2006:3) the proponents of a teacher-centred approach laud its ability to cover a big scope of content information. On the other hand, the opponents of the teacher-centred approach argue that active learning techniques increase learners' engagement and thus create lifelong learners who enjoy what they are doing.

In a teacher-centred classroom dispensation, the teacher is the dominant figure who transmits information using a traditional lecture method or a chalk and talk approach to the learners, who are passive recipients of information and whose role in class seems to be limited to listening and writing notes. Whiting (2006:171) asserts that the passive environment engendered by teacher-centred methods is ill suited to spark interest and create enthusiasm for what economics as subject has to offer. In contrast to the view that education is a passive process, Greenlaw (2003:61) notes that literature on economics education suggests that active or participative learning is more productive than passive learning. In an active learning environment, the learners play an active role in learning by exploring issues and ideas under the guidance of the teacher. Instead of memorising and being mesmerised by a set of often loosely connected facts, the students learn a way of thinking, asking questions, searching for answers and interpreting observations.

In a passive learning environment, learners often find it difficult to link the concepts they are taught in class with the outside economic world and it becomes difficult for them to make meaning out of the concepts, which seem to lack relevance to them. Learners will instead resort to a mere memorisation of these concepts. Curriculum Development Council (2007:35) states that economics as a discipline has a high level of abstraction which can be very challenging for learners at the senior secondary level. To master economic knowledge, learners have to develop understanding through connecting concepts and theories with real-world events. Woods and Ziemnowiz (1997:1) therefore argue that active learning strategies can be an effective teaching method to increase the perceived relevancy of economics to the lives of the students. Engaging learners in the learning process deepens their understanding of economic concepts. Gullason (2009:87) concurs, stating that the creation of a stronger link between the material presented in the economics classroom and how economics is utilised in the real world enhances the learners' appreciation of economics concepts.

Armento (2001:179) notes the importance of a comprehension of economics concepts, arguing that learning the basic economic concepts forms an important part of the study of economics, because conceptual knowledge unlocks the language code used to discuss and analyse economic events and issues. Conceptual learning also provides the mental framework necessary for the analysis of new examples, for seeing relationships between

concepts and for identifying cause-effect relationships. Conceptual knowledge enhances the critical analysis of economic problems and issues, leading to an ability to propose viable alternatives.

### 1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem was formulated against the preceding background to this study. It states that the teaching strategies that are implemented by economics teachers in high school are teacher-centred, often referred to as the chalk and talk, traditional or lecture method, which leads to learner passivity and difficulty in understanding abstract economics concepts.

#### 1.3.1 Research question

This problem statement led to the formulation of the following research question: how can teachers create an active learning environment to enhance learner engagement in class and improve the learners' understanding of abstract economics concepts?

#### 1.3.2 Aim of the research

In the quest to provide answers to the research question, it was therefore the aim of this study to develop an active learning framework to enhance learner engagement and improve understanding of economics concepts.

#### 1.3.3 Research objectives

In order to address the aim of this study, five research objectives were identified. The first objective was to demonstrate and justify the need for an active learning framework in the economics class. The teachers and learners who participated in this study were all of the view that economics teaching can be more effective if opportunities can be created in class that will involve the learners in practically illustrating the concepts they are taught; hence they saw a need for an active learning framework. This need also stems from the curriculum changes implemented in the democratic environment in South Africa. Jacobs, Vakalisa and Gawe (2004:12) note that with the introduction of outcomes-based education, the new political dispensation in South Africa legislated that participative learning should become a reality in all classrooms. The Department Of Education (2005:16) also notes that in South

Africa the economics teacher is expected to engage learners actively in the classroom by facilitating learning, using a variety of learner-engaging methods.

The second objective of the study was to identify the main components of a suitable active learning framework. A literature review was done to find out if the problem identified in this study has been experienced by other countries, how they dealt with it and what could be the best practices from those countries. The research participants also tried and tested different strategies and made recommendations on those that seemed to show good results.

The third objective was to explore the conditions under which the framework could be implemented successfully. During the time when participants were testing the viability of various strategies, they were also noting the factors that were enabling or could enable the success of those strategies in class.

The fourth objective was to identify the possible threats or challenges to the implementation of the active learning strategies, to find the measures that could mitigate those threats and overcome the identified barriers.

The fifth objective of the study was to monitor the implementation of the framework and assess its functionality. The aim was to see if the active learning strategies implemented were enhancing learner engagement in class, and whether the learners were beginning to better understand the concepts illustrated through those strategies.

#### 1.4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is located in a critical theoretical framework, whose aims include transformation, emancipation, social justice, hope and empowerment. Henning (2004:22) states that the research using critical theory aims at promoting critical consciousness and breaking down the institutional structures and arrangements that reproduce oppressive ideologies and social inequalities that are maintained by social structures and ideologies. The framework that the study developed intends to change the current dominant role of the teacher as a knowledge transmitter to one of being a facilitator and a guide in the teaching and learning environment. The framework also aims at transforming the traditional classroom

environment of listening, repetition and reproduction to an environment where learners will feel free to question, argue their points and defend their arguments.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000:291) state that critical research can best be understood in the context of the empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name critical, must have as one of its aims an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or a public sphere within a society. Research thus becomes transformative and emancipatory. The framework that was developed in this study has the aim of emancipating the learners from their accustomed roles of passive receivers of knowledge in class and empowering them to become co-constructors of knowledge. With a better understanding of economics concepts, they will be able to apply them correctly and make better economic decisions. Learners will also be able to go beyond the stage of information acquisition to a stage where they can start to apply high-order skills like analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

#### 1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the form of participatory action research (PAR). The choice of PAR for this study was based on the principle that the people who are better positioned to research, understand, explain and address any issue are those who experience it daily. Reason and Bradbury (2008:125) argue that in critical PAR, participants aim to be critical in their way, trying to find out how particular perspectives, social structures and practices conspire to produce untoward effects, finding ways to change things so that those consequences can be avoided.

The research team was comprised of economics educators and Grade 11 learners who undertook an action oriented research activity to address a common need, that is, the improvement of the pedagogic approach to economics teaching to allow for more learner engagement in class and possibly improving learners' understanding of economics. Teachers and learners were purposely invited to participate in this study as they are the ones who experience the problem identified in the study. Their classroom experiences made them suitable informants in the process of finding solutions. Frisby, Reid, Miler and Hoerber (2005:375) state that PAR contrasts with positivist research methodologies that are characterised by an expert researcher-driven process. Walter (2009:2) concurs, stating that



PAR by its nature moves right away from the idea of an outside expert coming into the community to examine, theorise and propose solutions.

In this study research participants were treated as equal partners, because their collective experiences of the problem could make a meaningful contribution and bring different perspectives to the research project. De Vos (2005:413) argues that the PAR model is adamant that the researcher and the community members (research participants) should be equal partners in the process and that the beneficiaries should participate in solutions to their problems. Everybody involved in the research project should have a shared ownership. Together, and as equal partners, the problem and its underlying causes are investigated and a collective action is taken to bring about long-term solutions to the problem. The researcher plays a supportive and facilitative role in the research project.

PAR was chosen for this study because the aim of the study was not only to find out what the problem was, but to make a collaborative effort to bring about a desired change in the teaching of economics. Gaffney (2008:9) states that in PAR, a person or a group sets out a question of professional relevance to their current teaching context, which is usually in relation to student learning. Activities are designed to answer these questions, which the teachers then implement. The problem-solving process usually follows a series of self-reflective cycles that include planning for a change, acting and observing the results of the action, reflecting on the results and further cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

In the planning phase, the research participants met with a view of developing a common understanding of the problem. Participants conducted a SWOT analysis that gave them an idea of how much ground they could cover. A mission statement and policy to guide the operations of the team were also developed. A strategic plan followed, in which priorities were identified, roles assigned to members and time-frames set for the planned activities. In the acting and observing phase, the participants implemented the active learning activities, putting them to test in class and observing their effect on the problem. The participants were also taking note of the enabling conditions and challenges in the implementation of those strategies in class. In the reflection phase, the participants met to reflect on the

actions taken. The focus was on sharing the findings and recommendations of different members, especially on how to deal with the challenges encountered.

The discussions of the focus group meetings, observations of the implementation of the active learning strategies and free-attitude interviews generated the data that was necessary to understand the problem from the perspectives of the participants and to develop an active learning framework.

#### 1.6. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data generated from this study was analysed using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method. CDA intends to explain why and under what circumstances the producers of text have made specific linguistic choices. It was seen as a relevant method for analysing data in this study, as the researcher was interested in analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, power and control as they are manifested in language (Baker, Gabrielatis, Khosvarinik, Kryzsanowski, Mcenery and Wodak 2008:280).

The data in this study came from collaboration between participants as equal partners in this research. Usually, if involved in research, participants are used as research subjects and usually they do not have the power or a voice to propose and effect self-determined solutions to the problems that affect them. This collaboration intended to develop an active learning framework that was an intervention strategy to bring about change in the classroom practice. CDA was therefore a relevant method to analyse data in this study, because as Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000:449) note, CDA advocates interventionism in social practices. It critically investigates the discourses informed by analysing the social dimensions of language used, that analysis should have effects in society for example empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless and mobilising people to remedy social wrongs. Thus CDA openly professes strong commitment to change, empowerment and practice-orientedness.

In the process of analysis, the researcher had to first translate the data into textual form as most of it came from the audio recordings of the focus group meeting discussions. The texts were broken down into themes around which the discourse was made. The themes centred around the objectives of the study. The analysis followed Fairclough's analytic framework

constituted by three dimensions, namely the text, the discursive practice and the sociocultural practice. The implication of this analytic framework is that each discursive event has three dimensions: it is spoken or written text, it is an instance of discursive practice involving production and interpretation of texts and it is part of social practice (Rodgers, 2005:371).

The aim of using Fairclough's three-dimensional framework was to ensure that the focus of my analysis was on the linguistic features of the texts. Furthermore, I wished to focus on the circumstances related to the production and consumption of text by participants and finally on the broader social practice to which the text produced belonged (Jorgenson and Phillips 2002:68).

### 1.7 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data analysis provided the findings and recommendations related to the views the research participants on the problem under investigation. The findings and recommendations were classified under the need for an active learning framework, the possible components of a suitable framework, conditions conducive for the successful implementation of the active learning framework, threats and possible challenges to implementing the framework and evidence of the functionality of the framework.

### 1.8 VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

The study aims to contribute to the literature and to the efforts and initiatives that have been taken to facilitate a shift in the teaching of economics from a teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred one, as it is the argument of this study that learners will gain a better understanding of the subject if they are actively engaged in the classroom. Weber (2008:292) points out that students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Active involvement of students in the learning process helps them to develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with the kinds of situations and problems they will encounter in the work place, community and their personal lives.

## 1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher sought permission from the Department of Education to conduct the study and from the principals of the schools where the study was to be conducted. Consent was obtained from the parents of the learners giving their permission that the children could participate in the study. Consent from the teachers to participate in the study was also obtained. In addition, the researcher sought permission from the participants to audiotape and video-record the data-generating activities and assured them that the exercise was purely to ensure accurate data-capturing. The participants were informed that they would be given pseudonyms in this study to protect their identities and that their schools would be given assumed names. The participants were told that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. They were further informed that they could consult the researcher or the supervisor should they feel any discomfort due to their participation in the study and that professional help would be sought to assist them. The researcher stressed that the research project was purely for academic reasons and not financially sponsored and that there would therefore be no financial rewards for participating. Participants were assured that the study did not pose any threat or risk, as it would be conducted in the normal teaching and learning environment.

## 1.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 provided the background to this study and provided a brief overview of literature related to the problem being investigated. The problem statement was introduced, together with the research question that was formulated from the problem statement. The aim of the study was explained, together with the five objectives of the study. The theoretical framework of the study was explained, and I also demonstrated why the critical theoretical framework was seen as a relevant framework to realise the objectives of the study. The research methodology that the study followed was explained and the reasons why PAR was chosen were provided. A brief explanation of the PAR cycles followed in this study was given. The chapter further explained how data was generated and later analysed and interpreted. A description of CDA, the method used to analyse data in this study, was given together with the reasons why it was deemed an appropriate data analysis method for the

study. Explanation was on how the findings and recommendations were classified. Lastly, the chapter demonstrated what could be the value of the study and highlighted the ethical issues that were considered and attended to in conducting the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON ACTIVE LEARNING IN THE SUBJECT ECONOMICS

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This study is about the use of active learning approach in the teaching of high-school economics. The aim of using this approach is to enhance understanding and application of economic concepts, which are often too abstract for learners at high school. Engaging the learners in activity-based lessons enables them to understand these concepts and their application in real life. In this chapter, I explain the theoretical framework that couches this study and justify its choice. The chapter will also present a review of literature related to active learning strategies and show how the literature study assisted me in the development of the framework that is aimed at enhancing learner engagement in the classroom.

#### 2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is positioned in a critical theoretical framework. Critical theory is defined by Grant and Humphries (2006:406) as a process that aims to produce a particular kind of knowledge that seeks to realise an emancipatory interest, specifically through a critique of consciousness and ideology. Henning (2004:23) states that research using critical theory aims at promoting critical consciousness and breaking down the institutional structures and arrangements that reproduce oppressive ideologies, and the social inequalities that are produced, maintained and reproduced by these social structures and ideologies. Lived experiences and the social relations that structure these experiences are the main focus of critical research.

Ponterotto (2005:129) states that critical theory serves to disrupt and challenge the status quo. The critical-ideological paradigm is one of emancipation and transformation, one in which the researcher's proactive values are central to the task, purpose and methods of research. Henning (2004:23) maintains that critical theorists hold that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from ideological inscription. Events are understood within social and economic contexts, with emphasis on ideological critique and praxis.

### 2.2.1 The historical origin of critical theory

The origins of critical theory, as noted by Abrahams (2004:2) can be traced to a group of German social theorists known as the inner circle at the privately financed Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt, Germany, in 1923. The Institute came to be known for the 'Frankfurt School' comprised of a group of philosophers, sociologists and cultural critics who published their work in the Institute's Journal for Social Research.

The members included Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Leo Löwenthal and Frederick Pollack (Abrahams, 2004:2). These social theorists opposed the ideologies of empiricist objectivism and positivist scientism, views that held knowledge to be a matter of sensory data reduced to statistics, to cause and effect and therefore the only true or positive knowledge. To that effect, they framed a theory that integrated diverse philosophical approaches. For example, their interest in the nature of reason and truth was inspired by German idealistic thought. Their concern with social transformation was inspired by Marxism, the notion of critique and knowledge came from Kant's philosophical approach, and the idea of an emergence of spirit came from Hegelian philosophy. Issues of struggle, power, culture, hegemony and critical consciousness were of paramount importance to the members of the Frankfurt School.

### 2.2.2 The objectives of critical theory

Mahlomaholo and Netshandama (2012:41) note the objectives of critical theory. Firstly, critical theory aims to go beyond the positivist approach of formulating general laws and prediction because most of the time human behaviour is not easily amenable to laws and predictions. Instead, critical theory uses such positivistic strategies primarily for diagnostic purposes in order to attempt to measure broad patterns before taking a closer look at the individual and deeper meaning construction of the participants.

Secondly, critical theory also views language as another pillar of society. Critical theory seeks to understand the human being as the speaking subject, who makes sense of the world. As such, critical research is seen as being about interpreting other people's interpretations. This objective is in line with the observation by Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009:9), who note that the most important underlying theme is that through the use of

active learning approaches, students become more engaged in learning. Providing opportunities that allow for creativity, direct experience, and personal interpretation will not only engage students in their learning, but promote a more humanistic approach to education.

Thirdly, critical emancipatory research affirms that society is also organised based on power, which regulates interactions, roles and identities among its members. Excessive power produces ideologies of superiority and inferiority and thus has to be confronted and subverted. Critical emancipatory research is important because it thematises power and ideology. It enables marginalised people to question their status in life and want to change it.

### 2.2.3 Steps in application of critical theory

The application of critical theory goes through various phases, designated the interpretive phase, analytic phase and the educative phase by Mahlomaholo and Netshandama (2012:42).

During the interpretive phase, the researcher goes into the community where the research is to be conducted to understand the community's ethos, fears, experiences and aspirations. The aim is to be at the same wavelength with the community to achieve the goals of reciprocity, relevance and responsiveness. During this stage of this research, I met with the economics teachers and learners, initiating conversations around the issue of how learners can be actively engaged in the classroom to enhance better understanding of abstract economics concepts and also discussing other challenges which exist in the teaching and learning of economics at high-school level. The focus was on the measures that had been taken to address the problems and challenges identified and how successful they were. The impediments to the successful application of suggested solutions were identified. At this stage I made it clear to the teachers and learners that it was our joint responsibility to come up with an action plan to bring about change in the way the subject had been taught.

The analytic phase is a stage where the researcher investigates what has been found in the past about the problem identified in the community. The researcher will then go back to the community to cross-check their findings against that of the community. Hence I undertook a



literature study on how active learning has been achieved in other countries. My findings were combined with those of the participants in the study to identify the inhibiting factors, conducive conditions and best practices in the application of active learning.

In the educative phase, the conversations between the researcher and the community lay the foundation for reciprocity and mutual respect that will result in praxis, where the participants are taught and interrogate the discussions for their own empowerment and transformation. Researchers also learn and understand from other perspectives that they may not have been initiated into. This stage provides the participants to interrogate the findings of the study; in the process, they learn valuable lessons which lead to empowerment and transformation for the better.

#### 2.2.4 The role of critical theory in the achievement of the objectives of study

One of the founders of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, Max Horkheimer, described critical theory as a form of theorising motivated by a deep concern to overcome social injustice and the establishment of more just social conditions for all people. Generally, it meant that the task of the theory was practical, not just theoretical. That is, it should aim not just to bring about correct understanding, but to create social and political conditions more conducive to human flourishing than the present ones. The goal of the theory was not just to determine what was wrong with contemporary society, but to identify progressive aspects and tendencies within it, to help transform society for better (Kemmis, 2008:125).

The definitions of critical theory all refer to empowerment, transformation, equality and emancipation as some of the aims of critical research. The use of critical theory as the lens that couched this study assisted in creating a framework for transforming the teaching of economics in high school, empowering the teachers by providing them with various strategies they can use to improve learner engagement. This framework aims at assisting the learners to better understand the concepts they are taught, which in turn empowers them, as the correct application of those concepts will make them better citizens who can make correct economic choices and decisions in their daily lives. The framework also aims to emancipate the learners from their usual role of passivity in the classroom as the active learning envisaged by this study provides opportunities for their voices to be heard.

Active learning is described by Menon (2008:4) as an approach to teaching based on the principles of democracy, equality and acknowledgement of the individuality of learners, which are the principles embraced by the critical theory. The critical theoretical framework assisted me and the research participants to create a counter-hegemonic, active learning framework in the classroom. Hegemony is a concept coined by an Italian philosopher, Antonio Gramsci. According to Abrahams (2004:4), it refers to ways in which a dominant class controls, shapes and manipulates the beliefs of subordinate groups to ensure that their views become common sense. This domination occurs not by force or coercion but through a process of passive, legitimate consent. The result is that the subordinated classes work to support the needs and interests of the dominant classes and in so doing, consent to their own oppression.

Students in many classrooms willingly accept a more passive role while the teacher plays a dominant role in transmitting knowledge. Power is centred on the teacher as they control the discursive practices in the classroom. The hegemony of such classrooms is maintained through an unspoken alliance between teacher and students, in which students become passive partners in maintaining classroom order while control and power rests with the teacher (Thornton and Reynolds, 2006:277).

The application of the critical lens also assists the envisaged framework in bringing about a shift in the balance of classroom power. As Weimer (2002:14) puts it, if the goal of teaching is to promote learning, then the role the teacher assumes to accomplish that goal changes considerably. Teachers no longer function as exclusive content experts or authoritarian classroom managers. They will lecture less and be much more around the classroom than in front of it. This simply means that the teacher is now a facilitator and contributor in the class, rather than the director and source of knowledge. Hence the responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the learner.

## 2.3 DEFINITION OF OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS

### 2.3.1 Active learning

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2011:13) the word 'active' means participating in a particular sphere or activity, working or in operation. The word is further defined as a

form of verb indicating that the subject performs the action. On the other hand, learning is defined as knowledge obtained through study, experience or by being taught.

Nolan (2010:3) states that active learning is a process whereby students engage in higher-order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In an active learning curriculum, students are given opportunities for a more interactive relationship with the subject matter of a course and are encouraged to generate rather than to receive knowledge. Cooperative learning, problem-based learning, and the use of case studies and simulations are some of the approaches that promote active learning.

In this study Active learning is seen as a teaching and learning environment in which learners are provided with opportunities through a variety of activities to think, talk, write and do something about what they are learning and to reflect on what they are doing. Active learning means that learners actively participate in the construction of knowledge as they shed their accustomed role in class of being passive recipients of knowledge from the teacher. In the economics class, active learning would mean that instead of learners' merely listening and taking notes or trying to memorise the economic concepts and theories as presented by the teacher, a classroom environment is created which allows them talk about and apply the economic concepts they learn, and furthermore to explore the relationships between these concepts and other conflicting theories or viewpoints.

### 2.3.2 Economics education

Economics is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (2011:454) as a branch of knowledge concerned with the production, consumption and transfer of wealth. The Department of Education (2011:08) defines Economics as the study of how individuals, businesses, governments and other organisations within society choose to use scarce resources to satisfy their numerous wants and needs in a manner that is efficient, equitable and sustainable.

Economics education is a field within economics that focuses on two main themes: firstly the current state of and efforts to improve the economics curriculum, materials and methods used to teach economics at all educational levels. Secondly it focuses on research into the effectiveness of alternative instructional techniques in economics.

### 2.3.3 Learner engagement

The Oxford English dictionary (2011: 811) defines the word learn as acquiring knowledge or skill in (something) through study or experience or by being taught. A learner can thus be seen as someone in the process of obtaining knowledge through study. The word engagement is defined as been occupied or in use.

Hoff and Lopus (2012:2) note that student engagement in the context of learning is referred to as a condition in which the learner is motivated to develop meaning about their experience and is willing to expend sustained effort to that end. Behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement are notable divisions of student engagement whereby behavioural engagement is represented by involvement in learning tasks, effort, persistence, and class participation. On the other hand, emotional engagement refers to the affective reactions to classmates, teachers, the classroom and the school, while cognitive engagement involves investment in learning, learning goals, self-regulation and planning.

Learner engagement refers to the learners' willingness, need, desire and eagerness to participate in the learning process and also to succeed. Learner engagement can also be defined as the quality of the efforts learners devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to the desired outcomes, furthermore, learner engagement can also be seen as the combination of learners' time on the task and their willingness to participate in activities related to what they are learning.

Kibota (2010:11) points out the characteristics of learner engagement. The first is an emphasis on higher-order thinking. Learners become cognitively engaged when they are asked to wrestle with new concepts, when they are pushed to understand, for example by being required to explain their reasoning, defend their conclusions or explore alternative solutions. Secondly, when learners are actively participating in their learning, they are more likely to be engaged. When learners are participating in a role-play simulation or competitive games, their engagement is greater than when they are listening passively to the teacher. Thirdly, simulations and games offer the learners a different variety of learning experiences. These experiences change the pacing of the class and make the class more interesting for the learners. The fourth characteristic focuses on collaboration. Learner

engagement in the learning process can be enhanced by allowing them to work in pairs or small groups on activities that require sharing meaningful interactions.

## 2.4 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In this section I provide a description of what literature tells us about active learning in economics, which this study believes is an approach that can help to solve the problem of learner passivity in class which seems to be the reason why learners find it difficult to understand abstract economic concepts. Specific reference will be made to the need for active learning in the economics class, which is part of the constructivist framework; the active learning strategies applied in teaching economics in different countries; the effectiveness of these strategies in class; the challenges and recommendations to ameliorate such challenges in applying active learning; and the conditions necessary for implementing active learning in the economics class.

### 2.4.1 Active learning in the classroom

Active learning is an umbrella term that refers to several models of instruction that focus the responsibility for learning on learners. Michel, Cater and Varela (2009:398) state that active learning is a broadly inclusive term used to describe several models of instruction that hold learners responsible for their learning. Dengler (2008:482) argues that active learning means that rather than passively receiving information, students are interactively engaged in their learning through activities that foster the development of critical thinking. Active learning in the classroom may occur through a range of activities such as role-playing, small group work, integration of multimedia images and sounds, classroom discussions and writing exercises.

Active learning can therefore be seen a learning environment in which learners do not just passively sit in class listening to the lesson as presented by the teacher, copying notes and providing answers to the questions when requested by the teacher. Instead, the learners are active participants in the construction of knowledge through a range of classroom activities that engage them with the learning material as they relate what they learn to their experiences. They also question theories and work towards application of the material they learn. Nguyen and Trimarchi (2010:3) argue that in practical terms active learning means

that students must do more than just attend classes, take verbatim notes, read assigned texts and work on suggested sample questions. The aim is to be able to transform the raw information they receive in class into a coherent body of acquired knowledge that can be used in new or different situations, e.g. work or experiences outside the classroom. Active learning requires students to go beyond the first phase of acquisition of raw information and engage in higher order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

#### 2.4.2 The need for active learning in economics

In the traditional way of teaching economics, the teacher is a dominant figure and takes centre stage in class, assuming the role of a powerful figure with all the knowledge to be transmitted to the learners. The teacher explains different concepts and theories, relying on the textbook and the chalk and talk approach, while the learners remain passive recipients of knowledge. Goma (2002:85) notes that despite the evidence that student approaches to learning differ, educator approaches to teaching have tended to exhibit less variation, with the majority of economics educators employing the traditional lecture method. Dalton (2010:252) has also noted that traditional economics education has focused on a lecture format for the delivery of content. It is corroborated by Bonner (2010:187), who also noted that it was common practice for teachers to transmit information which students are expected to memorise.

This approach to teaching, as noted by Greenlaw (2003:6), has often led students to view education as a passive process in which teachers are the sources of knowledge that will be dispensed to them if they simply attend class and take copious notes. Zain, Subramaniam, Rashid and Ghani (2009:93) state that such a perception results in students coming to class unprepared, reluctant to exercise reasoning and engage in discussions, and failing to provide two-way communication. Consequently, such attitudes have led students to become assisted learners rather than self-directed learners, impairing their ability to survive in a competitive world. Whiting (2006:171) asserts that the passive learning environment engendered by the lecture method is ill-suited to sparking and creating enthusiasm for what economics has to offer. This is affirmed by Davis (2009:132), who notes that the traditional lecture has led students to think of knowledge as a package of content waiting to be transmitted, with the lecture becoming a delivery vehicle of factual subject knowledge to

the students. One drawback of this type of learning environment is that it encourages passive and rote learning, leaving no room for problem-solving and exploration of facts. Another drawback of the traditional lecture method appears to be a lack of student attention. The over-reliance on the lecture method appears to lead to students becoming disengaged in class and it becomes common for some to drift off to sleep, for others to talk among themselves while others start to play some games in class while the teacher is busy with the lesson (Mitchel, Cater and Varela, 2009:400).

Attempts to overcome the limitations of the traditional chalk and talk approach in teaching economics have led to calls by education practitioners and universities for changes in the learning approach from teacher-centredness to student-centredness (Zain, Subramaniam, Rashid, and Ghani, 2009:93). In proposing a shift from the passive learning environment created by the traditional lecture and chalk and talk methods, Bonner (2010:187) argues that good practice encourages active learning, where students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but are actively engaged in their learning. Dalton (2010:252) points out that in the 1990s the constructivist approach to education began to take hold. This student-centred, active learning, project-based or inquiry-based approach resulted in cooperative learning exercises and a variety of innovative classroom techniques that enable students to construct their learning from within. Aldridge, Fraser and Sebela (2004:245) note that the constructivist theory acknowledges that the teacher is not the transmitter of knowledge but rather a facilitator and provider of experiences from which learners will learn; and that learners are not absorbers of knowledge but active participants in constructing their own meaning based on strongly held perceptions.

The view that teachers should not be transmitters of knowledge but rather facilitators in knowledge construction is shared by Huali (2011:641), who states that constructivism advocates a learner-centred learning environment. In such an environment, the teacher plays the role of helper and facilitator in meaning construction rather than knowledge imparter and indoctrinator. The student is in turn an active meaning constructor rather than a passive recipient of external stimuli and the subject to be taught. In a constructivist framework, knowledge is therefore not a product that can be delivered. Scheyvens, Griffin, Liu and Bradford (2008:53) state that the proponents of a constructivist approach believe that knowledge does not exist independently of the knower. In other words, if a student is

to learn something, there must be an interaction between the student's internal knowledge structure and the outside world. This interaction can be supported by requiring the student to both participate in an activity and then reflect on their experience with the activity. This process of engagement with learning enables students to internalise key concepts and make linkages between theory and practice.

In a further argument for the use of learner-engaging or learner-centred strategies in an economics class, Joshi and Marri (2006:199) maintain that constructivism is the preferred form of pedagogy in both progressive economics education and high-school social science classrooms. The reason is that economics concepts such as scarcity, markets and reserve banking are best understood in action through experience and makes students, in having fun, are more engaged by such methods. This view is affirmed by Mtshali (2008:11), who also notes that in a constructive teaching and learning environment, the emphasis is on the way in which knowledge is basically constructed by the students through understanding and applying fundamental economic concepts and principles in relevant contexts.

Economics as a discipline studies human behaviour in relation to choices, resource allocation and coordination. This body of knowledge has a high level of abstraction, which can be very challenging for learners at high school. To master economic knowledge, learners have to develop understandings through connecting concepts and theories with real-world events and this requires them to shed their passive roles in class (Curriculum Development Council, 2007:35). Salemi (2005:50) also affirms the notion that for students to understand abstract economic concepts, they must be active co-constructors of knowledge in class and further argues that, for students to understand economics, they should work with economics concepts in class every day, solving puzzles and analysing policies. Further, they should also construct arguments and support them.

The subject of economics deals with the issues that learners are confronted with in their daily lives and should therefore be taught in such a manner that they can easily relate what they learn in class with realities outside the classroom, which unfortunately is not always the case. Hirsch (2003:1) notes that economics is often taught as a dry, analytical subject that is difficult for learners to relate to everyday life. Hirsch (2003:1) adds that teaching economics effectively to high-school learners requires that the subject be made real to



them, which should not be difficult as they are surrounded by economics in their daily lives. They are constantly making economic choices when they buy goods and services and they operate the equivalent of small businesses in activities such as fund-raising.

Teaching economics using the traditional teacher-centred methods does not do much to make the learners understand economic concepts, because they remain passive recipients of knowledge. Learners find it difficult to understand and make meaning of the concepts they are taught, as they cannot relate them to the outside economic world. To this effect, Hervani and Helms (2004:267) argue that higher levels of understanding require active involvement in the application and use of concepts. Active involvement in the learning process seems to help, particularly when students are learning how to solve problems. It is also necessary for students to enjoy real-life examples and develop a greater appreciation for the relevance of the concepts they learn. Actual current economic events are brought into the classroom to help fill the gaps created by students' lack of real-world experience, once again strengthening their motivation to learn.

It is important for teachers to actively engage the learners in the lesson as this has the potential to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Ruffle (2003:123) notes that economic concepts are taught at such a level of abstraction that the learner views these concepts as irrelevant to understanding real-world phenomena. He further argues that efforts to show the relevance of economic concepts at the earliest stages of a learner's training can prove invaluable to their outlook on the discipline.

The application of economics knowledge in real life requires that students should have a full understanding of the economics concepts that goes beyond mere memorisation. Saunders and Gilliard (2005:9) state that economic concepts are the basis of economic understanding. They provide the analytical tools needed to understand and make reasoned decisions. These concepts also constitute the basic vocabulary of economics. Armento (2001:179) concurs, stating that learning the basic concepts forms an important part of the study of economics, for conceptual knowledge unlocks the language code used to discuss and analyse economic events and issues. In addition, conceptual knowledge provides the mental framework for analysis of new examples, for seeing relationships among concepts, and for identifying

cause-effect relationships. Most importantly, conceptual knowledge allows for critical analysis of economic problems and issues and for proposal of viable alternatives.

The question is: how can economics teachers who are confronted with the task of teaching a subject learners tend to dislike and frequently find has no real application or relevance to their lives, alter their instruction so that students are more engaged and begin to critically evaluate economic concepts? Rosales and Journal (2012:53) maintain that one of the courses of action is to change not the substance of what is being taught, but the way in which it is presented and applied so that the application and the relevance of the material is made more obvious to the learners.

The content knowledge of teachers must be complemented by their didactic knowledge for effective teaching and learning to take place. Hence the teacher must continually search for methods of teaching that can make an impact on the learners. Parkinson and Sorgman (2005:1) explain that, while teachers may have economics knowledge after some form of economics education training, they do not necessarily have the disposition to teach economic concepts to their learners, which may result in their discomfort with economics. Parkison and Sorgman (2005:2) argue that the active learning approach in economics (using simulations, role-plays and games) has a powerful effect on teachers' efficacy with economic content and curriculum. Joshi and Marri (2006:199) further argue that these methods promote active rather than passive learning, through personal experience rather than vicarious experience, and that they lead to greater learning.

The adoption and implementation of active learning approaches in class will depend amongst other factors on the continual training of teachers and the development of the support materials. Maxwell, Bellisimo and Mergedoller (2001:73) note that the Council on Economic Education (CEE) has produced and distributed a wide variety of curriculum materials that promote active learning in high-school economics. In many of the activities, learners participate in a process designed to further their understanding of economic principles and concepts. The CEE, formerly known as the National Council for Economic Education (NCEE), is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing materials and training for teachers of economics, personal finance and entrepreneurship between kindergarten

and Grade 12. The CEE-sponsored teacher training workshops aim to improve economics instruction in US schools (Leet and Lopus, 2012:11).

## 2.5 ACTIVE LEARNING IN ECONOMICS IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA CONTEXT

Economics as a school subject is very prominent in the United States and this is evident from the observation by Leet and Lopus (2012:9) that since the inception of the national economic movement in the middle of the twentieth century, the prominence of economics has grown in the US public schools. Part of this rising tide is manifested in state requirements for high-school economics courses. As of 2009, 21 states required that students take a high-school economics course as a graduation requirement, up from 17 states in 2007. The increased importance of economics in high school means that it is critically important that it be taught well and that teachers are well trained to teach it.

One of the problems with economics education in the United States as identified by Wion (2008:2) is the strategies teachers use to teach the subject. Many teachers are stuck on the traditional direct instruction methods that have been in practice for many years, for example the chalk and talk method and the lecture method in which the teacher addresses the students and uses the blackboard to provide examples or illustrations. These direct instruction methods seem to be the cause of economics students becoming bored in class and losing interest in the material taught. According to Rosales and Journal (2012:58), the economic instruction the learners receive in US high schools is too often so abstract that learners cannot make adequate connection between theory being presented in class and the real-life economic decisions affecting their daily lives. Onger (2009:2) also notes that the lecture method has been found to be the predominant mode of instruction in economics, as opposed to other teaching techniques that actively involve learners. In an effort to reduce the heavy reliance on the lecture method, Freisner and Alexelson (2006:1) note that the economics educators in the US have posited new approaches to improve the appeal and effectiveness of economics courses. One common theme in the economic education literature is to change the way in which economics is taught, for instance through reducing the use of the traditional chalk and talk method in favour of the active learning approach. Suggested alternative approaches to the chalk and talk approach method include the use of games and scenarios in teaching certain economics concepts.

## 2.6 STRATEGIES USED IN THE USA ECONOMICS EDUCATION

Rosales and Journal (2012:58) assert that incorporating games and scenarios encourage learners to consider on their own why consumers and producers make certain decisions when they enter the market place. They enhance the relevance of economic theory and in turn helps learners to learn and remember the economic concepts long after the exams are passed. Wion (2008:2) contends that if teachers were able to use effective methods in economics teaching, their students would be able to better comprehend the information, making them better citizens of not only the US but the world as well.

### 2.6.1 Problem-based learning

In contrast with the textbook-driven curriculum for high-school economics, problem-based learning (PBL) uses a problem-based approach. Rather than reading or hearing about the facts and concepts that define an academic field of study, students solve realistic (albeit simulated) problems that reflect the decisions and dilemmas people face every day. PBL is a powerful and engaging learning strategy that leads to sustained and transferable learning. It is argued that PBL fosters the development of self-directed learning strategies and makes it easier for students to retain knowledge and apply it in new and unfamiliar situations (Mergendoller, Maxwell and Bellisimo 2006:4).

PBL is described by Fosythe (2002:4) as a learner-centred system whereby learners, working in small groups, generate the information necessary to respond to, or to solve a specific problem or task. In looking at the potential which this approach has on empowering and on engaging learners, Sahin (2007:64) notes that PBL is a teaching method that encourages learners to apply critical thinking and problem-solving skills along with content knowledge to real life problems and issues. In this approach, learning is more student-centred and less teacher-centred, learning is an active process and students are responsible for their learning. The PBL environment also has the potential to provide learners with opportunities to come to grasp with the abstract economic concepts they often struggle with. It is noted by Sahin (2007:66) that in PBL modules, concepts from different disciplines are integrated to help students to learn related concepts in a meaningful way in the context of each other.

PBL, unlike the traditional method of teacher-centeredness, aims to create a classroom environment where learners actively participate in the teaching and learning process. They are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and to become more self-directed than solely dependent on their teachers to provide solutions for them. Mergendoller et al. (2006:50) state that PBL deviates from the conventional instructional strategies by restructuring traditional teacher-student interactions towards active, self-directed learning by students. Students pursue their own problem solutions by clarifying a problem, posing pertinent questions, researching these questions and producing a product that displays their thinking. These activities are generally conducted in collaborative learning groups that often solve the same problem in different ways and arrive at different answers. The teacher plays a facilitative role, answering questions, monitoring positive and negative behaviour, and watching for opportunities to direct students to specific resources or providing clarifying explanations.

The implementation of PBL does not seem to be an easy task for teachers, a challenge noted by Finkelstein et al. (2010:5), who state that teachers often have difficulty incorporating problem-based teaching in classroom instruction. Hence the Buck Institute for Education developed a PBL approach to assist teachers. The Institute partnered with university economists and teachers to create the Problem-based Economics curriculum. The curriculum complies with the National Council for Economics Education (NCEE) standards, and it is supported by professional development for teachers.

#### 2.6.2 The effectiveness of problem-based learning

In a study to determine the effectiveness of PBL in enhancing student knowledge of macroeconomics, five teachers at four different high schools that participated in the study taught macroeconomics content using a PBL unit ('The president's Dilemma') with one or more classes and a traditional lecture approach with one class (Mergendoller et al,2006:2). All teachers had attended at least one week-long training workshop to prepare them to use the PBL unit in their classes. The teachers were asked to spend the same amount of time and to address the same concepts in both the traditional and the PBL classes. Throughout the traditional class sessions, teachers took the responsibility for transmitting an understanding of the key concepts to students and rarely asked the students to teach each

other or explain a concept to a small working group, something that consistently occurred during the PBL class sessions (Mergendoller et al. 2006:52).

A 16-item pre- and post-test drawn from the Test of Economic Literacy and the test bank accompanying a widely used high-school economics textbook was used to assess student achievement gains. At the conclusion of the study, Finkelstein (2010:6) notes that data collected from 252 economics students and the five teachers showed that the PBL approach increased learning of macroeconomics, especially when teachers were well trained. Mergendoller et al. (2006:59) report that data obtained from their study led them to reject their hypothesis that there is no difference in achievement, as measured via pre-test-post-test changes in macroeconomics knowledge, between students in PBL and traditional instructional environments, because the data indicated that PBL was more effective than the traditional approach in helping students learn basic macroeconomic concepts.

### 2.6.3 Experiments as a strategy in economics education

Experiments or demonstrations have been identified as another effective method of communicating economic concepts to learners. Durham, McKinnon and Schulman (2007:1) argue that introducing experiments into the economics classroom is warranted by the evolution of the discipline itself and the need to more actively involve students in the learning process. Brock and Lopus (2006:189) argue that the rationale for using this methodology is that it helps students to remember and apply abstract concepts and that it can be successfully used with students of differing ability levels. Furthermore, it promotes economic understanding and because of the fun it brings to class, students are more interested in the subject matter.

Classroom experiments have the potential to enhance the critical thinking skills of the learners. Hoyt and McGolrick (2012:90) state that classroom experiments are one of the active learning techniques intended to promote higher-order thinking. They help teachers to illustrate concepts and engage learners in the learning process, making economic theory easier for learners to understand. A classroom experiment helps learners to make economic decisions in a controlled environment. When designed well and implemented correctly, experiments help learners discover important economic concepts for themselves, which

enables them to take greater ownership of their new-found knowledge, generating higher levels of engagement with the subject and potentially longer-term retention of the material.

The use of classroom experiments provides the opportunities for the learners to be actively engaged with the concepts they are taught while receiving assistance from other students and the teacher in making meaning of such concepts. Wion (2008:13) states that by using experiments, demonstrations or dramatisations, teachers can give the classroom a laboratory format for providing a more active learning environment in which learners can be meaningfully engaged by the material, with other learners and with the teacher. Kaplan and Balkenborg (2010:100) concur, stating that experiments are a fun way not only to learn, but also to teach. They can inspire students to learn more about a topic and provide an easy way to engage learners in discussion. The teacher can use this experience in classroom discussions and guide the learners towards understanding new theoretical concepts, which can then be used to analyse data and other economic phenomena.

Studies on the use of economic experiments in the class have shown that the experiments put students directly into real economic situations. Jackstad et al. (2008:155) argue that experiments provide a powerful connection between economic theory and direct experience. In order to effectively use and realise the potential benefits of classroom experiments, teacher training seems to be helpful, as noted with PBL. Jackstad et al. (2008:155) note that teacher training is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of classroom experiments. Specifically, teacher training in experimental economics should stress the creative use of non-monetary incentives. Experiments should be hand-run rather than computerised and tied directly and explicitly to school curricula.

#### 2.6.4 The effectiveness of classroom experiments

A classroom experiment known as 'A Trading Experiment' (Hazlett 2003:81) which was used to promote discussion on the social origins and characteristics of money provides some form of evidence as to the effect classroom experiments may have on economics students. Hazlett (2003:89) reports that the experiment had a positive effect on the students and that it was effective as students were placed directly in the economic environments being studied. After participating in the experiment, students brought first-hand experience to the discussion and could actively demonstrate how social conditions (specialisation and

decentralisation) give rise to money, and the resulting benefits of using money. Hazlett (2003:89) concludes that classroom experiments serve to bring abstract concepts to life and provide a powerful demonstration of the principles of economics at work.

In the study conducted by Durham, McKinnon and Schulman (2007:162) to examine the effectiveness of using economics experiments in the classroom and their effects on student performance, student attitudes towards economics, and economic knowledge retention, the students were separated into control and treatment classes. The two groups were taught using a traditional lecture and a class discussion format, but experiments designed to illustrate specific economics concepts were used only in the treatment group in place of the additional lecture, class discussion and examples used in the control classes for those topics.

The results of the study showed that classroom experiments improved student performance on questions covering the topics that the experiments were designed to explore. The study also showed that students seemed to benefit more from some experiments than from others. One possible factor may be the nature of the material being demonstrated. For example, the study found that the experiments were more useful than the lecture method for demonstrating concepts that were either less concrete or more complicated to understand (Durham, McKinnon and Schulman, 2007:177).

#### 2.6.5 Simulation games and role-play as a strategy for economics education

One other strategy the teacher can use to actively engage the learners and make the teaching of economics less abstract is the use of simulations, games and role-playing in teaching economic concepts. In defining the terms games, simulations and simulation game, Zapalska, Brozik and Rudd (2012:165) state that in an educational setting a game would entail an exercise that has a winner who or which is an individual or team that first successfully completes the requirements of the game. The game provides a competitive setting for learning a specific subject matter. On the other hand, a simulation models a proportion of reality in a controlled setting and can reproduce the social, economic or political processes of particular systems of interaction. Students assume roles in the system and try to understand how the system operates by participating in it as members, not merely as observers. In a simulation exercise, there is no winner as the focus is on



situational learning. A simulation game is a combination of the two techniques that uses the role-playing of a simulation for learning specific concepts, and has a winner.

The teaching of economics by using games and simulation seems to have potentially positive effects in understanding the teaching material and is gaining momentum among teachers. Zapalska and Brozik (2008:345) note that the use of games and simulation as a teaching strategy is receiving serious attention and many economics teachers have embraced them with great enthusiasm. Simulation and games require learners' active participation and decision-making throughout the learning process. They allow real-life behaviours in simulated scenarios and elicit learners' responses to situations that illustrate realistic environments. Zapalska et al. (2012:164) further state that active learning with simulations and games enables students to actively experiment, test and apply what they have learnt in other and more complex situations. The aim is to allow students to experience something new and encourage them to reflect on their experience. This reflection helps active learners to develop new skills or new ways of thinking.

The experience that is provided by participation in simulation games and role-playing may help the learners to gain better understanding of the concepts they learn, as these concepts are brought to reality and put to practice in the classroom under the guidance of the teacher. Sullivan (2003:70) argues that as a learning device, role-playing exercises help the learners to be actively engaged with the learning material, because to participate in a role-play they first need to research the topic at hand. Role-playing exercises also provide the learners with an opportunity to hone their communication skills by orally presenting a position. Sullivan (2003:70) adds that by requiring learners to explain and defend their positions, a role-playing exercise forces them to draw upon both theory and supporting data in order to make their case. Furthermore, a role-playing exercise engages learners cognitively and socially. Cognitively, they have to use abstract economic principles to develop a policy position. Socially, learners encounter the complex interplay of political, cultural, and economic influences on policy-making.

The value of simulation games and role-playing exercises is also noted by Lantis, Kille and Krain (2010:8) who state that simulation, games and role-playing represent an important set of active learning approaches. The educational objectives of simulation, games and role-

playing include deepening conceptual understanding of a particular phenomenon, set of interactions, or socio-political process by using learner interaction to bring abstract concepts to life. They provide the learners with a real imaginary environment within which to act out a given situation with the aim of enabling students to actively experience rather than read or hear about the constraints and motivations for action experienced by real players or to think about what they might do in a particular situation that the teacher has dramatised for them.

One example of a role-playing simulation used in the US economics classes is called 'The Summit of the Americans'. It is a macroeconomic behavioural simulation in which students act as trade representatives negotiating trade agreements on behalf of their respective countries. The simulation challenges the learners to process information efficiently and quickly, to apply economic analysis, to sharpen their decision-making skills, and to improve their negotiation skills with the ultimate goal of developing and implementing a plan to enhance their country's economic and political well-being (Wentland, 2004:643).

Well-designed games and simulations have the potential to bring the real economic life into the classroom and make it easier for the learners to understand the abstract concepts, as their interest and motivation is enhanced by their participation in these activities. Zapalska and Brozik (2008:365) contend that games and simulations give students real experiences and make concepts learnt more meaningful. These exercises seem to have a strong impact on learners, because role-playing facilitates effective active learning and acceptance of new concepts and generates increased student interest, enthusiasm and motivation. They are active learning instruments that can be used for improving teaching effectiveness through promotion of active and effective gathering and organisation of information followed by comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

One important element of these exercises is a debriefing session in which the teacher and learners should participate after the activity. According to Zapalska et al. (2012:169), the debriefing session allows the learners to take theoretical concepts and connect them with the exercise. Basic concepts that are practised and learnt while playing the game become more meaningful when students link them with their experiences. Practice and experience, which are basic elements of games, help students reinforce the material learnt. As students

gather information actively, effectively and systematically, theories are no longer abstract concepts that are memorised. In order to realise the potential benefits of games and simulations, teachers need to overcome some challenges in the implementation of these exercises, for example time constraints in the classroom, evaluation of the exercise and the extent of guidance provided to the participants in the games and simulations.

## 2.7 ACTIVE LEARNING IN ECONOMICS TEACHING IN THE MALDIVES CONTEXT

The teaching of economics in high schools in the Maldives has also demonstrated heavy reliance on the teacher-centred approach, indicating that learners in some instances did not show sound understanding of the subject. Nazeer (2006:3) observed that there was a general pattern of chalk and talk or one-way transmissive teaching as a strategy employed by the economics teachers in Maldives secondary schools. Nazeer(2006:41) also notes that most of the students who have completed a secondary course in economics exhibit significant deficiencies in their knowledge of economics and lack skills to analyse basic economic problems. Many of the students at the Faculty of Education (FE) of the Maldives College of Higher Education indicated that their lack of knowledge and skills was largely attributable to being taught by rote memorisation and sitting passively in classrooms with the result that they quickly forgot what they studied or memorised for their examinations.

In an attempt to find out the possible reasons for such a lack of knowledge and skills among the economics high-school graduates of Maldives, Nazeer (2006:42) states that one possible reason may be that teachers have a traditional approach to teaching economics based on the transmission model. The model does not promote interaction between prior and new knowledge nor the conversations that are necessary for internalisation and deep understanding. Traditional teaching is concerned with the teacher being the controller of the learning environment. The teacher holds power and responsibility and plays the role of instructor and decision-maker.

The dominant role played by teachers in the Maldives classrooms is based on the view that knowledge is a package that can be delivered to learners while they are passively seated in the classroom and not actively engaged with the economic concepts they are being taught. However, passivity and rote learning do not contribute to lifelong learning. Against this background, a cooperative learning model, Learning Together, has been incorporated in the

teaching of economics in Maldives to enhance learner engagement in the teaching and learning of economics at secondary school level. Nazeer (2006:5) notes that contemporary learning theories such as constructivism suggest that knowledge is a product of ways in which the student's mind is engaged by classroom activities to construct knowledge and develop understanding through interactions and that students generally prefer to be actively involved in small group learning rather than always sitting passively in a desk. Consequently, through active participation in cooperative learning, learners can develop more positive attitude towards teaching and learning.

Cooperative learning is described by Yamarik (2007:261) as a teaching method where students work in small groups to help one another learn academic material. In groups, students are expected to help each other find answers to questions rather than seeking answers from the teacher. Students in cooperative groups work with each other to ensure that everyone in the group understands the concepts being taught. Cooperative learning techniques provide a structure through which students interact with one another in pairs or small groups. A key to this interaction is to create a dependency within the group. Ultimately, the success of the group depends on its ability to make certain that everyone grasps the key ideas.

It is important to note that merely placing learners in groups and expecting them to work on the assigned task does not necessarily mean cooperative learning. Becker et al. (2006:41) note that economics teachers frequently assign students to work in groups for class presentations or a project, yet groups are not necessarily cooperative learning groups and do not always operate as effectively and efficiently as teachers would like. Students may gather for study or work sessions and find that one student has done all the work and ends up teaching the material to other, less prepared students. Whereas the one student who is teaching the others is actively engaged in learning, the other students who are listening and taking in the material are passively learning.

The point that cooperative learning goes beyond a mere grouping of students for a particular project is also highlighted by Zain et al. (2009:93) who argue that cooperative learning is not merely being physically near to other students at the same table and sharing materials among students. Nor it is limited to assigning a report to a group of students in

which only one student does all the work and the other students place their names on the product. It is also not limited to students doing the task on individual basis with the instruction that the student who finishes first would assist the other students.

In explaining what cooperative learning environment entails, Peterson and McGoldrick (2009:80) state that cooperative learning exercises provide a wide range of activities to engage students in the learning process while developing deeper appreciation for multiple perspectives. Such exercises promote an environment in which the learning of one student is enhanced by the contributions of all group members. Individuals are motivated to take responsibility for contributing to learning within the group. No member can avoid contributing during the exercise and many groups are engaged in the activity simultaneously.

Two theories that support the use of the cooperative learning approach are the motivational model and cognitive model. The motivational model suggests that when students work together towards a common goal, as they do when cooperative learning takes place, their efforts would be directed towards helping each other learn and succeed. Similarly, the cognitive model argues that students must be active learners to enable them to elaborate and explain the material learnt to other students in order to retain the information (Zain et al. 2009:94).

The cooperative learning model, Learning Together, used in the economics teaching in Maldives is based on the model developed by Johnson and Johnson at the University of Minnesota. It involves the students working together in small heterogeneous groups to produce a group project. The model is based upon integration of five essential elements into each activity or assignment that is necessary to construct positive and effective cooperative group learning situations. Slagle (2009:6) argue that there are essential elements of which the teacher must be aware for cooperative learning to be effective. This view is echoed by Becker et al. (2006:42), who state that any cooperative learning exercise must have five key elements in place and functioning well for it to be successful.

The first element is positive interdependence, which occurs when each group member learns to depend on the rest of the group to achieve shared tasks. It focuses on the group and conveys a message of us rather than me (Slagler, 2009:7). The second one is face-to-

face interaction which according to Becker et al. (2006:42) will take place when students have time in class to engage in conversations with members of their group, because talking about economics helps the students to learn the language of economics and gives them quick and helpful feedback on how well they understand a concept. The third element is individual accountability which occurs when each student's performance is evaluated as an individual and the results are given back to the group and the individual. It is important that each member of the group participate fully and does not attempt to ride on the laurels of students who did their work (Nazeer, 2006:74). The fourth element is interpersonal and small group skills, which Slagler (2009:9) maintains must be provided by the teacher, as students are not necessarily skilled to handle group work without a measure of instruction. The fifth element is group processing, which occurs when group members are given time and opportunities to discuss and evaluate how effectively the groups are working to achieve their goal and maintain effective working relationships within the groups (Nazeer, 2006:75).

## 2.8 ACTIVE LEARNING IN ECONOMICS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The South African education system has also experienced the need for a shift from a predominantly teacher-centred classroom environment towards a more learner-centred environment. Aldridge, Fraser and Mokgokong (2004:245) note that after the new South African government came into existence in 1994, the ministry of education decided that from 1998 the old curriculum would be phased out and gradually replaced by Curriculum 2005, which is based on the ideal of lifelong learning. Teaching practices adopted by Curriculum 2005 require that learners participate in classroom activities, become more involved in the learning process, and take responsibility for their learning. The curriculum also requires that teachers should give learners the opportunity to work at their own pace according to individual abilities and level of development. It is envisaged that teachers, as facilitators in the own classrooms, will use variety of strategies such as cooperative learning, experiential learning, inquiry or investigation and problem-solving amongst others.

The teaching of economics in South Africa has also shown that learners have experienced some problems with the understanding of this subject, which entails abstract concepts that are often difficult to understand when taught using only direct instruction. The Department of Basic Education (2012:3) states that economics appears to be a study of complicated

tables, charts and statistics and that for learners to start the discussion of economics they need to understand the concept of scarcity and the two branches of study within economics, namely micro- and macroeconomics. For learners to understand branches of economics, they first need to understand economic concepts and principles and they should understand the process of applying economic concepts and principles to the analysis of economic issues and problems. This understanding can be enhanced by providing the learners with opportunities to actively engage with these concepts in class. However, the economics class is generally still dominated by teachers who rely on the chalk and talk approach. This observation is also noted by Mtshali (2008:9), who argues that economics teachers tend to adopt a traditional lecture method and are too reliant on the textbook as opposed to interactive methods of teaching that are both engaging and student-centred.

In keeping with the outcomes-based approach the DoE LPG Economics (2005:8) clearly specifies that the teaching of economics should not be confined to the classroom, but should include interaction with the outside world as this will create opportunities for research and practical work, thus shifting the emphasis from rote learning to the development of life skills, values and attitudes. Various methods have been suggested and applied in economics education which is aimed at making economics concepts more practical by engaging learners in the classroom. The suggestion that more learner-engaging activities should be used in the teaching of economics is also supported by Mtshali (2008:9), who argues that teachers should adopt learner-engaging methods such as classroom experiments, simulations, case studies and games. The use of innovative teaching methods in economics such as classroom experiments is an example of interactive teaching and learning. These methods bring abstract concepts to life and provide powerful demonstrations of the principles of economics at work.

Successful learning and teaching in economics relies heavily on the teaching approach chosen by the teacher, as the greatest challenge is to ensure application of knowledge. The LPG Economics document (2005:16) states that the economics teacher should engage learners actively in their own learning by facilitating learning, using group work, getting learners to talk and accommodating individual learner needs. In experiential (active) learning, learners get to practice life skills in the classroom and reflect on these experiences. Facilitation allows the voices of the learners to be heard and allows the learners to

participate in their own learning. Group work allows learners to assist and be assisted by others and encourage the practising of different roles. This approach to teaching and learning puts more emphasis on learning through actual experience or through simulated real-life economic events as well as in-depth content knowledge. In this kind of teaching learning environment, the teacher is a facilitator and organiser of learning rather than the source and focus of all information.

## 2.9 STRATEGIES USED FOR ACTIVE LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICA

### 2.9.1 The use of simulation games

One attempt to bring the abstract economics concepts to reality in the classroom and improve active learner participation in the lesson is through the use of simulation games. Davis (2011:1) notes that learners perceive economics as a problematic, abstract and theoretical subject, which results in their disengagement from the subject. He suggests that the solution does not lie in adding more teaching or more workbooks, but in changing the learning environment and the manner in which the content is taught by breaking away from the traditional method of teaching and combining it with games. Van Wyk (2013:126) also notes that attempts have been made to enhance student learning experiences by increasing their motivation, by attempting to focus their attention, and by helping them to construct meaningful and permanent records of their learning in economics education. To encourage this development, Van Wyk (2013:125) states that learning activities become important and the use of simulated games is one example of the teaching strategies that can be used to encourage, create interest, develop critical thinking and reflective skills in economics education. Simulated games place students directly in real economics situations and they provide a powerful link between economics theory and direct experience.

The argument for the use of games as a strategy that has potential to actively engage learners and enhance their motivation to learn and apply economics concepts in real life situations is noted by Davis (2009:132). He argues that the use of games in economics could be a key to the longstanding goal in education of how to promote situations where a person is motivated to learn, is engaged in the learning act and is willing to go to great lengths to ensure that learning will occur. Davis (2011:2) also contends that games are a valuable method for second-language learning as they encourage thinking and creativity, allows



students to develop and practice new language and behavioural skills in a relatively non-threatening setting. Davis (2011:2) further notes that games in economics could provide a means of facilitating acquisition of the language and concepts of economics in a more meaningful context for the second-language speakers and that, games also provide hands-on exposure to economic principles, increase attention and performance, result in higher interest in outcomes and interrelationships of concepts since they are introduced through a process where students directly participate.

### 2.9.2 Effectiveness of simulation games

Literature on economics education suggests that the use of classroom simulation games can be an effective strategy to actively engage learners in the construction of knowledge and that they provide learners with an opportunity to apply abstract economic concepts in the classroom. The effectiveness of simulation games in teaching economics is noted by Milondzo (2011:4) who reported that games had a positive effect on student learning. The benefits included increased motivation for participation, improved application of economic concepts, enhanced academic performance and linked to real-life experiences on how markets operate. Students acquired and improved their social skills and gained confidence in their ability to apply skills effectively during the games in the classroom and were motivated to take responsibility for their own learning.

For many students, the treatment of production and costs in the standard lecture and textbook mode seems to be an endless maze of definitions and formulas that seem remote and difficult to relate to the real world of production. Observing this, Davis (2011:5) uses the game 'Widget production in the classroom' to explain the concept of diminishing marginal returns. Reflecting on students' perceptions of the game as a method of teaching in economics, Davis (2011:10) reports that the students responded positively to this teaching intervention and believed it assisted their learning. The majority of the students stated that the game emphasises the theory in a practical way that made it easier to understand the law of diminishing marginal returns. The students felt that games should be used more and that the scope of gaming needs to be expanded into other economics topics within the curriculum.

In a study conducted by Van Wyk (2013:125) to explore the educational value of economics games on student learning, seven in-class simulated games were played. The findings from the games revealed that students viewed in-class simulated games as a valuable tool which contributed to their learning and that students' achievements were enhanced by the in-class structured experiences. Furthermore, the study found that economics games enhanced their academic performance and interpersonal relationships and could be linked to real-life experiences on how markets operate. Students were also reported to have been motivated by the economics games to take responsibility for their own learning. With regard to the impact that games and simulations have on learner motivation, Zapalska and Brozik (2008:362) argue that it is difficult for learners to learn if they are not sufficiently motivated. Games and simulations provide the means by which students are placed in situations calling for maximum performance. The element of competition against another individual or against another team tends to elicit greater intensity of effort and application. Another benefit of games and simulation is that students appear capable of sustaining an increased attention span during these activities.

### 2.9.3 The use of cooperative learning exercises

To actively engage the learners and improve their understanding of economics concepts, a one fits all strategy cannot be adopted when considering that learners have different learning styles and that conditions might differ from class to class. Van Wyk (2011:183) is also of the view that to ensure that the outcomes of economics teaching are achieved, economics teachers are compelled to consider different teaching strategies and methods. By pursuing these new strategies and methods, teachers will be enabled to initiate teaching and learning effectively so that knowledge, skills and positive attitude may be optimised among learners in their response to economic environment. One such strategy is cooperative learning. Van Wyk (2011:183) contends that economics teachers should strive to present their subject in ways that are meaningful and learner-centred. If this can be achieved, learners are engaged effectively in the subject and an interest in the learning content may be evoked.

A cooperative learning technique that has been used in South Africa in the teaching of economics is the Student Teams Achievement Divisions (STAD). According to Van Wyk

(2010:83), STAD as a teaching technique was designed and researched by Johns Hopkins University and is known as student team learning. It is one of the simplest of all cooperative learning techniques that could be an effective instrument to begin with for teachers who are new to the cooperative learning technique.

STAD is defined as a cooperative group where four to five students of different ethnicities, abilities and gender work in a team to ensure that all team members have mastered the lesson that was presented by the teacher. Students are provided with the worksheets to reinforce the content. In their respective teams, students teach one another until all students have mastered the content discussed. They then take individual quizzes on the material, at which time they may not help one another. Students' quiz scores are then compared to their own past averages and points are awarded on the basis of the degree to which students meet or exceed their own earlier performance (Slagle 2009:19).

#### 2.9 4 The effectiveness of cooperative learning exercises

Van Wyk (2010) applied a modified STAD in teaching a module on elementary economics to assess the impact of STAD on students' performance in economic literacy. This modified STAD focused on elements such as direct instruction, class demonstrations, student presentations through role-playing, simulation and group discussions. The implementation of STAD seems to yield positive results on student academic achievement. Van Wyk (2010:86) reports that the results of his study indicate that the cooperative learning method STAD was more effective in terms of academic achievement than the traditional lecture method. The findings from the study further showed that STAD as a teaching technique contributes to positive effects such as extra teaching practice sessions, simulations, role-playing, group demonstrations of economic concepts, increased social skills and an increase in economic knowledge. STAD provided an alternative technique that impacted on student achievement and students were positively interdependent on one another for the learning process.

Students are motivated to participate through rewards that go to the whole group. During the usage of STAD, because the individual scores are averaged for a team score, the whole team receives awards from the teacher such as certificates or recognition in newsletters. Students are individually accountable when they create a product based on their work in the

group; in STAD, this is an individual worksheet to prepare for quizzes. During this cooperative learning exercise, students may also participate in group accountability by making a product as a group such as presentation or a report (Bawn, 2007:19).

The use of practical classroom demonstrations is in agreement with Salemi (2005:45), who argues that because economic literacy entails the ability to use economic concepts, a course targeted to economic literacy must provide students with practice in using the economic concepts. Salemi (2005) further states that in pursuit of economic literacy, students should work with economic concepts in class every day. They should solve puzzles and analyse policies, they should construct arguments and support them. Good exercises provide students with opportunities to explain their thinking and constructively critique the thinking of others and also provide opportunities for students to obtain feedback and to revise their thinking in the light of the feedback they receive.

## 2.10 ENABLING CONDITIONS FOR APPLICATION OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN CLASS

It is also important to note that an enabling environment needs to be created for active learning to thrive. The successful implementation of active learning depends on the conditions under which it is applied. Yazedjian and Kolkhost (2007:165) argue that although teachers should include activities that promote understanding and skills relevant to course content, they should not assume that students understand the value and purpose of those activities. Teachers should communicate what students are expected to learn from the activity, in addition to providing a framework to accommodate new ideas. Students may need a context and foundation on which to base their active learning participation and experience. Thoroughly explaining the activity structure, objectives and related course material may aid in ensuring that students remain on task and are personally accountable for participation.

On the other hand, Michael et al. (2009:399) state that in order to have a positive effect on students, the teacher must apply the principles of active learning to the practical setting of the classroom and create a systematic approach to promote active learning in the classroom. They note four dimensions in this regard, namely context setting, class preparation, class delivery and continuous improvement. Context setting refers to creating an open and relaxed atmosphere for learning in the classroom. Class preparation involves

thought, planning, and creativity before the class session. Class delivery refers to the implementation of the planned lesson in the classroom while continuous improvement entails seeking and using feedback concerning the teaching approach.

Active learning requires a positive atmosphere in which the learners will feel motivated and eager to venture into the new territory. The teacher has a major role to play in creating such an environment. Yazedjian and Kolkhost (2007:166) propose that strategies preceding the active learning activity may include an information session on the required reading and teacher modelling. In addition, the teacher may provide appropriate direction before the active learning begins to assist students on how to form their groups, providing discussion topics, designating a length of time and affirming learning goals. These directions will set a suitable framework for students to begin working together and guide them towards the most meaningful active learning experience.

A different type of classroom culture is needed when using active learning approaches. Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009:8) point out that educators take a less dominant role in the classroom, guiding students through the learning process by encouraging them to take risks and challenging them to learn from their mistakes. Students have more freedom to explore the learning process and the teacher's role is to help them when they get stuck, so that they can move forward with their own learning. The teacher is not the centre of attention in the classroom – student learning is. Rosales and Journell (2012:58) concur, stating that an active learning environment requires that the teacher relinquish his position as the 'sage on stage' and instead he takes position of a 'guide on the side'. The teacher assumes a role of more of a facilitator with the purpose of guiding the students in designing meaningful learning experiences and allowing them time to complete and demonstrate their comprehension to an audience of peers, when applicable. Students on the other hand become active participants in the classroom and need to understand that a different culture combined with a set of expectations is a beneficial way to learn.

Changing the classroom culture requires a change in the teacher's role and the student's role as well as a change in the classroom structure. With these innovative teaching practices, students should not be confined to their chairs. Students need to experience their learning in a less directed way to fully benefit from these teaching methods. To be engaged

in the learning process, students need autonomy, which may include brainstorming ideas with peers, moving around the classroom to gather resources and using technology to access information. Something as simple as rearranging classroom desks into a circle can help change the culture of the classroom (Wurdinger and Rudolph 2009:9).

## 2.11 CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTING ACTIVE LEARNING IN CLASS

There are challenges and limitations that pose a threat to the successful implementation of active learning in the classroom. The identification of such challenges can assist in the search for ways and means to overcome them. Dengler (2008:428) notes that although active learning can be effectively integrated into varied classroom settings to enhance student learning experiences, limitations to the approach include difficulty of application to large classroom sizes, balancing the demands for inclusion of breadth of content with depth through active learning, fostering participation of students and willingness of the teacher to be exposed to some degree of uncertainty. Another challenge pointed out by Salemi (2002:730) is that it takes time to develop and revise good active learning exercises.

Larger classes have been identified as one factor that breeds learner passivity and hampers maximum student engagement. USAID (2005:2) notes that teaching, especially using active learning, student-centred pedagogies, is more challenging when one is working in classrooms with large numbers of pupils and limited instructional resources. The World Bank (2008:49) states that overcrowded classrooms are the reality for many schools in sub-Saharan Africa. There is a close relation between instructional quality and class size; teaching 40 or more students is a demanding task for teachers. Manageable class sizes are strong factors for improvement of instructional quality. Becker et al. (2006:76) state that because large classes can be particularly prone to student passivity, teachers are required to find ways to refresh and actively engage learners. Class size should not prevent the teacher from using innovative pedagogical techniques. Bonwell (2003:4) suggests that large classes can be divided into small groups for discussion activities; assignments can be read and critiqued by the learners themselves instead of the teacher.

One other challenge of active learning strategies is related to the amount of content that needs to be covered as it is often argued that active learning reduces the amount of time available for content coverage. For example, Salemi (2002:730) states that one of the costs

of applying active learning is that it takes more class time to teach a concept with active learning than by using the traditional lecture method, which results in fewer topics being covered. Bonwell (2003:4) also admits that the use of active learning strategies reduces the amount of available time for content coverage but states that teachers who regularly use active learning strategies typically find other ways to ensure that students learn the assigned course content (e.g. using reading and writing assignments and through their classroom examinations). Salemi (2002:730) further states that this challenge can be ameliorated by using active learning to teach only the most important concepts and communicating clearly to students that they must master some concepts on their own.

Closely related to the challenge of the amount of content coverage, Salemi (2002:730) also notes that it takes time to devise and revise good active learning exercises. Many teachers have for many years relied on the lecture method without trying out other teaching strategies. Teachers might therefore feel less confident and competent to venture into an active learning environment. Salemi (2002:730) responds to this challenge with the suggestion that teachers should choose a content area where they believe students would benefit from active learning and create or find exercises for it. If they judge that the benefit outweighs the costs, they can add additional active learning components when they next teach the exercise.

Teachers should nevertheless build on the impact of active learning on learners by trying to balance the breadth of content covered and the depth achieved through active learning. Michael (2007:45) points out that the concern that active learning takes too much class time ignores the reality of what happens in all too many classrooms, namely that great quantities of information are transmitted but little learning with understanding occurs. Becker et al. (2006:76) assert that the benefit of active learning techniques is a gain in depth of student understanding and that the gain in depth is well worth the potential sacrifice of some breadth. Salemi (2002:730) concurs, stating that even though active learning covers less material than direct instruction, what matters is what learners know and what they can do years after the course is concluded. What is important is not what teachers cover, but what students learn.

Society's commonly held view that an appropriate classroom order is when the teacher plays an authoritative role with all the knowledge to be passed on to the learners, who play a subordinate and passive role as receivers of knowledge, can be another threat to the successful implementation of an active learning and learner-centred approach in the economics class. The World Bank (2008:44) notes that, generally, the teacher is regarded by society and culturally determined understandings of authority and teaching, including students' perceptions, as the provider of knowledge and the bearer of authority. It is therefore difficult for learners to be accepted as equal partners in the process of knowledge construction. The World Bank (2008:45) further argues that students frequently share with teachers a common perception about what it means to teach, and are resistant to changes to this perception even though the intention of this changed classroom culture is for students to become more self-reliant, mentally active and responsible learners.

Michael (2007:45) also notes that students and teachers have expectations about teaching and learning based on their prior experiences in classrooms, where in most cases teachers admit that they teach the way they were taught. These expectations are commonly reinforced by the images of teaching and learning depicted in the media; as a result both students and teachers feel uncomfortable about active learning because it violates the cultural norms that have been unconsciously internalised by society.

Another potential challenge noted by Michael (2007:45) is that if students are encouraged to ask questions, the likelihood increases that the teacher might not know all the answers. It also means that the simple linear model of the classroom in which the teacher delivers information and the students receive it becomes a highly branched model in which the discussion can go anywhere and the lesson plan can go out of the window. Active learning does not mean the teacher loses control; rather, it means that control is exerted differently.

This problem is compounded by the fact that most teachers believe that they are good at teaching using the lecture method, which also allows them to transmit a lot of information in a short space of time. Bonwell (2003:4) states that most instructors see themselves as good lecturers and therefore see no reason to change. He cautions that although lecturing is potentially a useful means of transmitting information, teaching does not equal learning. This is often demonstrated by the disparity between what teachers think they have



effectively taught and what students indicate they have learnt as reflected in their examination grades.

In order for meaningful teaching and learning to be a reality in the economics classroom, both the teacher and learners need to acknowledge the existence of these and other challenges which may impede the application of the active learning approach in the class and most importantly they should work towards overcoming these challenges. Wurdinger and Rudolph (2009:11) argue that the effort to overcome these barriers is well worth it because these approaches create exciting learning environments. Teachers need to remember to let go of some control and allow students freedom to learn on their own. Mistakes should be expected as teachers attempt to implement these teaching approaches; however, teachers will grow professionally by experimenting and trying out new things in classroom.

## 2.12 CONCLUSION

The chapter focused on the theoretical framework which couched this study, that is the critical theory. Critical theory was seen as a relevant framework for this study as its principles of transformation, empowerment and emancipation were deemed to be relevant to the objective of this study, which is to bring about change to the chalk and talk or traditional lecture method which seems to be a predominant approach in the teaching of economics in high schools. The study seeks to change the teaching of economics from a teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred, the active learning approach. The active learning approach seems to empower both the teacher and the learner in using a more practical approach to teaching and learning the abstract economics concepts which seem difficult to understand when the teacher relies only on the traditional lecture method. Learners' engagement in class is also enhanced as they participate in various activities to demonstrate the concepts, providing a platform for their voices to be heard in class and emancipating them from their usual passive role in the class.

The concept of active learning was explained, together with its relevance in addressing the problem of learner passivity in class and in trying to concretise the abstract economic concepts. The chapter further demonstrated that the problem investigated in this study has been experienced in some other developed and developing countries. Literature was

provided on how the active learning approach was used in those countries to address the problem. The focus was on possible enabling conditions and the challenges or threats to the successful implementation of active learning in the class. Evidence on the effectiveness of the active learning strategies in addressing the research problem was provided and suggestions from the literature on how to mitigate the challenges and threats in applying active learning were also made.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY FOR ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASS

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on active learning in teaching economics. Chapter 3, among other things, examines the meaning of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the methodology used for this study, giving reasons why PAR was chosen. The chapter demonstrates how the PAR cycle was followed, from problem identification, establishing a team of co-researchers (research participants), working out the strategic plan to address the problem to the development of a monitoring instrument. It explains and justifies the data generation methods and finally explains the method that was used to analyse the data and why it was seen as the relevant method.

##### 3.1.1 PAR as methodology

It is the aim of this study to create a framework for active learning to enhance learner engagement in class, an important tool for learners to understand abstract economics concepts. I worked with a team comprised of economics educators and a number of economics students, collaborating to generate knowledge on the identified problem and devise action plans for changing the teaching and learning of economics. The aim was to free the learners from their usual passive role in class and free the teachers from the confines of the chalk and talk approach, which appears to be the dominant mode of knowledge transfer in class. Academic researchers with interest in active learning in economics education were invited to share their knowledge and experiences with the team.

The aim of the collaboration was to bridge the gap between myself as the researcher and the intended beneficiaries of this research project, namely the teachers and learners. I believed they had the relevant knowledge on the research problem as they were confronted with it daily. Their insider knowledge together with the knowledge of the outsider academic researchers would provide the basis for solving the problem that necessitated this research. In the process, the research participants would not only contribute to the study. They would be empowered through learning about research skills, something that would play a catalytic

role towards raising consciousness and being able to solve the self-identified problems within their community.

This approach to conducting research is known as PAR. Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009:80) argue that PAR is a systematic approach to personal, organisational and structural transformation, and an intentionally and transparently political endeavour that places human self-determination, the development of critical consciousness, and positive social change as central goals of social science research. The goal of PAR, according to Hughes (2003:41), is to build a community's capacity to solve self-identified problems. It assumes that local knowledge is essential to a better understanding of problems and construction of effective interventions. In this approach, relevant knowledge includes that of the outsider university-based researcher and that of insiders, i.e. community members. Neither type of expertise has primacy, as the researcher and the community members must engage in a dialectic process before knowledge is owned by the community, and such ownership of knowledge is necessary for sustained development.

### 3.1.2 Why PAR is relevant for this study

The PAR model was chosen for this study because the researcher believes that in forming a partnership with other economics educators and learners, the collaboration can yield the knowledge required to answer the question of how an active learning environment can be created in the economics class. Miskovic and Hoop (2006:270) propose praxis-oriented research to produce knowledge that will have more significance for the everyday activities of communities. This form of research is not abstract. It is highly contextual and focused on the real problems of communities. By developing a co-generative inquiry where the researcher and the community of interest collaborate in research, the process becomes democratised, done with the community and not to it.

Using PAR for this study provided an opportunity to engage with other stakeholders over a sustained period to thoroughly investigate the problem, plan jointly on how best to tackle it, implement the suggested solutions and critically evaluate the impact of the proposed solutions as a group. Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007:335) state that strategies employed within a PAR process to achieve a meaningful change involve engaging with a group of participants in a series of self-reflective cycles that include: planning a change with the

participants; acting and observing the process and the consequences of change; reflecting on these processes and consequences; and further cycles of planning and reflecting.

### 3.2 CYCLE ONE OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

#### 3.2.1 The planning cycle

In the first phase of the study, which was also the beginning of the planning for change cycle, I started informal one-on-one discussions with teachers from other high schools to get their general views on teaching economics as subject. The discussions included the problems encountered in teaching and learning the subject and the teaching methods applied in class. The common problem raised was that economics involves teaching about very abstract concepts which learners find difficult to comprehend. The problem seemed to be compounded by lack of active learner involvement in class, because the subject was mostly taught from a teacher-centred approach. The teacher is a dominant figure in the class, focusing on transmitting knowledge, relying on the chalk and talks method, while learners are expected to passively absorb that knowledge. As Kelly (2005:69) argues, the researcher does not enter a community as if it is a *tabula rasa*. My intention was to find out if the learner passivity I encountered in class and which is also noted in the literature on economics education could also be a concern to at least some of these teachers. Some colleagues I met individually also raised the learner passivity in class as an impediment to understanding the abstract concepts taught in economics. They mentioned that with the teacher-centred approach that is normally the order of the day in our teaching, learners tend to just memorise without clearly understanding.

The common problem raised by participants in this study was that economics as a subject contains many abstract concepts which learners find difficult to comprehend. At the same time, our teaching of the subject tends to be teacher-centred, in hopes that learners will passively grasp the concepts we teach. There were suggestions that as teachers we needed to incorporate activities that can make the teaching of economics more practical and strive for more learner engagement in the classroom. Another suggestion was to invite some academic researchers on economics education to share their experiences with the group.

### 3.2.2 Putting the team together

It emerged from my individual meetings with teachers that if we could form a working group of economics teachers in the same neighbourhood, we might be able to learn from each other, share ideas and probably improve the situation. The teachers also suggested that we involve the learners in this group as a possible first step in encouraging their active involvement with the subject, and invite some academic researchers on economics education to share their experiences with the group. Hooley (2005:70) argues that one of the steps for incorporating the features of knowledge production and critical social science is the establishment of a participatory research team involving a small group of practitioners with similar interests who are willing to become involved in a systematic enquiry of an issue over an extended time.

I then decided to arrange a meeting with some of the colleagues and a number of the economics learners to form a partnership for collectively addressing the problem identified. I regarded this meeting as a very important opportunity to understand the problem from the learners' point of view as well. The aim of the meeting was to formally ask the colleagues and the learners to work with me as co-researchers in this project in an attempt to change our teaching and learning practice. The aim was also to introduce PAR as a methodology for this study.

Two different sets of consent forms were used as formal invitations to voluntarily participate in the study. One was completed by the teachers and the university-based researchers and the other one was a parent consent form to be completed by the parents or guardians of the learners. The letters were sent to the schools where those teachers were employed, asking permission to use their schools and some learners for the research. Lastly, permission was sought from the Department of Education to conduct the study in the identified schools.

The selected teachers were included in the team because of the experience they had in teaching the subject. They were deemed to be in a good position to share ideas on how to actively engage learners in the class. Two of the teachers had also been involved in marking Grade 12 Economics examinations. We believed that their marking experience would enable

them to share with the group the learners' performance in questions that require analysis and application of economics concepts at Grade 12 level.

The learners who had earlier showed concern about the way economics is presented in class and whose parents had consented on their participation in the study were included in the team to work in collaboration with the teachers. These learners took economics in Grade 10 and were in a position to use their experiences in Grade 10 economics to contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the study. The researcher felt that it would be fitting to include the learners in the team, as their participation would provide the opportunity to understand the problem from their point of view, to hear and understand their perspectives and act together with them on their perspectives. The study wanted to move away from the common practice noted by Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009:83), who state that the teacher-as-researcher movement encourages teachers to use the action model to examine and improve their own classroom practices, while students are often positioned as objects of the teacher' study rather than collaborative partners or allies.

The main role of the teachers and learners in the study was to identify the concepts that they felt learners found difficult to comprehend when taught by the traditional lecture method. They would also design classroom activities to make the teaching of these concepts more practical and provide the learners an opportunity to grapple with them in a guided and controlled classroom environment. The research methodology that was to be adopted to conduct this study was PAR. Because the majority of the participants were not familiar with it, a university-based academic researcher with experience in the use of PAR as a research methodology was included in the team on advisory basis.

The team finally comprised myself as the main researcher, four teachers, twelve learners from the participating schools and two university-based academic researchers. The aim was to tap into the knowledge and experiences of different role-players to collaboratively work towards problem solutions. Hooley (2005:70) argues that research conducted in isolation will lack the stimulation of immediate feedback and the contestation of differing perspectives. Conversely, research that is conducted by a democratic group, particularly with the inclusion of an outsider, will have greater opportunity of constructing creative resolutions to the task at hand.

### 3.3 CYCLE TWO OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

#### 3.3.1 Information session

The second phase of the project was the continuation of the planning cycle. At this stage the planning involved further deliberations on the problem issue and the desired change. The team planned what needed to be done, who should be involved, allocation of responsibilities, where the activities were going to take place, timelines for each activity and the resources needed. Pain, Whitman and Milledge (2011:4), caution that such plans might change as the research unfolds and that new ideas, sources of data and people whose opinions might be sought often come into the picture. At the same time, some plans might turn out not to be possible and priorities might change.

After receiving the signed consent forms from the different stakeholders, I arranged a meeting at which the problems encountered in teaching and learning economics were discussed for the first time in a group involving the teachers and learners. At the meeting, I briefly explained that all the participants should work together as equal partners in the group and emphasised that everyone's contribution would be of great value. They should see me also as a partner in an endeavour to improve the situation and not as an expert who already had the answers to the problems. Kidd and Kraal (2005:188) argue that regardless of how the project is initiated, success depends on joint commitment and responsibility. Ideally, all participants leading the project must be open to multiple perspectives while being committed to a shared vision. The researcher's preconceptions regarding the goals, means, methods and actions must be amenable to change while negotiating the balance between bringing knowledge rather than imposing it, and incorporating knowledge from the participants.

The teachers spoke about employing a more learner-centred approach, which they believed would hold learners more responsible for their learning and enhance their participation in class. The teachers and learners agreed that a way should be found to ensure that the teaching of economics created lifelong learners who will be able to use the concepts they learn in class even after they have completed schooling.



This information session was also used as an opportunity to start building trust among the participants, as trust was seen as being key to encouraging participation and commitment to the research project. It was therefore important that the project be run in an atmosphere where diverse perspectives are valued and each participant develops a feeling of being a valued member of the team who respects and is respected by other members. Savin-Baden and Wimpeny (2007:335) argue that embracing a PAR process is not only about getting on with solving the problem at hand, but also considering the well-being of all those involved. The strategies used during the research must enable the participants to feel supported, valued and respected throughout, with the emphasis on meaningful dialogue and actions that respect each individual's dignity, integrity and privacy.

The participants were invited to share their reasons for participating in the project and were later given an opportunity to put on a flipchart the skills and knowledge they thought they were bringing to the research team and how those skills and knowledge would contribute to the solution of the research problem. After considering the skills and knowledge each participant indicated that they could offer, roles were identified and assigned to different members. The major roles were related to identification of different concepts from the four topics (Macro-economics, Micro-economics, Economic pursuits and Contemporary economic issues) in the Grade 11 economics syllabus by the teachers and learners. The importance of presenting these concepts in a manner that actively involves the learners in the lessons was stressed.

In an attempt to maximise participation, other tasks and responsibilities apart from the research problem itself, for example organising meetings, note-taking and communicating with the wider reference group, were assigned to participants according to their stated skills and knowledge. I suggested that we invite a person to share their experience in using PAR in a school setting.

### 3.3.2 The development of mission and vision for research team

At this stage, it was important to ensure that all participants had a common understanding of the goals of this research project and were committed to the collective attainment of these goals. The participants' understanding of the goals and their commitment to

accomplishing those goals was seen as being key to maintaining their enthusiastic participation in the study.

Krishnaswamy (2004:2) points out that, at the beginning of a participatory research project, the research participants must have a clear understanding of the broader goals of the research project to be able to design a practical and effective participatory research project. Once the research participants have developed a common understanding of the goals of the research project, they can develop a mission statement that identifies the desired outcomes, and the general strategy for achieving the mission. The mission statement should describe the goals, that is, what the research is trying to accomplish or the type of problem the research trying to solve; the general strategy, i.e. the plan for attaining the research goals; and the values of the research participants, namely the ground rules that will guide the research, for example emphasis on stakeholder involvement, transparency, and capacity building.

In one meeting, the team members engaged in a exercise to develop a mission statement for the team. The exercise was guided by the research problem that the team wanted to address: learner passivity in class. The participants developed their mission statement as: "Creation of an active learning economics classroom through a joint initiative." The two major goals of the study on which the mission statement was based, were to develop an active learning framework for teaching economics concepts and to solve the problem of learner passivity. This passivity seemed to be the reason for poor understanding of economics concepts and rote learning. Participants also believed that their collaboration had a potential for capacity building and that they would be learning from each other in the process of addressing the research problem.

To attain the research goals, the research participants would collectively generate data on the research problem and on possible solutions for bringing about change. Participants engaged in a series of focus group meetings where they shared their views on the problem. They would also design classroom activities to be observed by other members when implemented in class. The team's vision was the creation of a framework for active learning in teaching economics in high school, so that learners could leave school with a better understanding of the concepts they were taught and could apply them in their daily lives.

### 3.3.3 Working out the policy for the research team

The participants agreed that the meetings should be held on Wednesdays at 15:00 to accommodate all the members. The venues of the meeting rotated among the schools that formed part of the study. This was to make sure everyone took ownership of the research process. Participants had to send apologies when they could not attend the meetings or any session planned.

Participants agreed to invite different people to assist the team with research methods and techniques as most of them had not been exposed to research. The group also agreed that the data generated by this study should be accessible to all members and should solely be used for the purpose the research and not for financial gain by individual or certain members. The information should be stored in such a way that confidentiality is preserved and care is taken that participants' anonymity is ensured.

### 3.3.4 SWOT guiding the activities of the research team

In order set ourselves realistic goals, the team performed a SWOT analysis to guide the activities of the participants in terms of our priorities, possibilities to explore to solve our research problem as determined by the skills, knowledge and resources we had pooled. The analysis was also important to develop awareness among the group members about potential problems or challenges that may need to be addressed or at least recognised and avenues to explore that might have a bearing on our study. The SWOT analysis would also inform us on the options that might be available to compensate for our limitations.

#### 3.3.4.1 Strengths

The team was comprised of teachers with years of experience in teaching the subject and learners who had been introduced to economics concepts in the Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) learning area in Grade 8 and took Economics at Grade 10. The experience of both the teachers and learners would enable them to make an informed and valuable contribution on activities to enhance learner engagement when teaching some of these concepts. Most of the participants had access to the Internet and community libraries, which would make it easier for them to search for literature on active learning strategies in economics and how these strategies have been used in different countries to enhance

learner engagement. The principals of the schools where the learners and teachers were based gave permission for the use of the school premises for the team meetings.

One of the regular guests was a university academic researcher who had experience of using PAR. This researcher was specifically invited to share some experiences in using PAR for conducting research and to orientate members to the methods of data generation used in PAR. The team felt that the inputs of this researcher would greatly compensate for the lack of research skills by some of the group members.

Most of the resources needed for the group meetings were readily available, for example writing material, flip charts, data projector and also the data capturing instruments in the form of a video recorder and voice recorder. Parental support was also a strong point for the team. The parents consented to their children participating in the study by allowing them to stay behind after school on meeting days.

#### 3.3.4.2 Weaknesses

Limited time available for the study was seen as a major weakness. Teachers and learners found that besides the research project meetings after school hours, they also had to conduct and attend extra classes arranged by their schools. Collaborative problem-solving requires more time for activities such as planning and coordinating, implementing strategies and reflecting on the progress made. Because some other activities were also competing for the time available to the teachers and learners, it was always a challenge to involve everyone every time. Little exposure to research methods also proved to be a weakness, as most of the participants had not been involved in a research projects.

The project was not funded and the participants had to cover expenses such as travelling to the meetings and communication by phoning or emailing or any form of electronic communication. Another challenge was the costs of information searches; it was seen as a limitation because participants could only do what their means permitted.

#### 3.3.4.3 Opportunities

The team viewed this research initiative collaboration as an opportunity for empowerment, as they had previously felt powerless as individuals in their efforts to effect change in

economics education. The teachers felt that by working together with others such as academic researchers as equal partners, their status would be elevated from research assistants or respondents to co-researchers who could make a meaningful contribution to the solution of the research problem. Learners also felt that this method of conducting research would allow their usually silenced voices to be heard during various stages of the research process.

The process would also build their capacity to solve their own problems. The research participants were of the view that they would not only be empowered but also emancipated from dependence on outsider researchers, who often come to the setting, diagnose the problems and impose solutions to the community. The opportunity for empowerment through PAR projects is noted by Rademacher and Sonn (2007:63), who assert that beyond the role of PAR in fostering learning and creating change, is its ability to empower participants through building relationships and supportive structures. The appeal of PAR is that in its claim to empower, it has the potential to address the profound inequalities in power between the researcher and the participants as it changes the traditional research dynamics whereby the researcher becomes the learner and the participants are experts due to their experience.

The ultimate aim of PAR is the empowerment of oppressed individuals to become partners in social change, which encourages capacity development and capacity building of all who participate. The collaboration of individuals with diverse knowledge, skills and expertise fosters the sharing of knowledge. Individuals also learn by doing, which strengthens their belief in their abilities and resources, as well as further developing their skills in collecting, analysing and utilising information (McDonald 2012:40).

Collective support was also seen as a factor that could benefit the study. Members believed that their collaboration would allow for the generation of a wide range of potentially good ideas and enable members to learn from each other in their quest to better understand abstract economics concepts. Walter (2009:6) states that as the researcher and the community of interest work together in a collaborative and participatory way, expertise and insights develop that would not otherwise be possible. In turn, these insights and access to broader expertise provide for more workable and innovative problem solutions. Kidd and

Kral (2005:190) add that in a PAR project the knowledge brought by the researcher and the knowledge of the research participants can combine to help people to understand and alter systems that were previously invisible or perceived as formidable or insurmountable barriers.

The participants also viewed the collaboration as having the potential to facilitate change in classroom practice and remedying other problems encountered in teaching and learning economics. This is because research is carried out by practitioners and learners who will be dealing hands-on with the real, material, concrete and particular issues that face them daily. Hein (2009:99) argues that action research is suitable for education because it is a participant-driven process, and context-specific in that it is usually carried out in a specific classroom by a particular teacher or group of teachers who work in collaboration with students to pursue a change or improvement in their teaching and learning issues.

Kemmis and McTaggart (2005:279) also state that by understanding their practice as a product of particular circumstances, participatory action researchers become alert to clues about how to transform the practices they are producing and reproducing through current ways of working. Focusing on practices in a concrete and specific way makes them accessible for reflection, discussion and reconstruction as products of past circumstances that are capable of being modified for present and future circumstances.

Another opportunity that members felt the study would provide was that their participation in this project would develop them into critical and reflective role-players in the classroom. The spirit of trust and collective support which they believed were the anchors of this study would allow them to engage in dialogue, be open to criticism concerning their viewpoints and hence to develop a more critical and informed view of the teaching and learning of economics.

The teachers saw the project as having the added potential to foster teacher development as they were introduced to the use of constructivist learning approaches in economics teaching. The teachers' engagement in the continuous cycles of reflection, dialogue, action and learning provided opportunities for personal growth and development leading to improvement in classroom practice. McDonald (2012:43) notes that PAR has played a pivotal role in educational change, particularly in the development of teachers and teaching.

Activities such as educational research, curriculum development, teaching and evaluation are fundamental aspects of PAR, which in an educational setting has the improvement of teaching practice as its primary aim.

#### 3.3.4.4 Threats

The study was conducted in a school setting where there are established cultures and norms, one being that teachers act the role of parents while learners are children. There is always a possibility that issues of power might creep in, making it difficult for teachers to embrace learners as their equal partners in research. This threat is noted by Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009:86). They argue that although PAR promotes the meaningful inclusion of students as co-researchers with their teachers about issues of mutual concern in the school or classroom, adults are not always prepared to work with youth to solve school or community problems, given the real power differentials between teachers and students.

The main researcher might also be inclined to play the expert and try to dominate the process by relegating teachers and learners to research assistant status. In acknowledging the possibility of dominance in a PAR project, Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007:340) assert that developing a sound dialectic between participants can be the greatest challenge for developing the new knowledge and effecting change. The primary researcher must therefore be aware of issues of relating to unequal power relations which participants may experience. Brydon-Miller and Maguire (2009:87) assert that it can be a daunting task to challenge the established policies and practices of one's workplace, especially in a setting as hierarchical as the education system. Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007:340) are of the view that the researcher should show a willingness to continually question and challenge the established methodological tenets of traditional research strategies and critically examine power relationships and the levelling of such relationships.

Related to the issue of unequal power relations is the possibility of suppression of other voices in the group. For example, learners might not feel at liberty to disagree with or offer counter-suggestions to those of the elderly participants. This might deny the group the opportunity to see things from the learners' perspective and compromise the maximum participation of the learners. Other voices may be silenced if one or a few members of the team carries out the greater part of the work. Kelly (2005:70) acknowledges that keeping a

diverse group of people together is challenging and that sustaining enthusiasm can be even more difficult in a PAR project.

Kidd and Kral (2005:190) argue that the participatory researcher must closely attend to a group process that appears to lack diversity and tension, to guard against the potential problem of what has been termed consensus tyranny. This occurs when individual perspectives are silenced and adverse social processes such as groupthink and intimidation undermine true participation.

Another potential threat to the study relates to the difficulty of maintaining a balance between knowledge brought by the primary researcher and knowledge brought by other research participants. Tensions might arise where other participants get the impression that their contributions are not valued by the primary researcher, who wants to impose his or her own ideas on the team. It is therefore critical that the researcher should strive to incorporate knowledge and avoid imposing knowledge. To this effect, Hughes (2003:41) states that relevant knowledge in a PAR project is both brought by the expert outsider researcher and the expert insider community members, and that neither type of expertise has primacy.

After identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the team, the opportunities which could offer advantage to the team and the threats which needed to be dealt with or be recognised, the members proposed another meeting to decide the immediate things that the team should start to do towards solving the problem. Each member was given homework, to think about matters that should be prioritised.

### 3.3.5 CYCLE THREE OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

In Cycle Three the team set priorities and developed a strategic plan. The research action cycle began when the members worked out the action plan to be followed, based on the priorities and activities they agreed upon. Kelly (2005:70) maintains that the overall goal of the action cycle of a PAR project is to create consciousness and social change by working together with the research participants to address an agreed-upon goal. To achieve meaningful results, participants must retain a sense of involvement while the programme is



moving towards its goals. Participants' voices must be heard continuously on major or minor issues.

After the members had made their suggestions about the appropriate actions, they agreed to start with the following: identifying the abstract concepts; developing activities to demonstrate those concepts; drawing up an action plan for the implementation and observation of the activities in an actual classroom setting; identifying enabling conditions and challenges in using those activities in class; and deciding on the components of the active learning framework.

#### 3.3.5.1. Identification of the abstract concepts

Economics concepts are seen as abstract and learners find it difficult to understand them when they are just theoretically presented in class. Four groups were formed, each group comprised of one teacher and a number of learners. Each group was assigned one of the topics dealt with in the Economics syllabus which are classified in the Economics Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document, as Micro-economics, Macro-economics, Economic pursuits and Contemporary economic issues (Department of Education, 2011:8). They had to identify at least three concepts from each topic. One week was allocated for the task. All the groups had to use their textbooks, that is, the learner books and the teacher guides. They should also look for newspaper articles or record news bulletins covering the concepts they chose.

In their next meeting, the groups were requested to provide the textbook definitions of those concepts, compare the technical definitions with dictionary meanings and try to make sense of those concepts. At this stage, other groups were allowed to ask questions and seek clarity. Once the group had explained their concepts, they had to provide newspaper articles, play any news bulletin clip or describe a real-life human behaviour that captured the concept they had presented, and link them to the explanation of the concept provided.

#### 3.3.5.2. Develop activities to practically demonstrate the concepts

The teachers and the learners in their groups were required to design a classroom activity that would actively engage the learners in the illustration of any of the concepts identified in their groups. If a group came across an existing activity, they were requested to modify it to

suit their classroom situation. The groups had to try to use resources that were easily and freely accessible for these exercises, which should be completed in one week. They also had to do research on active learning strategies in economics teaching to learn from best practices. They had to do library and Internet searches for this. The aim of the exercise was to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside economic world and demonstrate real-life human behaviour.

Subsequently, each group demonstrated the activity they had designed. They explained the resources needed for the activity, the do's and don'ts of the activity, how the activity aimed to illustrate a particular economic concept, how it intended to engage the learners and which skills, values and knowledge the learners would develop from participating in such an activity. The process would run for two weeks. A video recorder was used to capture all the presentations and demonstrations.

When the team reconvened, they reflected on all the activities that had been demonstrated and collectively suggested improvements on each activity where necessary. The reflection process was completed in this meeting.

Each group also had to make a presentation using a method that was adopted by another group in the previous session. The aim was to encourage everyone to be comfortable and take ownership of the proposed classroom activities and also to effect the improvements that might have been suggested. They once again had a week to complete the activity. After the second round of presentations, members reconvened to reflect on the improvements to the activities presented and their appropriateness for use in class. They focused on the potential of an individual activity to enhance learner engagement and to improve the understanding of each concept presented.

#### 3.3.5.3. Action plan for observation and implementation

A timetable was set for observation of the teachers implementing these activities in a normal classroom situation, ensuring that at least one colleague would be present to observe the lesson. Each participating teacher was assigned a particular active learning method to present an economics concept in class. The teachers drew up lesson plans which would be made available to the colleagues observing the lesson. The lesson plans allowed

the observing teachers to compare the actual unfolding of the lesson with how it had been planned. The observing teachers made notes for the reflection session.

After all the teachers had presented their lessons, the research participants met to reflect on the impact of each strategy on learner engagement and on bringing the real economic world to the classroom. The participants used their notes taken during the presentations and the videos of the lessons to make their inputs.

#### 3.3.5.4. Identify enabling conditions and challenges for the implementation

Once all the teachers had presented their lessons using the strategies assigned to them, each strategy was analysed to determine the conditions necessary for the successful application of each strategy in the class, for example the resources needed, capacitating of teachers, roles of teachers and learners and specific classroom arrangements. In a similar analysis, they identified possible barriers to the successful implementation of each strategy. This was followed by suggestions for ensuring that the ideal conditions for the implementation of the active learning strategies are met and possible measures for overcoming the identified barriers or challenges that might hinder the implementation of active learning strategies.

The teachers went back to their classes and put in place the suggestions for creating an enabling environment for the various active learning strategies. They added the suggested measures to ameliorate the challenges hindering the implementation of the strategies. Later, members reported on their progress in ensuring that the different learner-engaging strategies were successful. Teachers also reported on progress in dealing with the challenges and on the learners' response to these strategies.

#### 3.3.5.5. Identify components for the active learning framework

The groups took turns to present their findings and perceptions on the use of each active learning strategy in class and recommend those that seemed to be more appropriate. Afterwards, the team members made a collective decision on the strategies to be included as the first components of the framework they intended to develop.

Once again, the groups had to provide more literature on the various active learning strategies to share with all members. The teachers were requested to formulate tasks to be completed by learners to assess the impact of the strategies used to bring about the envisaged change. All the teachers had to compile the assessment tasks. The team members had to suggest ways to ensure the sustained use of these active learning strategies and to improve on their application.

### 3.3.6 CYCLE FOUR OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The participants suggested a monitoring plan to continually assess the effectiveness of the active learning framework that was designed. They discussed the description and aims of each of the components of the framework and then identified the indicators of success pertaining to each component of the framework, followed by the activities to be undertaken from time to time to assess progress. The monitoring instrument included the three components of the active learning framework that members had agreed upon and indicated the: strategies that were to be implemented in class, the aim(s) of each strategy and the indicators of success for each strategy.

The teachers decided that to continually monitor the effectiveness of the framework they would assess the understanding of the learners by giving them exercises based on case studies, cartoons and other data response questions, which would give an indication as to whether learners were able to answer questions that require analysis and application. Learners also had to design simulation and role-playing exercises to illustrate certain concepts in action. Team members would meet once a month to share with each other the results of the monitoring instrument and to reflect on how the framework was responding to the research problem.

#### 3.3.6.1 Classroom experiments as component (i)

Description and aims: Classroom experiments put students in a controlled environment and ask them to make economic decisions. They guide students through discovery of important economic concepts, inspiring new ideas. The aim is to provide a connection between economic theory and direct experience as they encourage learners to actively participate in decision-making and analysis of the results about a particular economic theory.

Indicators of success: Learners are actively engaged in the lesson and their participation demonstrates that they are able to make a link between economic theory and direct experience and to make rational decisions.

#### 3.3.6.2 Cooperative learning exercises as component (ii)

Description and aims: The cooperative learning approach is an instructional strategy focusing on small groups, allowing group members to work together in maximising their goals and learning capabilities. Students help each other to find answers to questions, rather than seeking answers from the teacher. The aim of cooperative learning exercises is to actively engage learners in group work requiring them to elaborate and explain material learnt to other group members to retain information.

Indicators of success: Learners value their participation and contributions of others in group work, they prepare well for the individual tasks assigned within a group, and the completed group tasks show that learners are able to analyse and apply the concepts they are taught correctly.

#### 3.3.6.3 Simulations and role-play exercises as component (iii)

Description and aims: Simulations and role-playing exercises create a learning environment in which students talk to each other, solve problems and work collaboratively. Learners are given certain roles related to the real economic world to play in class and are encouraged to reflect upon their theoretical understanding of economic concepts and arguments and check their interpretations of the material with other learners in a more informal setting.

Indicators of success: Learners are motivated and eager to take part in simulation and role-playing exercises, they are able to design on their own exercises to demonstrate certain concepts through simulation or role-playing and the roles they assume reflect correct understanding and application of different concepts.

### 3.3.7 DATA GENERATION

It was of the utmost importance to develop an in-depth understanding of how learner engagement could be enhanced through a variety of active learning strategies and how these strategies could be applied in a classroom. The team had to look for suitable ways of

generating the data to answer this research question. According to McDonald (2012:41), various methods of data generation have been used in PAR. For each specific issue or situation, the researcher and the participants collaborate to establish appropriate methods of data generation. However, it is recommended that at least three selected methods be used to transcend the limitations of each individual method and to produce more effective problem-solving.

The research participants held a session in which the academic researcher presented to the group the methods used in qualitative studies and those recommended for PAR in generating data. The researcher shared with the group some experiences in conducting a PAR project. The main emphasis was on ensuring that the methods chosen should address issues of power relations, so that all voices would be heard and also on encouraging maximum participation. After the information session, the group met to reflect on the presentation of the guest and deliberated on their understanding of the different data generation methods presented. The participants selected the methods they felt would be appropriate and feasible for the study. They were of the opinion that focus group (participants) meetings, participants' observations and document analysis relating to lesson preparations and planning would generate the data needed to solve the research problem.

Participants in a PAR team are usually people deemed to have experience and knowledge on the problem under investigation, who can then use that knowledge or their interest in the issue to suggest solutions. McDonald (2012:41) states that focus groups are considered a socially orientated process and a form that capitalises on communication between research participants to generate data and further notes that a focus group can be made of seven to twelve individuals who share certain characteristics relevant to the focus of the study. Marshall and Rossman (2011:149) also state that this method assumes that an individual's attitudes and beliefs are socially constructed as they do not form in a vacuum.

The research team meetings provided the platform for participants to listen to each other and also learn from each other in their quest to create a framework enhancing learner engagement in the class. Shillingford (2006:64) argues that the interactions of participants in a research team stimulate discussions in which one group member reacts to comments made by another and the resulting synergy allows participants to draw from one another

and to brainstorm collectively. More ideas and even solutions to a problem can therefore be generated through group discussions than through individual conversations or one-on-one interviews.

Data will be generated using Free Attitude Interview (FAI) technique which according to Meulenbern-Buskens (1997:2) is an open type of interview and a non-directive controlled depth interview. The FAI technique can be used in a interview of two persons or more, as well as group discussions. This technique allows the research participants a freedom to explore their own ideas and also suggest new topics once the facilitator of the discussion has posed an exploratory question. The following exploratory questions are examples of the questions used during the participants meetings and free attitude interviews conducted: Why is it necessary for learners to be actively engaged in the economics class?, what strategies can be used to create an active learning environment in the economics class?, under which conditions will those strategies succeed?, what are the challenges that can make it difficult to implement those strategies in class? and is there any improvement in the understanding of economics concepts that you have realised with the use of those active learning strategies?.

The participants in the research team believed that working together as a team where members contributed their experience in economics teaching and learning would enable them to engage in conversations that would generate the data required to understand the problem and try out possible solutions to the problem identified to effect a desired change. De Marrais and Lapan (2004:89) assert that a research team in a PAR is most useful when employed with the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, where reality of interest is the result of social interaction, and that research is a series of negotiated acts, dependent upon language that results in shared knowledge.

It was also in the opinion of participants in this research study that working together as a team would provide an empowering and supportive structure for them to share ideas and propose solutions as they were together faced with the problem of learner passivity in class, which seems to be the reason for a lack of understanding of abstract economics concepts. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005:301) are of the opinion that people feel supported and empowered in a group situation where they are surrounded by others and

are more likely to share experiences and feelings in the presence of people whom they perceive to be like themselves.

The research team meetings comprised the four economics teachers, the twelve learners from the participating schools taking economics and in some occasions the invited guests who came to share some experiences relevant to the study with the group. The teachers felt that it might be necessary to increase the numbers of learners participating in the study as dictated by the type of activities that were to be undertaken and as a way to expose more learners to this problem-solving collaboration. De Vos et al. (2005:299) state that focus groups or participants in a research study are selected because they have certain characteristics in common that relate to the research problem or topic of the group and that the group is focused in that it involves some kind of collective activity.

To encourage maximum attendance, the participants' discussions meetings were scheduled for Wednesday afternoons (15:00) and were to take two hours on a weekly basis or fortnightly, depending on the time-frames of the activities assigned to the participants. At first it was difficult to decide the exact number of discussion meetings to be held, but later a collective decision was taken that the progress made towards engaging with the research problem would determine when to discontinue with the research team meetings.

Based on the skills and abilities of individual participants in this study that were identified during the SWOT analysis, facilitation of research team meetings was rotated, allowing others to learn from those exposed in facilitating research meetings or meetings of similar status elsewhere. The role of the facilitator was to create and maintain a friendly environment in which all participants became comfortable in sharing their ideas, interrogating discourses and asking questions around the teaching and learning of economic education. The facilitator was responsible for probing questions and maintaining the focus of the conversations and ensuring that ground rules were observed throughout the meeting.

The group decided on the following ground rules that would assist in the success of the focus group meetings: (a) members to put their cell phones on silent mode during the meetings; (b) respecting one another; (c) accommodating differing views and constructive criticism; (d) the right to participate and to non-disclosure. The group anticipated that there



would be new things that will become apparent as more focus group meetings were held which might result in adding more ground rules for each meeting.

According to de Marrais and Lapan (2004:99), the ground rules in a PAR team meeting are meant to prevent possible problems such as domination by a few individuals, lack of attention to one another and artificially or prematurely reaching consensus. Participants should understand that the research team meeting provides an opportunity to give their opinions and perspectives and for them to be heard. The aim is not to reach a consensus but to cover diversity of opinions and understand the research problem from diverse perspectives. De Vos et al. (2005:299) agree, stating that the researcher creates a tolerant environment in a PAR by encouraging participants to share perceptions, points of view, experiences, wishes and concerns without pressuring participants to reach consensus.

At the beginning of each research team meeting, the facilitator would set the context of the meeting by explaining the purpose of the particular meeting, reminding the participants of the ground rules, and reassuring participants about the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. The facilitator would also remind the participants that notes were being taken and the proceedings of the meeting recorded, describing the type of recording instruments used.

The structure of our meetings was such that members would be able to raise their views on how to present different abstract economics concepts in class in a manner they felt would promote learner engagement. They would also suggest possible activities that could be incorporated in the lessons to practically demonstrate particular concepts. Once the activities suggested were put into effect in class, a follow-up meeting was held for participants to reflect on how the different activities unfolded in class. The meeting was also used for re-planning where necessary and for bringing new ideas, suggestions and evidence to the whole team.

Research team meetings were used alongside participant observations of lessons in economic education to check whether the teaching and learning of economic education was promoting learner engagement. All participants in this study were accorded the status of participant observers, because PAR works with participants and is not research done on people as objects in a science laboratory. Participant observations were meant to allow

members of the research team access to the actual classroom settings to see how their colleagues created an enabling learning environment in teaching economics, to identify conditions that permitted the use of particular strategies, and challenges that must be addressed or recognised when using active learning strategies.

Marshall and Rossman (2011:140) are of the view that participant observation requires first-hand involvement in the social world chosen for the study and that the researcher is both a participant and observer in a research setting. Immersion in the setting permits the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as participants do. MacDonald (2012:42) adds that participant observation is an innovative qualitative research method of inquiry and a rich source of data generation, commonly employed in PAR. It provides the researcher with privileged access to research participants in a social situation and captures the context of the social setting in which individuals function. The researcher as a participant observer not only observes activities, participants and physical aspects of the situation, but also engages in activities appropriate to the social setting.

The observations took place during the research team meetings when participants were demonstrating the activities that they had developed to teach particular economics concepts. All the research participants observed the group that was making a demonstration and took notes that were to be used for discussion during the research team meetings. Observations were carried out in the normal classroom situation as well. The arrangement was that a teacher would invite one teacher and learners to their class to observe and be part of the activity presented on the day. To avoid disruption of the normal running of the schools involved, the observations were scheduled to take place at the same time reserved for the research team meetings. The teachers invited other learners who were not part of the core research team.

The teachers provided their lesson plans on the day of the observation for analysis by other participants and observers. The observing teachers used the lesson plans to compare the plan and the actual unfolding of the lesson. Marshall and Rossman (2011:160) note that researchers often supplement participant observation with gathering and analysing documents produced in the course of everyday events or constructed specifically for the

research at hand. As such, the analysis of documents is potentially quite a rich source for portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting.

As a primary researcher, I had to take into consideration some ethical issues related to the use of the data generation methods used in this study. To gain access to the schools to conduct the observations, permission was sought from the principals of the participating schools. Letters requesting permission outlined the details of the research project and indicated that observations would be arranged to cause minimal or no interruption of the normal school time-table or other special arrangements made by the school. All learners in the affected class were informed about the study and consent was sought from their parents as well.

The participants in both the observations and research team were assured that their identities would not be disclosed, that their participation was voluntary and that they were at liberty to withdraw from the study at any stage. The teachers were assured that the lesson plans that they provided during the lesson observation would only be used to obtain information to advance the objective of the study and not for inspection purposes. I also explained to the participants that the data generated during the research process would be used only for this research project and that only the participants would have access to it. Participants were informed that the study was for academic purposes and that no financial benefits would accrue to the researcher as result of the research.

### 3.3.8 DATA-CAPTURING INSTRUMENTS

Permission was obtained from the research participants for the use of audio and video recorders during the project. I explained that these instruments were only meant to accurately capture data during the focus group meetings and observations. De Vos (2005:334) asserts that the researcher should demonstrate an awareness that techniques for recording observations, interactions and interviews should not intrude excessively on the ongoing flow of daily events on the research site. Plans to use tape recorders and cameras should be delineated in the research proposal, demonstrating that the researcher will use data-recording strategies that fit the setting and the participants' sensitivities and that they will only be used with participants' consent.

In this study, the researcher decided to use video, notes from observations of economic education lessons, lesson plans from various participants, notes taken during the research team meetings and participants' actual words recorded on videotape. All these were used to collate the data for this research study, together with the formal and informal meetings we had with other practitioners in the field of economics education.

### 3.3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All ethical considerations were observed. Participants were informed that the tapes would be kept in a locked safe by the researcher and that information on the computer could only be accessed through a password. The procedure for disposing of the data at the completion of the study was explained. Walliman (2011:45) cautions that as research often impinges on the sensibilities and rights of other people, researchers must be aware of the relevant ethical standards that have to be observed to avoid any harm which might be caused by carrying out or publishing the results of the research project.

In our first formal research meeting, which all the participants attended, I presented them with an ethical clearance granted by the university to demonstrate that the study had been approved. Permission was first sought from the principals of the schools that were part of the study to gain access to the schools for this research purpose. Prior consent was obtained from all the participants through the letters of consent that they submitted. The letters of consent were translated into an African language to accommodate those who were not well conversant with English. The letters clearly explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants were free to withdraw from the project at any time without any consequences. The participants were informed that they should not hesitate to make the main researcher aware of any discomfort which they might experience because of their participation in the study and that professional help would be sought on their behalf should such a situation arise. Participants were assured that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identities. The principal researcher made it clear to the participants that the study was purely for academic purposes and entailed no financial rewards.

### 3.3.10 CYCLE FIVE OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

After the PAR cycle had gone full circle, the research participants met to reflect on the action cycle and its outcomes and to evaluate its effects on the teaching and learning of economics. Discussions were based on the results of the monitoring processes and used to assess the impact of the active learning strategies implemented in class. Gaffney (2008:9) notes that once the activities and experiences designed to address the problem issue have been implemented, the group evaluates the impact of the changed practices. The main focus of the research team at this stage of the research project was to shed light on the following key areas: Is the active learning framework that was developed achieving its goal of enhancing learner engagement? Is there any evidence of improved understanding of the abstract economic concepts? Has there been any success in creating an enabling teaching and learning environment for the active learning strategies that were put to test in the previous cycles? Are research participants able to deal with the challenges that were identified in the implementation of the active learning strategies and in which areas can improvements be effected?

Gaffney (2008:9) maintains that the answers or lack of answers from the reflection cycle are meant to lead to new questions. Hence the process continues in what is referred to as cycles or spirals of ongoing action and reflection. Walter (2009:4) concurs, stating that if the reflection deems the first action unsuccessful or not as successful as anticipated, then these outcomes are taken into consideration in the planning of new or different actions in the next cycle of planning, action, observation and reflection. The cycle continues for as many iterations as needed to resolve the problem or reach the objective and the ultimate conclusion that the problem was solved or the objective achieved is collaborative.

It should however be noted that the process is not an easy, straightforward set of self-contained spirals of planning, acting and observing. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005:277) argue that the stages overlap and initial plans may change in the light of learning experience. In reality, the process is likely to be more fluid, open and responsive. The measure of the success of PAR as Savin-Baden and Wimpenny (2007:335), argue, is not about participants having to follow prescribed steps but whether they have a sense of how their practice and understanding of their practice (a heightened consciousness) have

developed. This part of the cycle of PAR is vitally important. The research team has to make a group reflection. In this stage of the research project, reflections on the action cycles are interrogated, providing a platform on which the dialectic discourse can be developed, interrogated and meaningful change considered or made.

### 3.3.11 DATA ANALYSIS

After the data had been generated, I as the main researcher took it as my responsibility to analyse it. Data analysis is always a delicate part of the research process and most of the team members had had little exposure to research. Frisby et al. (2005:378) argue that data analysis is the phase of the research process that poses the greatest challenge to actively engage research participants, as it involves considerable trial and error. The research participants were therefore not included in this phase and the main researcher analysed the data using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method pioneered by among others, van Dijk, Fairclough and Wodak. Henning (2004:117) states that when doing analysis of data for discourse purposes, the analyst must search through the data and look for pertinent themes (via coding and categorising) on the premise that there are multiple meanings and that the clues to those meanings need to be found in the discourse, the rule-governed language behaviour of the participants and the way in which they make sense of their reality.

Sheyholislami (2001:1) notes that van Dijk describes CDA as a field concerned with studying and analysing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias. CDA examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts. Sheyholislami (2001: 2) further notes a related definition of CDA by Fairclough, which states that CDA is discourse analysis that aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practices, events and texts and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes. Tracy and Martinez (2011:244) contend that CDA studies analyse the content and design of written texts or oral exchanges, drawing on language, interactions and semiotic concepts while attending to the context in which discourse is produced.

CDA allows an analyst to interpret language informed by discourse in the texts and the social structure as well as on what it says about the social structure. Using CDA to analyse

data helped me to go beyond the mere description of inequities and power relationships in interactions to interpreting and explaining them. CDA aims to contextualise discourse in the public domain and to make links between texts and contexts in which they emerge and also to provide insight into the structure of social orders of discourse and how they interact and position each other (Rogers 2003:141).

In this study, CDA was used to explore relationships between texts, discursive practices, and wider social structures as reflected in the participants' interactions while creating a framework for active learning in the economics classroom aimed at solving the problem of learner passivity in class which seems to be a reason for poor understanding of abstract economics concepts. Moufahim (2007:88) argues that one of the major role of social research is to understand and interpret socially produced meanings. Discourse analysis explores the relationships between texts, discourse and context, promoting understanding through the analysis of the historical and social context, how meanings are constructed and how broader reality is constructed and experienced by people. Blommaert and Bulcaen (2000:449) maintain that CDA advocates interventionism and that analysis of the social dimensions of language use should have effects in society, for example empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless and mobilising people to remedy social wrongs. Hence, CDA openly professes strong commitment to change, empowerment and practice-orientedness.

#### 3.3.11.1 Framework used to analyse data in this study

This study adopted Fairclough's three-tiered critical discourse analysis procedure. Rodgers (2005:371) notes that a critical discourse analysis would include analysis of the discourse as text, analysis of discourse as discursive practice or interactions and analysis of discourse as social practices at the local, institutional and societal levels. Within this framework, the analyst aims at describing relationships among certain texts, interactions and social practices and interpreting the configuration of discourse practices. He or she also aims at using the description and interpretation to offer an explanation of why and how social practices are constituted.

The framework used in this study is constituted by three dimensions (i.e. the text, the discursive practice and the socio-cultural practices), meaning that each discursive event has

three dimensions in that it is a spoken or written text, an instance of discourse practice involving the production and interpretation of texts and a part of social practice. Furthermore, Jorgenson and Phillips (2002:68) argue that to ensure that all dimensions are covered in a specific discourse analysis of a communicative event, analysis should focus on the linguistic features of the text, processes related to the text production and consumption of the text and the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs.

### 3.3.11.2 The three-tiered critical discourse analysis used in this study

#### (a) Textual analysis

Most of the data that was generated was not in a textual form, as it comprised the recordings of the discussions of the research team meetings. It was therefore necessary to start by transcribing discourses generated into data to textual form for analysis. Ruiz (2009:4) states that the first step normally taken in textual analysis is to translate the discourse into a textual form. This translation of non-textual discourse to a textual form constitutes the first phase of textual analysis and entails rigorous criteria and procedures. Two procedures that are commonly used for this translation are description, which is applied to non-verbal discourse, and transcription, which is applied to spoken discourse.

After the data was translated into textual form, it was broken down into units of information for categorisation into themes around which the discourse was made. The main themes that came out of the analysis centred around the need for active learning in teaching economic concepts, conditions that will enable the use of active learning strategies, the challenges to the use of active learning strategies in class and information related to the success of active learning in enhancing learner engagement and assisting learners to better understand abstract economic concepts. Ruiz (2009:5) maintains that the aim of textual analysis is not to provide a reduced version of the discourse, but that it should be seen as a process whereby information is enlarged and multiplied rather than reduced. It is therefore important that both description and transcription should include all the non-verbal events (moments of silence and their duration, modulations, emphasis, meaningful gestures and expression) as well as verbal events.



## (b) Contextual or discursive practice analysis

Context refers to the space in which the discourse has emerged and within which it acquires meaning. At the contextual analysis level, discourse is understood as a singular event produced by the research participants who are immersed in a specific time and place within a specific universe and who have their own discursive intentions (Ruiz 2009:7). Thornton and Reynolds (2006:274) describe discourse as discursive practice, as something that is produced, distributed and consumed in society. Furthermore, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:69) state that analysis of discursive practice focuses on how the authors of texts draw on already existing discourses and genres to create a text, and on how receivers of text apply available discourses and genres in the communication and interpretation of the texts.

Thornton and Reynolds (2006:274) also note the three concepts; force, coherence and intertextuality as introduced by Norman Fairclough in the analysis of text as discursive practice. The concept of force is used to describe what the text is being used to do socially. In this study, my analysis therefore focuses on the text that is used to promote the use of active learning strategies in the economics class, for example the themes that stress the need for and success of active learning in enhancing learner engagement in class and improving understanding of economics concepts. The concept of coherence is used to describe the extent to which the interpreter of text is able to infer meaningful relationships and to make sense of the text as a whole; and the concept of intertextuality is used to describe how texts are related historically to other texts. To demonstrate coherence and intertextuality in this study, the focus of my analysis would be on the texts that demonstrate that participants are able to follow and make meaning of what others are saying about the use of active learning, and the texts that show that participants are using the ideas of others or texts that circulate in space to jointly build an understanding of how active learning strategies can be used to promote learner participation in class.

At this level of analysis, the aim was to make meaning of how the context in which the study was carried out had an influence on the discourse that emerged. This required me to pay attention to the discourse positions of the participants, as it would help me to link particular discourses with the space from which they emerged. The two major discourse positions that I was looking at during the analysis were the position as a teacher in the study and the

position as a learner. According to Ruiz (2009:7), discourse positions are socially defined discursive roles that people adopt in their concrete discursive practices. Discourse positions allow the researcher reconstruct communicative interactions through which the discourse has been produced and in this way gain a better understanding of their meaning from the point of view of those who take part in such interactions.

Furthermore, I also paid attention to the local norms that governed the everyday interactions of the participants in the study to understand and explain social action. These norms included for example the code of conduct followed at schools and classroom rules, as I believe they have a bearing on the interactions of the teachers and learners. To understand the discourse with reference to all the discourses that circulate in the social space, I did an inter-textual analysis of the data, trying to find the presence of features from other discourses in the discourse that I was analysing. Ruiz (2009:8) notes that inter-textuality, as conceptualised by Fairclough, is built on the notion that subjects resort to discourses circulating in the social space to produce their own discourse. To do an inter-textual analysis, the analyst must therefore ask each fragment of an analysed discourse about its presuppositions, about the other discourses it dialogues with and thus with which other discourses it is in conflict or in association.

#### (c) Sociological or social practice analysis

At this level of analysis, the aim is to interpret the discourse by establishing links between the discourse analysed and the social space in which they have emerged. Ruiz (2009:9) makes a distinction between three types of interpretation, namely, those that consider discourse as social information; those that consider discourse as a reflection of the ideologies of people who engage in it; and those which consider discourse as a social product.

Interpreting discourse as social information means that I recognise the research participants as people who are familiar with and knowledgeable about the teaching and learning of economics. Here I will attempt to explain the discourse in terms of the knowledge provided by participants, which can assist to provide solutions on the research problem the study is investigating. Discourse interpreted as reflection of ideologies means that I have to understand the viewpoints of the research participants not as their own subjective bias, but

as an indication of ideological constructs which influence their perceptions on economics teaching, for example the constructivist approach to education. The proponents of this approach believe that if a student is to learn something, there must be an interaction between the student's internal knowledge structure and the outside world. This interaction requires the student to participate actively in some activities and reflect on them, as this engagement with learning enables students to internalise key concepts and make linkages between theory and practice (Scheyvens et al, 2008:53). The interpretation of discourse as a social product would give me a reflection of the social conditions under which the discourse was produced.

### 3.3.12 CONCLUSION

The chapter focused on how the researcher engaged with the teachers and learners in a collaborative endeavour to provide solutions to the problem of learner passivity in the class, which according to this study seems to be the reason why learners find it difficult to understand abstract economics concepts. The adoption of PAR for this study made it possible for me to adopt the position of a participant, a facilitator of the project and a learner in the research process instead of that of an expert and a detached researcher. The voices of the teachers and learners who are usually treated as research subjects could be heard throughout the decision-making processes. Rich data could therefore be generated as all participants believed that sharing their views and ideas would make a meaningful contribution to confronting the research problem. The process was empowering, emancipatory and consciousness-raising to the participants as it provided opportunities for all participants to improve on their analytic skills as they collaboratively tried out possible solutions to the research problem. They also learnt some research skills and gained more knowledge on active learning by participating in this research. The knowledge and skills they learnt in the process created a sense of responsibility and strengthened their belief that they are the relevant people with the ability and resources to address the problems they face daily and do not have to overly rely on outsiders to identify their problems and provide solutions to them. The participants became more aware of the problems they faced in the teaching and learning of economics and started to act like agents of change and improvement. The PAR process was, however, not without challenges as I found out that it required more time in going through the cycles of planning for change, acting and observing

and reflecting on the impact of the action implemented to address the problem. The teachers and learners had to fit in their participation in the project in their already tight school schedules.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA, PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 explained the methodology followed to conduct this study, namely Participatory Action Research (PAR), and how the PAR cycle was followed in data generation. The chapter also explained how the researcher was going to analyse the data using a critical discourse analysis. In this chapter the researcher will apply the three levels of critical discourse analysis, i.e. discourse at textual level, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice, in the analysis of the main constructs pertaining to the five objectives of this study. The chapter will further analyse how some key elements of critical emancipatory theory emerged in this study.

The following codes will be used throughout the analysis to make referencing easier: ANNEXURE TR 1 (Annex TR 1) to ANNEXURE TR7 (Annex TR 7) will represent transcripts number 1 to 7.

#### 4.2 The need for an active learning framework in a high school economics class

##### 4.2.1 Need for a shift from a more teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred approach in the teaching of economics

The teaching of economics seems to be more teacher-centred in the sense that the teacher dominates the classroom proceedings by relying on the traditional method of teaching, i.e. the lecture method or the chalk and talk method. This method of teaching is based on the direct transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the learners. Individual learning styles are often not accommodated by this method. This method relegates the learners to being passive recipients of knowledge in class and that often leads to rote learning. See Goma (2002:85) and Bonner (2010:187) in Section 2.4.2.

In Annex TR 2 learners responded to the question, 'Who does most of the talking in class during economics class?' and to the follow-up question, 'What is your role in class?', in the following manner:

Hlonolofatso: 'It is the teacher' and a chorus from the learners: 'We are just listening.'

Reneilwe: 'We sleep sometimes, some are playing or making jokes.'

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The response of Hlonolofatso points to a classroom environment where the teacher is the dominant figure and the transmitter of knowledge to the learners whose voices are rarely heard in class. The learners seldom make contributions to what they are being taught. The phrases mentioned show that the learners have become used to going to class knowing that not much is expected of them in terms of participating in the class, as the teacher will be the one doing almost everything in class. They view their responsibility in class as listening to the teacher and sometimes they end up losing focus and some will even start sleeping during the teacher's presentation.

Teachers often feel comfortable teaching economics using the same chalk and talk method used by the earlier generations of teachers who found this method efficient in order to cover a lot of concepts and topics in a short space of time. This mode of teaching may be effective in providing learners with large amounts of information but often results in learners losing interest in the class as the teacher is the one doing most of the talking. See Mitchel, Cater and Varela (2009:400) in Section 2.4.2.

Ms Aldam is quoted in Annex TR 3 saying '... traditionally in South Africa for many years teachers have become used to being the chalk and talk masters ... teachers are doing what they were seeing in the classroom ...'.

Mr Sebola is also quoted in a Annex TR 5 as saying '... we are still comfortable with the traditional way of teaching ... we often don't use those strategies because we don't know them or in cases we know them we cannot use them because we don't have enough time to try them in class ...'.

Mr Tshabi in a Annex TR 5 notes the time factor as one reason why teachers might be inclined to the traditional chalk and talk method by saying '... as you teach you want the learners to learn and acquire deeper understanding ... at the same time you must be able to

cover a certain amount of work in a particular period of time ... if you want to use demonstrations ... you will find yourself running out of time ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrases '[...] at the same time you must be able to cover a certain amount of work ...' and '... you will find yourself running out of time ...' demonstrate that the teachers will always resort to the traditional lecture method as they see it as an effective way to transmit large amounts of information so that they do not fall behind the work schedule. The phrase '... you want learners to learn and acquire deeper understanding ...' suggests that Mr Tshabi has realised that the traditional teacher-centred method might not be enough to help learners to acquire deeper understanding of the economics concepts and the teacher needs to do more than just talk and chalk in class but he or she is forced by time constraints to stick to it.

#### Analysis of discourse as social practice

The phrase '[...] traditionally in South Africa for many years teachers have become used to being the chalk and talk masters ...' shows that the teaching approach that is used by the teachers today is something that has been there for many years and has become a social practice and the order of the classroom. The phrase '... teachers are doing what they were seeing in the classroom ...' demonstrates that the chalk and talk method has become self-perpetuated in class for the reason that even the teacher will always want to teach the way he or she was taught and has come to believe that in this way he or she will be able to meet the expectations of what a good teacher is.

In a statement made by Mr Sebola, the phrases '... we are still comfortable with the traditional way of teaching ...' and '... we often don't use those strategies ...' show that teachers might be aware of the learner-centred methods of teaching but do not use them because they feel comfortable with the chalk and talk approach that they have become used to over the years. The phrase '... in cases we know them we don't use them because we don't have enough time to try them in class ...' demonstrates that even when teachers might know of some learner-centred methods of teaching they still stick to the traditional lecture method that they see it as a tried and tested method in terms of content coverage.

The political changes that took place in South Africa, which led to the democratically elected government in 1994, saw the old curriculum being gradually phased out from 1998 and replaced by a newer curriculum known as Curriculum 2005 that advocates the use of constructivist teaching methods to ensure a more learner-centred classroom. This approach regards learners as co-creators of knowledge in the learning process and requires the teacher to assume a role of a guide and facilitator in the learning process. The ideal for learner-centred teaching is also based on the fact that it can accommodate different learning styles exhibited by the students. See Aldridge, Fraser and Mokgokong (2004:245) in Section 2.8.

In a Annex TR 3 Ms Aldam highlights curriculum change as a factor that enables the use of active learning by stating '[...] the way the curriculum is designed can really make space for simulations ... together with the curriculum the new approach to education you know the whole new curriculum review, the fact that we are changing things created an environment where it is okay to change ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase '[...] the way the curriculum is designed can really make space for simulations ...' shows the recognition that with the change in the curriculum the teachers should start to implement the learner-centred strategies in class. Simulation is one such strategy. The phrase '... the new approach to education you know the whole new curriculum review, the fact that we are changing things created an environment where it is okay to change ...' demonstrates that with a new approach to education in South Africa an environment has been created for the teachers that is conducive to start shifting from the traditional teacher-centred approach to a more learner-centred approach in class.

Mr Sebola is quoted in a Annex TR 6 as saying '[...] so I think we need a paradigm shift, we must take the society on board ... let them know that with the change in the curriculum ...we want learners to start to discover things on their own and move away from the practice where the teacher is the only source of knowledge in class ...'.

The phrase '[...] with the change in the curriculum ... we want learners to start to discover things on their own and move away from the practice where the teacher is the only source



of knowledge in class ...' acknowledges that the curriculum changes in South Africa call for the learners to be regarded as co-creators of knowledge in the learning process; learners should be given opportunities to seek answers and solutions to problems on their own without relying on the teacher who acts as their source of knowledge in class.

#### Analysis of discourse from the critical emancipatory research perspective

The phrase '[...] the new approach to education you know the whole new curriculum review, the fact that we are changing things ...' demonstrates a transformation in the education system that is intended to produce a learner who will demonstrate understanding of what he or she has learnt at school and will move away from rote learning. This change will serve to empower the learners for a life beyond school.

The phrase '... with the change in the curriculum [...] we want learners to start to discover things on their own ...' shows that one of the intended aims of the curriculum change is to ensure that learners do not only have to be over reliant on the teacher but need to start to generate information and seek knowledge on their own, that emancipates them from the confines of the traditional classroom order where they were just passive recipients of knowledge from the teacher.

#### 4.2.2 Creating opportunities to concretise the abstract economics concepts

Economics entails many abstract concepts that learners find difficult to understand when they only read about them or hear them from the teacher. When the teachers rely only on the use of the direct method of instruction, learners seem to find it difficult to relate the concepts and economic theory they are presented with in class to the real economic world and as a result they are unable to develop a deeper understanding of these concepts and fail to apply them correctly. See Rosales and Journell (2012:58) and Ruffle (2003:123) in Section 2.4.2.

Reabetswe confirms the statement in the previous paragraph when she says (in Annex TR 1): '... the problem we have in economics is actually the terms, most of them are not easily understood in plain English, they seem to be at a high level or they are more abstract ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase '... not easily understood in plain English ...' shows that the concepts they are taught are difficult to comprehend as they are not in the language the students are used to.

Mr Tshabi also states '... in economics one problem we are facing is that we don't link economics concepts with the day-to-day life, we treat them as abstract things which are far away from our lives ...'.

The use of the pronoun 'we' by Reabetswe and Mr Tshabi demonstrates that the problem under investigation in this study concerns not only an individual teacher or an individual learner but that economics teachers and learners in general face this problem.

This point is confirmed by Marematlou in Annex TR 1: '... I think the problem with economics is that you need to understand it deeply ... when we study we don't do it with understanding but we just resort to cramming, something that is not good for us. It will be best if we can start to be able to apply the concepts ... in our daily lives ...'.

Marematlou uses the personal pronoun 'you' in an inclusive manner to show that all the participants are similarly affected by the nature of the subject of economics.

#### Analysis of discourse at a discursive practice level

This practice of mere memorisation of information by learners is noted by Mr Tshabi who in Annex TR5 states that '... another thing is that, we have become results-oriented rather than deeper understanding of subject matter. Learners would just do anything like memorising information from the teacher just to get a pass mark in a test or exam ...'.

In stating that '... learners would just do anything like memorising ...', Mr Tshabi shows that he understands the discourse that is produced in these discussions as his statement contains the elements of the statement '... we just resort to cramming ...' made earlier by Marematlou. Coherence is demonstrated in Mr Tshabi's statement as he builds on Reneilwe's by explaining the reason why learners end up resorting to the practice of memorisation; he shows a clear understanding of this practice by adding to what Marematlou has said '... we have become results-oriented ...'.

## Analysis of discourse as social practice

The point raised by Mr Tshabi '... we treat them as ...' shows that the use of the direct method of instruction has become a social practice in the teaching of economics in class and this practice is a contributing factor to poor understanding of economics concepts.

This statement by Marematlou '... we just resort to cramming ...' shows that for learners to be able to answer questions in tests or exams, cramming and memorisation have become social practices that learners are now used to. Because they find it difficult to relate to the concepts the way they are taught in class, they resort to mere memorisation instead of deeper understanding that can help them to correctly apply these concepts in practice.

This analysis of discourse at social practice level can also be interpreted to imply discourse as social information. The two statements '... we just resort to ...' and '... learners would just do anything like ...' both indicate that Marematlou and Mr Tshabi are well conversant with the social reality that this study is investigating and can therefore be regarded as competent informants on the teaching and learning of economics. They both acknowledge that learners have difficulty in understanding the abstract concepts they are taught, yet on the other hand they are expected to produce good results hence they end up resorting to rote learning.

A classroom environment in which learners are able to analyse and find the relationships between the economics concepts will help to bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside economic world and enhance a better understanding of economic theory and economics concepts. This can be achieved when the teacher actively engages the learners by incorporating the use of games, classroom experiments and simulations or role-play exercises in class. These activities and experiences place them in direct contact with the real economic events and this allows them to actually learn how these concepts work and how are they related. See Hervani and Helms (2004:267) in Section 2.4.2.

In Annex TR 5 , Mr Sebola states that '... if only you have devised the means to involve them in a lesson, for example, when teaching the concept of diminishing marginal returns by the usual chalk and talk method it becomes difficult for them to understand the concept ...' and

'... you can also use that one, where they were eating sweets, I think they were illustrating the concept of diminishing marginal utility ...'.

In the Annex TR 2, Reneilwe is quoted as saying '... I think we should also practically illustrate those concepts in class also doing it in the form of drama by assigning roles to the learners to illustrate a particular concept ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

In stating that '... if only you have devised the means ...' Mr Sebola shows that it will take the teacher more than the chalk and talk approach to ensure that learners understand the concept of marginal diminishing returns. The teacher will therefore have to devise some activities to involve the learners in trying to understand the concepts. The opportunity created by such activities can then enhance understanding. In suggesting '... you can also use that one, where they were eating sweets ...' shows that Mr Sebola has seen one other concept being demonstrated in class and he is convinced that teachers can make the economics concepts more practical with the use of a variety of activities in the classroom.

Reneilwe starts the statement by saying '... I think ...'. This demonstrates that the discourse that is produced and distributed here is concerned with the mental processes, i.e. the participants are applying their minds to finding solutions to the problem identified in this study. The statement shows that the participants make their reasoning or suggestions public so that they are open to debate or potential criticism.

In that statement Reneilwe continues to say '... we should also practically illustrate those concepts ...'.

This also demonstrates that the learners are of the opinion that, to bring these abstract concepts closer to reality, some activities need to be designed that will practically illustrate the concepts in class and by participating in such activities learners will have a better understanding of such concepts.

#### Analysis of discourse from a critical emancipatory research perspective

Reneilwe uses the pronoun '... we ...' inclusively in that statement to demonstrate that as learners they can contribute to the effort of finding solutions to the problem by being given

roles to play in illustrating certain concepts. The statement contains elements of critical theory, i.e. transformation and empowerment, in that the use of practical illustrations in class will change the teaching of economics from the heavy reliance on the chalk and talk method and learners will step out of their passive roles to become active participants in class. In assigning the learners different roles in the illustration of concepts, the learners are empowered in the sense that they will have a responsibility to do research on the roles they are given; the voices of the learners will be heard as they interact with one another during the demonstrations and the learners will soon realise that they are actually co-constructors of knowledge in class and not empty vessels to be filled with information from the teacher.

The abstract nature of teaching economics concepts often leads the learners to view these concepts as irrelevant to their daily lives and it therefore becomes necessary to develop meaningful strategies to communicate these concepts so that learners can show understanding of their relevance at the earliest stage of studying economics. See Ruffle (2003:123) in Section 2.4.2.

In Annex TR 5 Mr Tshabi confirms the point that meaningful strategies need to be employed to make economic teaching more relevant to the learners at the early stages of studying the subject by stating that '... the concept of active learning in economics is a good one and can bring about change [...] and I believe should be implemented at an earlier age ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The statement by Mr Tshabi demonstrates coherence and intertextuality as it contains some elements of what was said earlier by Mr Sebola who in Annex TR 1 says '... the information we are going to generate here will still be beneficial [...] we will apply it to make economics more practical and exciting [...] and even to solve some of our challenges, challenges we face daily in class [...]'. This statement by Mr Sebola shows that he values the efforts and contributions by participants towards developing an active learning framework for the teaching of economics that he sees as having potential to solve certain problems faced daily in the economics class. Mr Tshabi's statement is related to Mr Sebola's statement in that he acknowledges that the idea of active learning in economics is a good one and that it can bring about change. Both of them mention that there are challenges that must be faced in the economics class. He builds on the former's statement by saying that '... I believe it

should be implemented at an earlier stage ...' . This illustrates that there is coherence in the discourse that is quoted here; the latter speaker shows that he does not only understand what the former speaker is saying but he also builds on it.

Analysis of discourse from critical emancipatory research perspective

Transformation, another element of critical theory, is noted when Mr Tshabi says '... and it can bring change ...'. It is the purpose of this study to develop a framework that will bring about change and address the challenges teachers and learners face daily in the economics class.

4.2.3 Learners need to be actively engaged with the learning material

Active participation of learners is needed for them to be cognitively engaged with the learning material. This is achieved when they are given opportunities to work with the economics concepts in class, when they are pushed to understand these concepts by being required to explain their reasoning, defend their arguments or look for alternative solutions in a problem situation. Their active participation and engagement has the potential to lead to higher order thinking. See Dengler (2008:482) in Section 2.4.1 and Sullivan (2003:70) in Section 2.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the Annex TR 2 Thando says '... personally I was thinking since other learners might not have the ability to debate, we can also allow each learner an opportunity to present a topic in the class the way he or she understands it so that he or she can be corrected where there are misunderstandings ...'.

The statement shows that Thando supports the idea that the classroom culture envisaged in this study requires a shift from the current classroom culture where learners are just passive recipients of knowledge in class but instead should take part in a variety of activities in class. This is demonstrated by the phrase '... since other learners might not be able to debate, we can also allow each learner an opportunity to present a topic ...'. This phrase demonstrates that she recognises the idea that learners can participate in a debate but other activities,

e.g. presentations, can be undertaken to accommodate students who might not be comfortable debating.

In Annex TR 2, Lefoko adds to the above statement made by Thando: '... I also agree with the idea that the teacher should give us the topics to present in class because that will force us to go and prepare for our presentations because as learners we really do not like to study, we only open our books when the teacher comes to class. That will motivate us to start doing things on our own and be corrected at a later stage ...'.

This statement further demonstrates that Lefoko acknowledges the need for a different classroom culture by saying '... that will force us to go and prepare ...' and '... that will motivate us to start doing things on our own ...'. The first phrase tells us that the active classroom requires the learners to come to class prepared and able to participate meaningfully in various class activities, which is in sharp contrast to the passive classroom where students often come to class unprepared, as the teacher usually dominates that classroom proceedings through a chalk and talk method.

Nkamogeleng is quoted in that transcript as saying '... I would think if the teacher can come across a DVD that has a bearing on the concept that we discuss in class he or she must bring it and play it in class because other learners learn the most when they see things in action ...'.

The suggestion '... if the teacher can come across a DVD ...' made by Nkamogeleng shows the need to break away from the sole reliance on the textbook in teaching the subject, which is a culture that one would come across in many economics classes. The phrase '... other learners learn the most ...' Nkamogeleng seems to demonstrate that other learners may learn the most when they see things.

#### 4.2.4 Active involvement of learners leads to long-term retention and improved application of economics concepts

Engagement of learners in activities that are designed to bring the abstract economics concepts home to the students helps them to develop a better understanding and the meaning of these concepts and they also get to experience how things work in the real economic world. With this approach to teaching economics, learners will be able to retain

for a long time various concepts and the material they have learnt as they did not only learn them by memorisation. See Brock and Lopus (2006:189) in Section 2.6.3 and Zain et al. (2009:94) in Section 2.7.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In Annex TR 4 Bushy gives one advantage of classroom presentations by saying '... I think it has some advantages because each learner will be participating, all will get an opportunity to present and [in] doing so the learner won't forget what he or she was presenting because the more you talk about something you can easily retain information ...'.

The phrase used by Bushy '... the more you talk about something ...' shows that if the learners are given opportunities to talk more often in class, in this case in the form doing class presentations, they will remember the topics they were talking about for a long time; unlike when they continue to be passive receivers of information in class.

In Annex 7 Moletlo seems to be in favour of the use of role-playing exercises by saying '... with the use of a role-play for an example we can ensure that learners participate in class by giving them roles to play in the exercise ... that will encourage our participation and improve understanding of the lesson. Even by the time you write a test or exam you would still remember what was happening in that exercise ...' and he further says '... you will still remember the questions that were posed to you in a role-play and use that experience to answer the question paper ...'.

The phrase '... even by the time you write ...' demonstrates that Moletlo believes that the knowledge that learners will gain by taking part in role-play exercises will last for a long time and that even by the time they have to reproduce it in a test or exam they will still be able to it.

### 4.3. Conditions necessary for the successful implementation of an active learning framework

#### 4.3.1 Proper context setting

The learners, by virtue of being used to their passive role in the classroom and because of their reliance on the teacher, may not automatically understand the purpose and value of



active learning. It will therefore be important for the teacher to create an inviting atmosphere explaining at the beginning what the students are expected to learn, what roles they will be expected to play during active learning exercises and how the overall experience in an active learning environment will be of value to them. The teacher should allow the learners to come with suggestions on how they can be actively engaged in class as that will create a sense of ownership of the active learning framework that is proposed. See Yazadjian and Kolkhost (2007:165) in Section 2.10.

In Annex TR 4 Nkamogeleng is quoted as saying '... I think for this to succeed the teacher must first explain to the class what is going to happen, say he or she wants to introduce a role-play, he or she must first explain what a role-play is [...]. The teacher can then demonstrate how role-playing works ...'.

Mosa is quoted from Annex TR 4 as saying '... I think the teacher must first explain ... how it works and how learners can benefit from its use. Learners can then compare it to the current teaching approach in economics ...'.

Nkamogeleng further states '... I think if the teacher can introduce active learning [...], give us reasons for it and how we could benefit from it we can start to appreciate it. The teacher must give us all the reasons behind all the activities ... and emphasize on how we will learn from such activities ...'.

In Annex TR 4, Reneilwe suggests that '... the teacher should explain the limitations of the traditional teaching method in terms of understanding economics and show the learners how active learning can improve on those limitations ... the teacher can even demonstrate it by making a practical example I think he must bring along the necessary materials to class to be able to explain using a practical example ...'.

Mosa continues to say '... and immediately they start to see that it works for them they would start to ... and they will be motivated to take part in the active learning activities ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The phrase '... the teacher must first explain to the class what is going to happen ...' suggests that the learners might at first not be familiar with active learning strategies and that the

teacher might be required to first familiarise them to the use of this approach in class. By further stating that '... give us reasons for it and how we could benefit from it, we can start to appreciate it ...'. Nkamogeleng seems to be suggesting that learners may not resist the use of active learning if they can be convinced that it will improve their understanding of the subject and in that way they can contribute to its successful implementation.

In the statement made by Reneilwe, the phrase '... should explain the limitations of the ... and show how active learning can improve on those ...' further suggests that the teacher should show the learners the reasons why they might be struggling to understand the economics concepts when they are just passive listeners to a chalk and talk presentation and how active learning can improve on the situation. The suggestion '... the teacher can even demonstrate it by a practical example ...' implies that the learners' interest in this method might be increased if the teacher can, at this stage of introducing active learning, give a practical example of how this method works.

The phrases from the statement by Mosa '... how it works ...' and '... how learners can benefit from its use ...' are indications that learners might not have encountered the use of active learning and might not know how it works. The teacher is therefore required to bring the learners on board with this approach to teaching economics and show them how it is likely to enhance their understanding of the subject.

#### Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The phrases from the two statements made by Mosa '... learners can then be able to compare it with the current teaching approach in economics ...' and '... immediately they start to see that it works for them they would ... and will be motivated to take part in the active learning activities ...' demonstrate coherence with what other participants have suggested earlier on and further build on those suggestions in stating that learners will be able to make a comparison of the two methods on their own, and if they see that with active learning their understanding of the subject improves they will start to value it.

#### 4.3.2 Availability of resources to properly plan the activities

Once a proper context has been set for the implementation of active learning, attention should be focused on planning suitable activities, ensuring that the activity will encourage

learner participation. Activities should illustrate a specific concept in such a manner that learners are able to relate their experience in the activity to that particular concept. Time should also be created for the debriefing of an activity as debriefing in itself provides a learning opportunity for the learners.

In Annex TR 4 Motedi identifies one of the enabling conditions for the implementation of active learning in the class in saying '... what is needed to implement these strategies I think is the resources ... resources you need will depend on what you are going to do ...'.

Ms Aldam in Annex TR 3 points to the availability of resources as a necessary condition to implementing active learning by stating that 'minor challenge is resource-based, if you want to do active learning you need resources. It is not expensive resources ... most of the resources you need are paper-based, so if learners have scissors they can cut money and they can do things ...'.

Mr Tshabi in Annex TR 5 is of the opinion that implementation of active learning depends on the availability of resources in stating that '... you need normal resources ... you need internet and library to facilitate information search, you need variety of textbooks, writing material ... you need financial support so that you can have all those resources ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Motedi states that '... what is needed ... I think is the resources' and elaborates on the statement by saying 'resources you need will depend on ...'.

The statement shows that the participant has not only identified the need for resources as an enabling condition but shows that there is no standard set of resources that is needed as that will always depend on the kind of activity that will be undertaken in class.

Ms Aldam confirms the need for resources in the implementation of active learning and goes further to show that availability of resources should not be a financial challenge to the teachers by saying 'minor challenge is resources-based ... it is not expensive resources ... most of the resources are paper-based ...'.

Mr Tshabi says '... you need normal resources ...' and '... you need financial support so that you can have all those resources ...'. These statements can be seen as a further confirmation

that availability of resources is important to implement active learning and in line with the point raised earlier that resources should not pose a financial challenge, Mr Tshabi stresses that you need normal resources, which means that the teachers can use the resources that are, under normal circumstances, already available in a school.

#### Analysis of discourse from a critical emancipatory research perspective

The second phrase '... you need financial support ...' in Mr Tshabi's statement shows that the success of active learning does not only depend on the teachers and the learners but also on the support from other stakeholders, for example the school governing body's willingness to allocate funds for the resources that might be needed to facilitate active learning. This financial support can be seen from the critical emancipatory research point of view as empowerment since learners and teachers will now have the material and other resources they need to improve the teaching and learning of the subject.

#### 4.3.3 A change in classroom culture and a redistribution of power in class

In a traditional teacher-centred teaching and learning environment, the teacher seems to be a powerful figure who is in control and a decision-maker in the classroom, with the learners only playing a passive role in knowledge acquisition. See (Nazeer 2006:74-75) in Section 2.7. An active-learning classroom culture will require the teacher to relinquish his dominant role in class to become a facilitator of learning activities and a guide in the class. See Wudinger (2009:8) and Rosales and Journell (2012:58) in Section 2.10. This change in the classroom culture and redistribution of power requires that learners start to assume control and responsibility for their own learning. Learners should be given freedom to engage in discussions with their classmates and the teacher, and they should be encouraged to participate in activities that demonstrate how economic theory works in real life. See Wudinger (2009:9) in Section 2.10.

In Annex TR 4 Reneilwe states '... if the teacher does not want to give learners opportunities in class to try and do things the way they think can help them ... we as learners are the ones who are affected by this problem and we can always come up with ideas that we can use in class to help each other and you as the teacher might also adopt and implement the ideas and methods we might think of ...'.

## Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement '... if the teacher does not want to ...' demonstrates that there are instances where the teacher still sees himself or herself as having all the power in the classroom and the sole responsibility of transmitting knowledge to the learners without giving them an opportunity to say or to show what they can offer the class. The statement shows that to promote active learning in class there must be a shift in the direction of accepting learners as equal partners in the learning process.

Reneilwe further states '... to try and do things the way they think can help them ... we can come up with ideas that we can use in class to help each other ...'. In this statement Reneilwe suggests that if learners can be accommodated by the teacher who is able to shift some power and control to them in the class, learners can contribute meaningfully to the learning process and help each other to better understand the subject.

The statement '... you as the teacher might also adopt and implement the ideas and methods we might think of ...' is in line with the view that learners should not just be seen as empty vessels to be filled with information from the teacher but as co-constructors of knowledge and that the teacher should not only be concerned with how he covers the content material but with how he shares the content material together with the learners.

In Annex TR 3 Ms Aldam says '... if you ask me if I want to do it today, what will be the inhibiting factors, is my unwillingness to do it because I do not have confidence in it, I am afraid I am giving power away, you give power to the pupils who talk with you and you are no longer the one in control who can only talk, that is a scary concept for teachers who grew up in a country were for hundreds of years they [the teachers] were the only ones with power in class ...'.

The statement '... I am afraid I am giving power away ... you are no longer the one in control ...' further demonstrates that active learning would not be a possibility in the class if the teacher believes by actively engaging the learners in class he or she will be giving his or her power away and he or she would lose control of the class. The statement shows that teachers should be willing to relinquish some power and control to the learners if an active learning environment is to be created in class.

Mr Tshabi in Annex TR 5 says '... I think the teacher can use that as an indirect form of assessment. By actively engaging the learners, the teacher can be gauge how much the learners understand ... The teacher can then start to assist them where they seem to be struggling ...'.

The two phrases '... I think the teacher can use that as an indirect form of assessment' and 'The teacher can then start to assist them ...' seem to suggest that a shift in the balance of power in class does not necessarily mean that the teacher is giving away control but it simply means that control is applied in a different manner. In this case, by giving the learners a platform to speak in class. To demonstrate things in class will actually help the teacher to diagnose the deficiencies in learners' understanding of the material dealt with and direct him or her to those areas where support is needed. In this way the teacher's role becomes that of facilitator of learning activities and guide.

#### Analysis of discourse as social practice

The statement by Ms Aldam '... that is a scary concept for teachers who grew up in a country where for hundreds of years they were the only ones with power in class ...' demonstrates that because of the social practice that teachers grew up with, that is, the teacher is the master in class and he or she has the power and control over the learners, can make it difficult to achieve a shift in the balance of power in the class that is seen as a necessary condition for active learning to be successfully implemented.

In Annex TR 6 Mr Sebola is quoted as saying ' ... I believe there is need to change the way we teach to benefit the learners, we should move away from the position of Mr 'Know-it-all' in class and start to accommodate the learners, because at the end of the day we should create opportunities for them to acquire knowledge and also create opportunities for them to apply that knowledge ... I think that is why we need a paradigm shift ...'. The phrase '... I believe there is a need to change the way we teach ... we should move away from the position of ...' shows that while Mr Sebola acknowledges that teachers have become used to the direct transmission of information that puts them in the position of power and control in class he suggests that there is a need to break away from such a social practice and that such a paradigm shift will enhance the application of active learning.

### Analysing discourse from the critical emancipatory research perspective

The statement made by Reneilwe '... if the teacher does not want to give learners opportunities in class to try and do things the way they think can help them ...' points to the unequal power relations that exist in the classroom where the teacher still believes that, as an authority figure in the class, he is the only one who dictates the classroom proceedings.

The unequal power relations in the classroom can also be noted in the statement by Ms Aldam '... I am afraid I am giving power away, you give power to the pupils who talk with you and you are no longer the one in control who can only talk ...'. This statement shows that a teacher has a perception that by encouraging active participation of the learners in class, he or she will be handing over the power and control to the learners, which is something he or she is not willing to do. Note the use of the phrase '... I am afraid...'.

Mr Sebola states that '... we should move away from the position of Mr Know-it-all in class and start to accommodate the learners ...'. From this statement we notice that the teachers still perceive themselves to be the experts in class '... Mr Know-it-all...' that puts them in a position of power in the classroom while the learners can only learn from what the 'expert' has to offer.

The above analysis confirms the need for a redistribution of power in the classroom as a necessary condition for active learning to succeed. This redistribution of power will lead to justice and equity in the classroom as the teachers begin to recognise learners' potential, value their voices and empower them by sharing with them the responsibility to create meaningful learning experiences in the teaching of the subject.

#### 4.3.5 Support from other relevant stakeholders

The system should encourage and support the application of active learning in the classroom. This can be achieved by, for example, the support of the principal and the school governing body to provide resources needed for classroom activities. The department of education should arrange workshops for teachers and develop materials to expose teachers to active learning methods that can be used to teach economics.

Reabetswe is quoted in Annex TR 4 as saying '... if the principal does not approve of whatever we want to do then we will not be able to succeed ...'.

In Annex TR 6 Mr Sebola makes a similar comment saying '... teachers might find themselves under pressure from the school management, you know those people who are in management positions, the principals and the deputy principals, some of them are from the old school ... they think that when there is silence in class then there is effective teaching and learning taking place ...'.

Mr Tshabi in Annex TR 5 is also of the opinion that implementation of active learning requires support from other stakeholders in stating that '... you need normal resources ... you need internet and library to facilitate information search, you need variety of textbooks, writing material ... you need financial support so that you can have all those resources ...'.

In Annex TR 3 Ms Aldam she says '... I think the other enabling factor is the material that is available, there is a lot of active learning material available ... We have subject advisors who were trained in this active learning so there are agents of change out there ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement made by Nkamogeleng the phrase '... if the principal does not approve of whatever ...' shows that for active learning to succeed in class, support is needed from the principal even though he or she might not be directly involved with the classroom activities and without that support it will be difficult for the teacher to implement active learning in the class.

The phrase from Mr Tshabi's statement '... you need financial support so that you can have all those resources ...' demonstrates that teachers and learners will need certain resources for active learning to succeed, e.g. access to internet, all of which will have some financial implication. The financial support from the school governing body will then make it possible for these resources to be availed and contribute to the implementation of active learning.

Two phrases are notable from Ms Aldam in Annex TR 3 ' ... the other enabling factor is the material that is available ...' , '... we have subject advisors who were trained ...' and '... so there are agents of change out there ...'. The first suggests that teachers need to have



material on active learning that they can use in their classes. Ms Aldam further qualifies the availability of material on active learning as an enabling factor with the phrase '... there is a lot of active learning material available specifically for economics ...'. This phrase suggests that it is easier for teachers to implement active learning in the instances where material is already available. That can be to the advantage of the teacher as they will not have to spend more time developing the material. The second phrase '... there are agents of change ...' implies that the subject advisors should support the teachers as they have been trained in this approach. The support they can offer the teachers can assist the teachers to start and to incorporate active learning in their classes; it will be a shift from the dominance of the traditional chalk and talk approach in the economics class. Through their support they will be serving as catalyst in the envisaged change to the teaching approach.

#### Analysis of discourse from a critical emancipatory research perspective

The statement by Nkamogeleng '... if the principal does not approve of whatever we want to do then we will not be able to succeed ...' demonstrates that Reabetswe recognises that the principal has authority and power in the school and that with the support of this authority figure, active learning can be a success.

In the statement made by Mr Tshabi, the phrase '... you know those people who are in management positions, the principals and the deputy principals, some of them are from the old school ...' shows that power is concentrated in the hands of those who are in the senior positions in schools and who are mostly in favour of the traditional way of teaching and might not approve of the innovative teaching methods used in economics class. Their support is largely dependent on their willingness to change and embrace the learner-engaging strategies in the economics class.

#### 4.4 Threats and possible challenges to the implementation of active learning framework

##### 4.4.1 Content coverage and time available to teach using active learning strategies

Teachers have to follow prescribed teaching plans that specify the content to be covered and time frames for the coverage of that content and this often puts them under pressure to always be up to par with those teaching plans. It is argued that active learning reduces the amount of time available for content coverage and for this reason teachers might not be

eager to use active learning because of the pressure to cover the same content they normally do when they use the traditional lecturing method. Teachers are therefore concerned that by applying active learning strategies they might be forced to sacrifice some breadth in content coverage in pursuit of the gain in depth of student understanding of economics concepts. See Salemi (2002:730) and Bonwell (2003:4) in Section 2.11.

In Annex TR 3 Ms Aldam states that '... another challenge for the teachers is the length of the class period. You cannot do a simulation if you have less than an hour. You cannot do active learning if you have less than an hour because active learning asks for a dialogue and dialogue asks for time ...'.

Mr Sebola in Annex TR 2 says '... it is unfortunate that you cannot be as free as you want to be using this approach to teach because you are always pressed for time ... it is unlike when you are in a workshop, you will be free to do these things practically but with a 48-minute period it is not easy to finish the activity and you will be forced to leave the gaps in between ... I think the activity will make impact if it can be finished in one period ...'.

In Annex TR 4 Reabetswe says '... it is time, our time as Grade 12 learners is limited and we have a lot of work to cover. These activities, e.g. drama, might take time to complete and we might find ourselves lagging behind with the syllabus ...'.

Analysis of discourse at a textual level

Ms Aldam points to one challenge of using active learning in the class with the phrase '... length of class period ...'. This simply shows that implementation of active learning can be a problem if the teacher does not have a certain amount of time per period.

A similar observation is made by Mr Sebola stating '... you cannot be free as you want using this approach ... you are always pressed for time ... I think the activity will make an impact if it can be finished in one period ...'. The statement is further acknowledgement that it is a challenge for teachers to apply active learning in class because of time constraints. Mr Sebola demonstrates in this statement active learning strategies will not make an impact on the learners if the teacher is forced by the bell to interrupt a debate or role-playing, for instance, before it is completed.

Reabetswe shares the same view stating '... our time as Grade 12 learners is limited ...' and '... we might find ourselves lagging behind ...' the statement demonstrates that Reabetswe is aware of the amount of work they have to complete and also aware of the time needed to complete certain active learning activities. Therefore time constraints may be a challenge when using active learning.

#### Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

Mr Tshabi is quoted in Annex TR 5 as saying '... that is a challenge, because as you teach you want the learners to learn and acquire deeper understanding ... At the same time you must be able to cover a certain amount of work in a particular period of time ...and if you want to use demonstrations and blah, blah, blah, I will find myself running out of time. So the use of active learning depends on other factors like time available ...'.

In the above extract Mr Tshabi tries to demonstrate what teachers and learners stand to benefit from active learning, namely, deeper understanding. At the same time he shows what may prevent them from using this approach, namely the amount of content. The phrase '... that is a challenge ...' shows that he is aware of limited time as a challenge that has been raised by others.

Teachers might be reluctant to use active learning as they find it difficult to strike a balance between the breadth of content coverage and depth of understanding. See Michael (2007:45) and Becker, et al. (2006:76) in Section 2.11.

In an effort to balance the breadth and depth of content coverage Mr Tshabi in Annex TR 5 says '... so at the end of the day I have to use the approach that will address both content coverage and depth of coverage. I might be forced to reduce the use of active learning in order to cover content even though I am trying to move away from the direct transmission of knowledge ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse as social practice

In this extract, the phrase '... I might be forced to reduce ... to cover content even though I am trying to move away from ...' shows us that Mr Tshabi will under the circumstances revert to the use of the traditional lecture method that has become reputable over the

years for its effectiveness in transmitting large amounts of information in a short space of time.

#### Interpretation of discourse as social information

Looking further at the above extract Mr Tshabi says '... so at the end of the day I have to ... that will address both content coverage and depth of coverage ...'. From this phrase, we become aware that the research participant is involved with the social reality under investigation and given his experience with that social reality he tries to come up with a viable solution to the dilemma he finds himself in.

#### 4.4.2 Large number of learners in class and limited class space

Active learning requires that learners should have free movement in the class as they gather for group discussions, work together on particular projects or demonstrate certain activities in class. It might be necessary to rearrange the normal sitting arrangement, e.g. by rearranging the desks in a circle, to facilitate group discussion but in a class with a large number of learners the limited classroom space might not allow such free movement of learners, classroom demonstrations and rearrangements of desks. Large classes may make it difficult for the teacher to involve all the learners in the class activities and this will further breed the problem of passivity and learner anonymity in class. See USAID (2005:2), World Bank Working Paper No 128 (2008:49) and Becker, et al. (2006:76) in Section 2.11.

In an Annex TR 5 Mr Tshabi is quoted saying '... numbers will always be a case but of utmost importance is the physical space that is available, it becomes difficult to ... if you have about 60 in one class because not all of them will participate in a class activity ...' he continues to say '... if I have enough space I can be able to put the activities in practice ...'.

In Annex TR 3 Ms Aldam says '... it becomes a challenge if the class size is bigger than 70 ... what I see as a challenge is a physical space because if physical space does not allow learners to stand, walk around ... then it cannot work ...' and continues to say '... for me physical space and the layout ... can be more of an inhibiting factor ... I have done simulations with more than 200 people at the same time ... if you are organised you can do it ...'.

### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The phrase '... numbers will always be a case ...' demonstrates that Mr Tshabi acknowledges that the number of learners in a classroom can be a challenge for the teacher to use active learning and that is something that needs to be considered. He goes on '... but of utmost importance is the physical space that is available ...'. From this statement, one can deduce that although Mr Tshabi recognises that the number of learners in a class can be a challenge, the physical space that the teacher has to conduct the active learning activities poses a more serious challenge, hence the phrase '... but of utmost importance is ...'. He then continues to justify his point as noted from the phrases '... if you have about 60 in a class not all of them will participate ...' and '... if I have enough space I can be able to ...'. The first phrase shows that for Mr Tshabi it will be difficult to actively involve 60 learners if you have limited class space and the second phrase shows that with enough space he will be able to engage them in an active learning activity.

### Analysis of discourse as a discursive practice

The statement by Ms Aldam that '... it becomes a challenge if the class size is bigger than 70 ... what I see as a challenge is a physical space ... I have done simulations with more than 200 people at the same time ...' demonstrates the discourse with regard to the numbers in class and class space as potential challenges in the implementation of active learning. One can note an element of intertextuality in this statement as it is related to the previous one made by Mr Tshabi. The phrases '... it becomes a challenge if class size is ...' , '... what I see as a challenge is ...' and '... I have done simulations with more than ...at the same time'. From these three phrases one notices that the points raised here can be traced to points raised earlier by Mr Tshabi.

The statement by Ms Aldam demonstrates an element of coherence. The phrase '... does not allow learners to stand, walk around ... then it cannot work ...' shows that Ms Aldam is actually building on the argument of numbers in class and class space by explaining how larger numbers of learners and a limited class space can inhibit the implementation of active learning in a class.

#### 4.4.3 Willingness of the learners to change their attitude on their role in the learning process

The learners have become used to a passive role in class and seem to be content with the situation where the teacher carries out most of the classroom responsibilities with learners' role in the teaching and learning process being limited to just regular class attendance, writing notes and heavy reliance on memorisation of information from the teacher and they perceive it to be the way things have to be. It is for this reason that learners might find it difficult to break away from the status quo. See Zain (2009:93) and Bonwell (2003:5) in Section 2.11 and Thornton and Reynolds (2006:277) in Section 2.2.4.

In Annex TR 7 Moletlo states that '... learners are comfortable with the old way of doing things ... they can simply hide behind the others in the sense that ... one or few learners who would be asking questions or answering questions in class ...'.

Mosa in Annex TR 7 says '... personally, as a Grade 12 economics student, I think it will be a challenge to adopt active learning in class because as learners since doing economics from Grade 10 we know the teacher will come into the class, read and explain ... and ours is just to underline certain concepts he or she is referring to ... learners will always find it difficult to take an active role in class ...'.

Reneilwe makes a similar observation stating that '... since Grade 1 we just got used to coming to class and passively listening to the teacher as if we are in a church listening to the sermon of the priest ... sometimes you find that there is a learner who is aware of the fact that this passivity ... could be one reason they fail ... but because the learner is scared to be active in class because he or she thinks that others may see him or her as trying to be ... the learner will continue with the flow of the class ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The two phrases '... learners are comfortable with the old way of ...' and '... they can simply hide behind the others ...' from Moletlo's statement suggest that learners might resist active learning as they are comfortable with their current roles in class. They find comfort in the old class order because with this order, they are never in the spotlight and find no reason to be in control and responsible for their learning. They can always survive as the teacher's

questions will always be answered by one or few learners in class. Active learning will force them to come out of their comfort zones as it requires them to be engaged in the classroom activities in that they have to search for information, participate in discussions, argue and defend their arguments, which are steps to another level in the learning process, something that they are unfortunately not used to.

#### Analysis of discourse as social practice

The phrase '... since doing economics from Grade 10 we know that teacher will come into class, read, and explain things to us and ours is just to ... because of this, learners will always find it difficult to take an active role in class ...' shows that Mosa acknowledges that as learners, they have become used to the classroom culture of simple linear order where the teacher will be directly transmitting information to the learners who see their role in class as to listen and take notes. It is this classroom culture that learners have become accustomed to that will make it difficult to see themselves as having more roles to play in the teaching and learning process and go beyond a mere acquisition of knowledge.

The argument by Mosa is carried forward by Reneilwe in stating '... since Grade 1 we just got used to coming to class and passively listening to the teacher as if we are in a church listening to the sermon of the priest ...'. By making a comparison between a classroom setting and church setting, Reneilwe shows that learners' perception of the learning process is something that might be deeply entrenched and may therefore contribute to resistance to change by the learners.

#### Analysis from critical emancipatory research

The statement by Reneilwe '... sometimes you find that there is learner who is aware of the fact ... the learner would then continue with the flow of ... the approach of the teacher in teaching might also not ... because the teacher is just pushing to complete the job ...' shows how the traditional teacher-centred approach maintains hegemony in the classroom. This hegemony in the classroom is maintained by an unspoken alliance between the teacher and the learners. The learners without any coercion from the teacher would not want to break the current classroom order but would instead maintain the status quo by going with the

existing flow of the class where the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge and the learners are passive recipients of that knowledge.

#### 4.4.4 Willingness of the teachers to change from their traditional way of teaching

Teachers may still see the traditional lecture method as an effective way to transmit large amounts of information and to stick to the lesson plan and this will make it difficult for them to change towards active learning. See Bonwell (2003:4) in Section 2.11. They might resist changing to the active learning approach because they do not feel self-confident in using this approach due to their limited exposure to it. Another factor that may prove a barrier to teachers adopting active learning is that they might think that it takes control and power they have in the class out of their hands. See Bonwell (2003:5) and Michael (2007:45) in Section 2.11.

In Annex TR 3, Ms Aldam refers to one challenge of using active learning by teachers by saying ' ... the first challenge will be the willingness of the teachers to change their way of thinking and way of doing things ... Traditionally in South Africa for many years teachers have become used to being the chalk and talk masters ... I think it is a huge challenge ... we come from an Oxford British system ...'.

In Annex TR 5 Mr Sebola shares a similar view that willingness of the teachers to change from the traditional chalk and talk method is a challenge in the implementation of active learning in teaching economics stating that '... it not going to happen automatically, given the background that we come from as teachers ... I mean I have been teaching for a long time ... we need to change the mind-sets of teachers especially those who were trained in the old system of education ...'.

#### Discourse Analysis at a textual level

At a textual analysis level Ms Aldam uses the phrases '... first challenge ...' and '... huge challenge ...'. The two phrases suggest that the willingness of the teachers to change is one of the most important factors that can impede the adoption of active learning in the economics classroom and by saying it is a huge challenge she views teacher willingness to change as a challenge that might not be easy to overcome.



The statement '... we need to change the mind-sets of teachers ...' by Mr Sebola demonstrates that teachers might not find it easy to use active learning strategies due to their perception of what is the best way for them to teach.

#### Discourse analysis as social practice

Looking at this challenge from a social practice level, Ms Aldam further states that '...have become used to being the chalk and talk masters ...'. This statement tells us that teachers might not be willing to change because of the social practice that they have become used to. Interpreting this statement using discourse as social information reveals that Ms Aldam is involved in and has contact with the social reality under investigation which in this study is the use of active learning in teaching economics. In this extract Ms Aldam shows that the problem stems from the traditional teacher training in South Africa and further from the influence the Oxford British system had on our education system.

Mr Sebola says ' ... given the background that we come from ... I have been teaching for a long time ... we need to change mind-sets of teachers especially those who were trained in the old system ...'.

This statement tells us that he has been teaching for a long time and it mentions the background many teachers come from in terms of teacher training. He and many other teachers have become used to the traditional teaching method that has become a social practice in class and that might prove a barrier to the adoption of active learning methods in class. By stating that he has been teaching for a long time he shows that he is involved and has contact with the social reality that the study is investigating. He makes a suggestion 'we need to change the mind-sets of... especially those who were trained in the old system ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

At a discursive practice level, we can see that there is intertextuality in the statements by Ms Aldam and Mr Sebola. The assertion by Mr Sebola that a change in the mind-sets is needed from the teachers' side for active learning to succeed is closely related to the statement from an earlier transcript in which Ms Aldam argued that a willingness to change is a huge challenge to adopting active learning.

#### 4.4.5 The society's expectations on what constitutes an appropriate classroom order

The schools still hold on to the culturally determined view that appropriate classroom order is when the teacher plays an authoritative role in the class dictating the classroom proceedings and he or she is responsible for direct transmission of knowledge to the learners who must subordinately receive information. It is because of this perception that teachers might find it difficult to relinquish the power that is vested in them by the societal perceptions of what constitutes appropriate classroom order. Teachers would therefore find it difficult to accept learners as partners in the knowledge-creation process by giving them freedom to express differing points of view in class, allowing them to engage with their peers in discussions and having the learners' voices heard. See World Bank Working Paper No 128 (2008:44) in Section 2.11. It is because of these expectations from the society that that it will be difficult to break away from the norm and embrace the innovative methods of teaching.

In Annex TR 5 transcript Mr Tshabi is quoted as saying '... it is still a concept, you might want to implement it but when you try you are met with resistance ... someone in the street will just see learners making noise instead of being taught, so at the end of the day you end up failing to achieve the desired results you wanted to achieve with active learning exercises ...':

Mr Sebola elaborates further on that point by saying '... I think we saw there was a need for change in the curriculum, but did we get all the stakeholders on board with what the new curriculum is about, no we did not ... parents who come from the traditional system will naturally complain when they see the activities the learners do ... we as teachers we still have a bit of resistance because of the way we were trained ... so the change in the mind-set must be across the board ...':

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

In a statement made by Mr Tshabi, the phrase '... you might want to implement it but when you try you are met with resistance ... someone in the street will just see learners making noise instead of being taught ...' shows that even if the teacher may be willing to implement active learning in class, there would still be a challenge from other stakeholders in

education,, e.g. parents, who are not clued up about this approach. Instead of seeing active learning as a way to ensure that learners develop deeper understanding of the subject material, other people will just see learners playing and it might be due to the fact that people still hold a particular view of what they regard as good classroom order.

#### Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The statement by Mr Sebola seems to build on the point of resistance raised earlier by Mr Tshabi. Looking at the phrase '... but did we get all the stakeholders on board with what the new curriculum is about, no we did not ...'. This phrase is in line with the point that was raised earlier that it is not only the teachers' and the learners' attitudes that may be a challenge to its implementation, there are other stakeholders who might resist this approach to teaching. He continues to point out that not all the stakeholders were initiated in the new curriculum and that may be the reason why others may resist the learner-centred approach to teaching.

#### Analysis of discourse as social practice

In that statement made by Mr Tshabi the phrase '... parents who come from the traditional system will naturally complain ...' shows the resistance to active learning by parents stems from the schooling system in which they grew up and believe that the classroom order they became used to as students, is what today's class should still look like. Mr Sebola acknowledges that not only teachers and learners need to be initiated in the learner-centred approach but efforts should be made to bring all stakeholders on board, hence the phrase '... so the change in the mind-set must be across the board ...'.

### 4.5 Components of an active learning framework

#### 4.5.1 Experiments or demonstrations

The use of experiments or demonstrations has been identified as one suitable component of the active learning framework for teaching the economics concepts for the reason that they have a potential to actively engage the learners in the learning process and assist the learners to remember and apply the abstract economics concepts. By participating in these experiments or demonstrations learners are given an opportunity to put in practice the

theory behind the concepts they learn and as they engage with these concepts they find out their deeper meanings and that will likely lead to long-term retention of those concepts. See Brock and Lopus (2006:189) and Durham, McKinnon and Schulman (2007:177) in Section 2.6.3.

In Annex TR 2 Reneilwe makes a suggestion on how learners can be actively engaged in class and what can be done to try and bring the abstract concepts to the classroom level by saying '... practical illustration of concepts ...'.

Mr Sebola is quoted in Annex TR 6 as saying '...In my experience the learners do respond to the demonstrations and classroom experiments unlike when I am in front of them trying to explain a difficult concept ...'.

In the Annex TR 7 Nkamogeleng is quoted as saying '... I think if it were possible to teach everything in economics with demonstrations we ... because in a demonstration of a certain concept ... I am able to see how it works in real life and by the time I study for the exams I would still remember what was in that demonstration ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The statement made by Reneilwe suggests that the learners believe that by practically demonstrating the concepts they are taught in class their engagement in such demonstrations will help them understand what those concepts really mean.

The phrase '... learners do respond to demonstrations and classroom experiments unlike when I ...' from the statement by Mr Sebola is a further suggestion that learners actually understand these abstract economics concepts much better when the teacher uses demonstrations and classroom experiments to explain them.

#### Interpreting discourse as social information

The phrase '... In my experience ...' from the statement by Mr Sebola demonstrates that he is familiar with the problem under investigation in this study. The phrase suggests that he has had an opportunity of teaching certain concepts with the chalk and talk approach and using demonstrations and classroom experiments and has found that the latter method

yielded better results hence he qualifies his statement with the phrase '... unlike when I am in front of them trying to explain a difficult concept ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The statement by Nkamogeleng shows that the participant understands the point made on the value of using classroom experiments and demonstrations in teaching economics concepts and builds on that point with the phrase '... because in a demonstration of a certain concept ... I am able to see how it works in real life and by the time I study for the exams I would still remember ...'.

#### 4.5.2 Cooperative learning exercises

Another way to effectively engage learners when teaching economics is the use of cooperative learning. This has the potential to stimulate interest and enthusiasm on the part of learners. Cooperative learning exercises are aimed at enhancing learner engagement in class by putting them in small groups to complete certain tasks given by the teacher. The use of cooperative exercises is necessitated by the fact that economics teachers in South Africa are encouraged to actively engage learners in their own learning by facilitating learning and by using group work. Group work allows learners to assist and be assisted by the others in learning the economics material. See Van Wyk (2011:183) in Section 2.9.3 and LPG Economics (2005:16) in Section 2.8.

In Annex TR 4 Motedi says '... I think a group discussion, let's say we have completed a particular aspect, we sit down in a circle ... we discuss so that everyone can share with the group his or her understanding of the topic under discussion ...'.

Mr Tshabi (Annex TR 5) adds to the use of small group activities by stating '... I am one person who believes the smaller the number the bigger the rewards, it is easier to carry out some tasks in small groups because monitoring and guiding become easy. When they work in small groups I see good results because even those who do not usually participate in a normal class situation push themselves to be active members in a group and it becomes easier to get assistance from their group members ...'.

In Annex TR 6, Mr Sebola reflects on working in small groups by saying '... actually those who are slower are able to learn from others ... I am not really able to accommodate them because I have to be on par with the work schedule and the pace-setter. When they work in groups and provided I ensure that order is maintained ... everybody gets a chance to ask questions and make contributions ... even those who are shy to speak in class ... that motivates them to start to realise that they can be capable to stand and present ... to the class'.

Nkamogeleng is quoted in Annex TR 4 as saying '... I also think that will give us platform to grow to become better people, there are learners who are shy who are introverts and this will help us grow as people, will help us to work together with others and break the barriers to communication and improve one's self complex ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase '... we sit down in a circle ... we discuss so that everyone can share with the group ...' by Motedi suggests that by coming together in a group, learners are able to reflect on the topic and this will help them to develop a better understanding as they share their insights into the topic and correct one another with the help of the teacher. The activity might be beneficial to all group members as it provides an extra teaching opportunity to them in the sense that by sharing their understanding of the topic they are actually teaching each other and learning from each other.

The phrase '... actually those who are slower are able to learn from others ... I am not really able to accommodate them because I have to be on par with the work schedule and the pace-setter ...' demonstrates that by using cooperative learning exercises in class the teacher is trying to accommodate those learners who may not be able to grasp the material as quickly as the others and who may be left behind because the teacher is always trying to transmit as much information as possible with the talk and chalk approach.

In that statement made by Mr Sebola the phrase '... provided I ensure that order is maintained ...' indicates that to ensure that group activities achieve the desired results the teacher should always be part of the group activities as a guide and to ensure that learners work in an orderly manner. Furthermore the phrase '... everybody gets a chance to ask

questions and make contributions ...' shows that group work has a potential to allow learners to assist one another with the topics they are assigned that can boost their understanding of the subject matter and their participation in class.

Analysis of discourse from the critical emancipatory research perspective

The phrase '... even those who are shy to speak in class... that motivates them to start to realise that they can be capable to stand and present ... to the class ...' from Mr Sebola's statement suggests that by using the cooperative learning exercises in class, those learners who previously did not have confidence to speak to a larger group can develop interactive skills from their groups and be empowered to present the content material to their peers in class.

In the statement made by Nkamogeleng, the phrase '... give us platform to grow to become better people, will help us grow as people, improve one's self-complex ...' demonstrates that cooperative learning exercises will not only assist the learners in understanding economics but from the group skills they will have acquired from such exercises they will be empowered to work cooperatively with others and that will help them to become better citizens and improve their self-image as they will have developed the confidence that they can make a meaningful contribution when required.

In a cooperative learning environment learners not only become actively engaged but develop an appreciation for multiple perspectives as they learn to recognise different opinions held by other group members. Learners therefore have an opportunity to learn and understand the content material from the contributions made by group members and fellow classmates during the class presentations. See Peterson and McGoldrick (2009:80) in Section 2.7.

In trying to demonstrate that learners will have to do some research on the topic to be discussed in their group, Mosa in Annex TR 7 says '... that information will be helpful to the learners who might not have understood the lesson as it was presented by the teacher, they can therefore use that information to have clarity on the concept that was discussed ...'.

In Annex TR 7 Reneilwe says '... one other thing is that the mere fact of going out to do research will go a long way, remember we are different as learners in class, so if one learner

comes with information on the topic and the others do the same, we can be able to use that information to understand a topic from various points of view which also improves our understanding ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase '... that information will be helpful to the learners who might not have understood the lesson as it was presented by the teacher ...' from Mosa' statement shows that participation in group discussions affords the learners another opportunity to understand the material from the fellow group members who might have gathered some information that will clarify to the learners what the teacher was actually explaining in class. The learners might then start to recognise how much they can learn from one another besides only banking on the teacher as the source of knowledge in class.

The phrases '... remember we are different as learners in class ...' and '... to understand a topic from various points of view ...' demonstrate that Reneilwe acknowledges the fact that they have different abilities and backgrounds as learners and might understand a topic from different angles. Adding all the different perspectives to the teacher's presentation, they have a broader picture of the topic and achieve a deeper understanding of the topic under discussion.

#### 4.5.3 Role-play and simulations

In a role-playing or simulation exercise, learners assume different roles assigned to them to simulate a particular social, economic or political process in a controlled setting and through participation in these exercises, learners are provided with real experiences that allow them to make meaning out of the concepts they learn and these exercises promote active learning, increased learner interest and motivation. See Zapalska and Brozik (2008:365) in Section 2.6.5.

In Annex TR 2 Nkamokeleng identifies one other strategy that can be used to actively engage learners and enhance understanding of economics concepts by saying '... we also spoke of drama, by dramatising for example topics like unemployment as a socio-economic problem learners will learn more about unemployment and the measures which government can implement to alleviate unemployment ...'.



In Annex TR 4 Moduedi makes a further addition to the use of drama by saying '... everyone can be able to see things in action... it is going to help us understand, I mean, Sir, let's say we dramatize a particular concept, we can add jokes during the dramatisation and that will help us to remember the concept even in the exam ...'.

Reabetswe says '... yes, I also think role-play can be [an] effective method especially in a difficult subject like economics which does not only require you to just read but you also need to do things practically and be actively engaged in class so that you can start to understand it better by reflecting on the roles that [were] played by different learners you can easily remember the topic on which the role play was based ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The phrases '... by dramatising for example topics like unemployment ...' and '... learners will learn more about unemployment ...' from the statement by Nkamogeleng show that she believes that for learners to understand certain topics, a topic can be treated in the form of a role-play where different roles assigned to learners will cover various aspects of that topic for example a role-play on unemployment can illustrate various types of unemployment, effects of unemployment and measures that can be taken to reduce unemployment.

In the statement made by Moduedi the phrase '... everyone can be able to see things in action ...' elaborates on how role-playing can assist the learners to understand the topic by bringing the real-world economic phenomena of unemployment into the class, learners can relate to it and make sense of it unlike when it is treated abstractly from the textbook. The second phrase '... we can add jokes during the dramatisation ...' shows that by adding humour to the activity and in having fun, the experience will last for a long time in the memories of the learners.

The application of this strategy requires that learners remain active participants and constant decision-makers throughout the learning process. See Sullivan (2003:70) and Zapalska and Brozik (2008:345) in Section 2.6.5.

In Annex TR 5 Mr Tshabi elaborates on the use of role-playing exercises by saying '... this strategy has an impact because it engages the learner with what he or she is doing, by acting a particular role the learner is put in the shoes of the character he or she is playing

and can then start to understand things from a particular point of view ... get a better understanding of economics concepts ... and how the economy works...'

Reabetswe says '... yes I also think role-play can be [an] effective method especially in a difficult subject like economics that does not only require you to just to read but you also need to do things practically and be actively engaged in class so that you can start to understand it better by reflecting on the roles played by different learners you can easily remember the topic on which the role-play was based ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

The phrase from Mr Tshabi's statement '... this strategy has an impact because it engages the learner with what he or she is doing ...' seems to be in confirmation of the argument that role-playing and simulations have a potential to actively engage the learners in class and therefore reduce their passivity in class. The phrase '... get a better understanding of economics concepts ...' shows that when learners are actively engaged with the material they are taught through participation in a role-playing exercise, for example, their understanding of economics concepts can improve. The phrase '... and how the economy works ...' demonstrates that by taking part in role-playing, learners are given an opportunity to practise the application of economics concepts in a simulated activity and will thus gain an understanding of how the economy works.

The phrase '... which does not only require you to just read ...' from Reabetswe's statement further demonstrates that the learner has realised that to understand economics concepts learners must go beyond just listening and reading but be engaged in activities that will make it easy to apply those concepts in practice in order to grasp their meanings and in this case the learner believes role-playing can be one such class activity.

### 4.6. Evidence on the functionality of the components of the active learning framework

#### 4.6.1 Classroom experiments or demonstrations

Classroom experiments are seen to be an effective method to help the learners to be actively engaged in class and to understand the economics concepts they learn in class. The participation of learners in these experiments puts them into a simulated economic

environment that is being studied and in so doing learners are able to make connections with the concepts that initially appeared to lack relevancy to their daily lives and were very abstract. Classroom experiments help the teachers to illustrate a specific concept while at the same time engaging the learners actively in the lesson who are able to discover themselves what these concepts mean in real life and with this personal discovery, learners are likely to take ownership of the learning process and the newly acquired knowledge. See Hoyt and McGolrick (2012:90) in Section 2.6.3 and Hazlett (2003:89) in Section 2.6.4.

In Annex TR 7 Reneilwe reflects on one classroom experiment in which they engaged by saying '... as Moletlo is saying, in that illustration of the concept of diminishing marginal returns we could see that as more workers were added to ... hence production started to decrease...'.

Moletlo further states '... and at first we thought if more workers are employed production will increase, the experiment showed how does the concept ... work in reality...'.

From the same annexure, Reabetswe states that '... with the experiment we did to illustrate the concept of .... I think the experiment managed to bring theory into the classroom, it helped us to see what we read about in the textbook...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

In the statement by Reneilwe the phrase '... in that illustration of the concept ... we could see ...', shows that their active engagement in the illustration of the concept of diminishing marginal returns made it possible to see the meaning of the concept in action and they could easily relate that experience to what happens in a real-life situation.

The phrases '... and at first we thought ...' and '... the experiment showed how does the concept ... work in reality ...' from Moletlo' statement, show that the learners had actually gone through the concept before the experiment was carried out but could not really understand the actual meaning of the concept hence the phrases '... and at first we thought ...' but once they were engaged in a practical demonstration of the concept in class, it was then when they started to understand what it really means and how the concept works.

From the statement made by Reabetswe, the phrase '... I think the experiment managed to bring practice into the classroom ...' is an indication that the learner previously had only a theoretical understanding of the concept marginal diminishing utility but with the experiment they did in class to demonstrate how that concept works in reality, they were able to acquire the actual meaning of the concept unlike when they were just reading it from the book.

The classroom experiments appear to be more effective to improve understanding when they are used to illustrate concepts that are less concrete and that seem to be difficult to understand when a direct lecture method is used. See Durham, Mckinnon and Schulman (2007:177) in Section 2.6.4.

In Annex TR 5 Mr Sebola states that '... when teaching them the concept of diminishing marginal returns by the usual chalk and talk method it becomes difficult for them to understand that concept. You can instead use a demonstration in class to illustrate that concept...'. He continues '... in that way learners will easily understand the concept as they saw it in action... and you can use that one where they were eating sweets, I think they were illustrating the concept of diminishing marginal utility ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The statement by Mr Sebola '... when teaching them the concept of diminishing marginal returns by the usual chalk and talk method it becomes difficult for them to understand that concept ...' shows that the teacher is aware that quite often, the learners will not understand certain concepts if he relies only on the traditional lecture method. The phrase '... You can instead use a demonstration in class to illustrate that concept ...' seems to be in agreement with the suggestion made earlier by Reneilwe that practical illustrations can be of value in teaching economics concepts. Mr Sebola further elaborates on why practical illustrations may lead to better understanding with the phrase '... as they saw it in action...'.

#### Analysis of discourse as discursive practice

The phrase '... and you can also use that one where learners were eating sweets ...' that demonstrates coherence said Mr Sebola, after making an example of how to illustrate a particular concepts and further suggests the use of another demonstration which he

observed being used in class and seems to be convinced that by practically illustrating concepts in class, learners understanding of such concepts can improve.

#### 4.6.2 Cooperative learning exercises

In a cooperative learning group, learners take the responsibility to ensure that each member understands the content material assigned by the teacher and they help each other to find answers to the questions and provide possible solutions to a problem rather than depending on the teacher to provide answers and solutions. See Yamarik (2007:261) in Section 2.7. The positive interdependence on which this method is based develops a sense of responsibility on the part of learners to learn and ensure that all the group members understand the material they have been assigned. In this way these cooperative learning groups function as an extra teaching practice for the learners because during their meetings, they focus on assisting each other to understand the topics assigned by the teacher. See Van Wyk (2010:86) in Section 2.9.4.

In Annex TR 7 Mosa reflects on a group work activity by saying '... on the other hand group work also helped me to talk, I was able to explain certain things to my group members and at the same time I could also ask where I did not understand...'.

Reneilwe in the same annexure says '...I can also say that group work assisted us a lot because we came out of our groups more knowledgeable in the sense that any group member was ready to face questions from another group without ... and we could also ask them questions and on their topic and judge their answers without ...'.

Mosa is quoted in Annex TR 7 as saying '... it helped us to assist each other because when one learner did not understand something he or she would ask from the group members, all the members also made sure that they contribute positively to ... without just relying on others to [do] the job...'.

In the same annexure Moletlo is quoted saying '... we made sure that on the day of the competition every group member understands everything about the topic so that whoever was to be picked by another group to face their questions would be able to provide answers...'.

In Annex TR 5, Mr Tshabi adds to the use of small-group activities by stating '... I am one person who believes the smaller the number the bigger the rewards, it is easier to carry out some tasks in small groups because monitoring and guiding becomes easy. When they work in small groups I see good results because even those who do not usually participate in a normal class situation push themselves to be active members in a group and it becomes easier to get assistance from their group members ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at textual level

The phrase '... it helped us to assist each other...' from Mosa' statement shows that by assisting each other to understand, learners realised they have to take responsibility in the learning process by becoming active co-constructors of knowledge instead of always relying on the teacher to provide them with answers and solutions. The other phrase '... without just relying on others to the job...' further demonstrates that each member of the group member was aware that he or she had a responsibility towards the group which was to contribute to the task at hand.

In the statement made by Moletlo the phrase '... we made sure that on the day of...' further demonstrates that learners had a collective responsibility during that group activity of ensuring that they all understand their topic. The assistance that learners provided each other with, would therefore contribute to better comprehension of the topic they were discussing.

In the statement made by Mr Tshabi, the phrase '... it is easier to carry out tasks in small groups because monitoring and guiding...' is an indication that cooperative learning exercises can yield best results to the learners as the teacher will always be around to monitor their work and give them assistance and guidance where necessary. The phrase ' ... those who do not usually... push themselves to be active members in a group...' shows that this active learning strategy can actually help the learners to start to take responsibility of their learning by becoming active members in the group and seeking assistance with the subject matter where they do not understand.

#### Analysis of discourse from critical emancipatory research perspective

In the statement by Mosa, the phrase '... it helped me to talk...' shows that she acknowledges that previously she could not quite easily communicate with fellow learners or feel confident to help others with the subject matter she understood better and she got empowered in terms of developing interactive skills which she can now use for her benefit and for the benefit of other learners in class.

The phrase from Reneilwe' statement shows that the learners felt that by engaging in a group activity they actually learnt much; to the extent that they were confident to engage in a quiz competition with other groups without having to have their notes or textbooks to look for answers. In that way, one can say that participation in the group work had actually empowered the learners hence the phrase '... we came out of our groups more knowledgeable ...'.

The phrase '... we made sure that ...' from Moletlo' statement shows that, by assisting one another, learners were able to empower one another as they wanted to make sure that any group member would represent the group well should he or she be picked by the other group to answer questions from that group.

In the statement by Mosa the phrase '... it helped us to assist each other...' demonstrates that during the group work task, learners had emancipated themselves from the usual routine of getting everything from the teacher but realised that they have the potential to discover things on their own. The second phrase '... without just relying on others to do the job...' is a further demonstration that engaging learners in these types of activities they do realise their individual potential in making a positive contribution in class by freeing themselves from their usually passive roles in class where they always rely on the teacher or hiding behind certain learners to do everything for them in class.

#### 4.6.3 Simulations, games and role-playing

The use of simulations, games and role-playing exercises seem very effective in enhancing learner engagement in class and understanding of economics concepts. These exercises provide a platform for learners to practise the application of economic theory and economics concepts in a controlled environment with the guidance of the teacher. The

performance of the learners in the questions based on the topics presented through simulations games and role-playing seem to improve. When using the simulations and role-playing, the economics theory is presented in a practical way. Learners' interest and motivation to learn seem to improve with the regular participation in these activities. They seem to gain an increased attention span in the lesson which is usually low when they are confined to their chairs listening to the teacher explaining theories which tend to be too abstract to them. See Milondzo (2011:4), Van Wyk (2013:125) and Zapalska and Brozik (2008:362) in Section 2.9.2.

In Annex TR 7 Mosa reflects on the use of role-play by saying '... it also has a positive impact because when you write a test you can be able to recall information from the role-play...'.

In the same annexure, Nkamogeleng says '... from the role-play I think we learnt a lot when those learners we [re] illustrating the process of money creation, it was fun, I can still remember the character Sophy, the atmosphere was more relaxed than in a normal class situation, you know that the learner's concentration span is very short, so by adding humour to a role-play focus and concentration can be sustained and learners will be having fun while learning at the same time...'.

In Annex TR 5, Mr Tshabi is quoted saying '... this strategy has an impact because it engages the learner with what he or she is doing, by acting a particular role the learner is put in the shoes of the character he or she is playing and can then start to understand things from a particular point of view ... get a better understanding of economics concepts ... and how the economy works ...'.

#### Analysis of discourse at a textual level

In the statement made by Mosa, the phrase '...it has a positive impact... ' suggests she has realised how effective role-playing exercises can be in class and ... ' you are able to recall information ... ' further suggests role-playing exercises can assist the learners to retain information for a long time which assists them when they write tests or exams.

The phrase '... it was fun, I can still remember the character Sophy, the atmosphere was relaxed ... by adding humour ... focus and concentration can be sustained ... ' attests to the point made earlier on that learners can retain information for a long time hence the phrase



'... I still remember the character Sophy ...'. The phrase '... the atmosphere was relaxed ...' shows that learners can benefit a lot. The statement further shows that the role-playing contributed to a sustained concentration span of the learners, which always seems to be short in a traditional lecture class.

#### Analysing discourse from the critical emancipatory research perspective

The statement by Mr Tshabi seems to demonstrate that role-playing exercises as one of the strategies of an active learning approach can achieve the role of emancipating the learners from the passive roles they usually occupy in class under the traditional chalk and talk approach, hence the phrase '... it engages the learner with what he or she is doing ...'. The two phrases '... get a better understanding of economics concepts ...' and '... how the economy works...' suggest that this active learning strategy contributes to improved understanding of the economics concepts and therefore empowers the learners to apply those concepts correctly and to make informed economic decisions.

The phrase '... and how the economy works ...' demonstrates that by taking part in role-playing learners are given an opportunity to practise the application of economics concepts in simulated activity and will thus gain an understanding of how the economy works.

#### 4.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter focused on the analysis and interpretation of the data generated from the literature study conducted on active learning in the teaching of economics, from the focus group meetings of the participants and through the free attitude interviews conducted. The constructs related to the five objectives of this study were developed and the analysis thereof was key to ensuring that there is a clear understanding of how an active learning environment aimed at assisting the learners to understand the abstract economics concepts and enhance their engagement in class can be created. The data was analysed and interpreted using critical discourse analysis (CDA), the method pioneered by amongst others van Dijk, Fairclough and Wodak. The three levels of analysis i.e. discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice and discourse as social practice were used in this analysis and interpretation. The analysis of discourse at a textual level allowed the researcher to understand how language was used by the participants in the study to show their

understanding of the research problem and the analysis of discourse as discursive practice showed how discourse was produced, distributed and interpreted by others, while analysis of discourse as social practice allowed the researcher to make connections between the discourse and the broader social structure in which it emerged. The analysis also focused on the elements of critical emancipatory research which emerged in the study and on the bearing they would have on the framework this study was developing.

## CHAPTER 5

### SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from the data generated in this study and makes recommendations that will assist in the creation of an active learning environment in the teaching of economics. The findings and recommendations are classified under the five objectives of the study.

#### 5.2 NEED FOR AN ACTIVE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

##### 5.2.1 Findings: Economics teaching is still dominated by the teacher-centred approach

The literature study on the teaching of economics revealed that a teacher-centred approach in which the teacher uses a lecture method or the talk and chalk approach is still the dominant method used in many economics classes. The data generated through the focus group discussions and the free-attitude interviews confirmed what the literature study found. One reason that the teachers give for the use of this approach is that they were orientated in this system from their school years and that they were trained in it. They argue that they find it easier to teach the way they were taught, that they feel in charge of the classroom when using this approach and can therefore maintain order in the classroom as their seniors expect.

The study found that in the teacher-centred approach to teaching, learners always assume a passive role in class and have developed a perception that it is their responsibility to attend the class, listen to the teacher and write notes. Learners also stated that they are doing what they have been doing from the earlier grades in their school years and also state that doing anything contrary to that is seen as defiance to the classroom order to which they have become used.

##### Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers should start to adopt a more learner-centred approach that encourages the participative methods promoted by South Africa's new curriculum. The

curriculum requires that a teaching and learning environment should be created where active participation of the learners in the learning process is enhanced. A teacher should not be the main focus area in the classroom; student learning should be. Education should therefore not be seen as a parcel ready to be delivered with the teacher as a delivery vehicle. It must be seen as a co-construction of knowledge involving the learner and the teacher. The teacher should be more of a facilitator of teaching and learning activities.

5.2.2 Finding: The nature of the subject requires that it be taught in a learner-centred manner

The subject of economics deals with abstract concepts that learners find difficult to relate and seem to have no relevancy in their world experiences. When the teacher relies solely on the textbook and the chalk and talk approach, learners often find it difficult to comprehend these concepts. The learners end up resorting to a mere memorisation of information in class so that they can just pass the tests or exams. This leads to surface learning, and deeper understanding is not achieved. The study has found that the learners find the language used in economics difficult. Even when they search for the dictionary meanings of certain concepts, they often fail to understand them.

Recommendations

The study would therefore recommend that efforts should be made to present these abstract concepts more concretely in class. This can be achieved by using an activity-based approach, where learners undertake certain activities in class, starting to work directly with these concepts and making meaning out of them. Classroom activities like role-play, demonstrations or classroom experiments seem to be effective in bridging the gap between the outside economic world and the classroom, the gap that always makes it difficult for learners to link theory and practice.

5.2.3 Finding: Active involvement in class seems to improve motivation to learn and understanding

The active participation of learners enables them to engage with the theoretical concepts they are confronted with and it becomes easier to relate them to their daily experiences. Active participation also appears to be an antidote to a common occurrence in the

traditional chalk and talk class, where learners become disengaged during the lesson, with some even drifting off to sleep or starting to talk among themselves. Learners are able to internalise these concepts and to link theory and practice when they are afforded opportunities to learn in an active manner. The active involvement of learners was also found to accommodate different learners' learning styles.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that the teacher should identify those concepts that the learners generally struggle with and design activities that engage them in the practical illustration of those concepts in class. The teacher can also use the active learning material produced by the Council for Economics Education (CEE), formerly known as the National Council for Economics Education (NCEE) and adapt them to suit particular class conditions. Current economic events must be discussed in class and their links to what learners are taught in class should be highlighted. Learners must be encouraged to do research on topical issues from their syllabus and do presentations in the class to show that they are able to link them to how they work in the real economic world.

## 5.3 COMPONENTS FOR THE ACTIVE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

### 5.3.1 Findings: Classroom experiments and demonstrations

The study found the use of classroom experiments to be effective in engaging the learners in class and helping them to discover on their own how these concepts work. The teachers used the experience from these activities to assist the learners to understand the concepts that were illustrated. The learners reported that they enjoyed participating in the classroom experiments as they provided them with an opportunity to see how various concepts work in practice. The experiments put the learners in real economic situations; they had to make decisions throughout the exercise and that helped them to start applying economics theory.

### 5.3.2 Findings: Simulations and role-play

Simulations and role-play exercises were also found to actively engage learners in class, as they were assigned different roles to play during a role-play exercise. The exercises appeared to have an effect, because while they are acting various roles, learners are actually

applying economics theory. These exercises placed the learners in the shoes of real economic decision-makers, and they began to understand how the economy works. Learners seemed to gain conceptual knowledge and practiced the language of economics when they made their arguments and listened to others. Learners reported that they found role-play interesting, as it created a relaxed learning environment, with plenty of humour added in acting out their characters. Role-play also seemed to sustain the attention span of the learners.

### 5.3.3 Findings: Cooperative learning exercises

Cooperative learning exercises seemed to have the potential of improving understanding. When learners were put in small groups to work on a particular topic assigned by the teacher, their participation seemed better than in the normal class situation. Learners reported that when they were first required to do group work, there was a tendency for some learners to rely on their group members without contributing to the group work. The situation seemed to improve when the teachers started to intervene and show all the learners that they all had the responsibility to contribute to the success of the group.

The teachers reported that this strategy provided an extra teaching opportunity. When learners did not grasp the subject matter during the teacher's presentation, group members helped them and that served to reinforce learning. Teachers further reported that due to the pressure of covering a large amount of work, they normally resorted to the direct method of instruction, which might fail to accommodate all the learners as their pace of learning differs. Through these group exercises, the slower learners could learn from their peers.

### Recommendations

The study recommends that when using classroom experiments, the teacher should first identify the concepts that seem too abstract for the learners to understand from a verbal explanation and work out an activity that can best demonstrate that concept. The teacher should also avoid lengthy experiments, as it has been noted that time is always a concern for the teachers and learners. The teacher should formulate clear instructions pertaining to the experiment to be conducted and explain them to the learners before the experiment

can start. The teacher should consider hand-run experiments which can be done face to face in the classroom rather than computerised experiments that require the learners to use a computer laboratory, which a school might not have.

When using simulations and role-play exercises, the teacher should create a scenario that will allow roles that are pertinent to the real economic world so that learners are able to understand how the economy works and how the concepts they learn in class are applied in the economic world. This will enable the learners to link the economic theory to practice as they apply textbook theory to simulated activities. The teacher should ensure that the roles of the learners are explained beforehand and guide them in the sources they can use to find the information related to their roles. The teacher should also explain to the learners what they are expected to learn by participating in a particular role-play exercise. It is also important to ensure that the exercise is completed within a class period so that it can be effective.

To realise the potential benefits of cooperative learning exercises, the teacher should always bear in mind that the mere grouping of learners does not necessarily mean cooperative learning. He or she must assist the learners in forming groups to avoid a situation where groups are being formed based on friendships. Clear roles within a group should be assigned to each member to ensure that everyone contributes to the group and to avoid a free rider problem. The teacher should also assist the learners with interpersonal skills and group skills that they might not have at the early stages of introduction to cooperative learning. The importance of individual accountability and positive interdependence must be stressed to ensure that learners realise that they can indeed learn from one another and that each learner can contribute positively to the group.

#### 5.4 THE FUNCTIONALITY OF THE ACTIVE LEARNING FRAMEWORK

##### 5.4.1 Findings: Classroom experiments

The study found that the classroom experiments managed to bring the abstract concepts to the classroom level and that learners started to realise how relevant those concepts are in their lives and also how they work. Learners reported that the experience was more enriching for them than when they have to learn only by reading about those concepts from

the textbook or listening to the teacher. Learners also seemed to develop a deeper understanding of the concepts that were illustrated and they seemed to remember them even long after the experiment was conducted.

#### 5.4.2 Findings: Simulations and role-play

The participants in the study reported that the experience provided by participating in these exercises helped the learners to gain a better understanding of economic theory as they were practicing them in a controlled environment. Learners also found simulations and role-play a fun way to learn and that increased their motivation to participate in more class activities because they realised that they were in a better position to work directly with the subject matter.

#### 5.4.3 Findings: Cooperative learning

The study found that learners benefited from the small-group activities. Learners showed that the group work was helping them to learn when they were put through a quiz competition on the topics they had covered in their groups. They started to demonstrate information-gathering skills and providing supplementary information from other sources. Learners who were usually too shy to speak in class started to develop confidence as they made their contributions in their groups and presented material to the class. Learners reported that group work afforded them another opportunity to reinforce the material they had learnt by explaining it to the group members. In doing so, they managed to retain the information for a long time.

#### Recommendations

The study recommends that all these active learning exercises be followed by a debriefing session. Because learners were playing different roles during these activities, they may take home different lessons. It is therefore important to review the activity and reconcile the lessons learnt. A debriefing session provides a structured reflection on an activity that was performed and provides an opportunity for discussion of the experiences provided by the activity. The debriefing session will also allow the teacher to direct the learners to the areas that he or she wanted to demonstrate with the activity and address questions from the



learners. This session will also show the learners how relevant the activity in which they engaged in, is to the subject matter they are taught in class.

## 5.5 CONDITIONS CONDUCIVE FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

### 5.5.1 Findings: Necessity to orientate learners to active learning

The study found that because the learners had become used the traditional classroom order, the teacher should first introduce them to active learning so that they can understand what it is all about, what is expected of them and how this approach is intended to benefit them. Learners should be allowed to ask questions at this stage and have their concerns addressed. In so doing the learners will start to value active learning and take ownership of it.

#### Recommendations

The teacher can present an information session where he or she will explain the concept of active learning to the learners. The teacher should demonstrate to the learners how this approach can complement the traditional approach in assisting them to improve their understanding. At this stage, the teacher can use this information session to practically illustrate how some of these activities will be implemented in class, so that the learners have a clear picture of what active learning entails. The teacher should guide the learners on how to access the information that they will need for various activities, possibly inviting a local librarian to explain how to access information from the internet and from the library.

### 5.5.2 Findings: Active learning requires a change in learning environment

The study found that in an active learning classroom, learners should be able to move around freely during demonstrations, role-play exercises or group discussions. The normal classroom seating arrangement may have to change, for example rearranging the desks in a circle to facilitate group discussions. The teacher will need certain resources for the practical illustration of concepts to add to the textbook.

## Recommendations

Given the constraints of time, the teacher should ensure that unnecessary movement is avoided and that order is maintained throughout the activities. Different sections in the class can be used for group discussions to avoid moving desks. The teacher should identify the resources that will be needed and engage with the principal so that those that need to be purchased can be included in the school budget. It is further recommended that the teacher use paper-based resources. For example, learners can cut out slips of paper to represent money and also products that have been produced. A space can be created where recent newspapers, business magazines and other relevant material can be kept as a reference centre for learners.

### 5.5.3 Findings: Teachers need to redistribute power in the classroom

The success of the active learning framework also requires that the teacher should accept the learners as co-creators of knowledge in class. This will mean that the teacher should start redistributing some power and control to the learners, as this will make them feel the responsibility for their own learning. The teachers need to ensure that the voices of the learners are heard in class. They should start to engage in discussions and debates, search for information and present it in class and support each other in the learning process. In this manner, the teacher is no longer a sage in the class but acts as facilitator and guide. In this classroom environment, learners will feel empowered to discover things on their own and are encouraged to take risks as they know that the teacher is always around to assist them when they make mistakes.

## Recommendations

The teacher can assign concepts to the groups to illustrate in class or topics to research and present in class. This will start to shift the responsibility for learning to the learners as they are now forced to do research on the topic they have to present and find information on the concept they have to illustrate. Learners will start realise that they have been empowered to contribute in class and that can motivate them and increase their interest in the subject.

#### 5.5.4 Findings: Support from the school management and governing body

The study has also found that the active learning framework can be successfully implemented when the mindset of staff members who hold managerial positions is changed. In most cases these are the people who were trained in the old system of education in South Africa, before the introduction of outcomes-based education. The study found that too often these senior staff members view an active learning classroom as being noisy and disorderly, which creates a perception that a teacher in charge of that class lacks classroom management skills. The support that the principal and the school management team can provide is to create an atmosphere where the teachers and learners will feel welcome to use innovative methods in class and will be encouraged to implement the active learning concept.

#### Recommendations

The teacher should always ensure that the activities are carried out in an orderly manner without disturbing other classes. Learners also need to know that the aim of these activities is to learn, even though they may include fun and excitement. The study recommends that all the teachers should strive to realise the ideals of the new curriculum, which encourages a learner-centred and activity-based approach to education. A change in the mindset of the teachers would help the teacher to fulfil the part of a lifelong learner as outlined by the norms and standards for educators in South Africa. The principal and the school governing body should use the parents' meetings as a platform to orientate the parents to this learner-centred approach, as most of them still expect the old classroom order to prevail. This will help to dispel their perception that learners are playing and are not being taught.

### 5.6 CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK

#### 5.6.1 Findings: Content coverage and time available

The study found that one of the factors that proved to be a barrier in the implementation of active learning strategies is the amount of content that the teachers needed to cover and the time that they had to do it. Teachers raised the concern that they had to follow the prescribed work schedules and keep up with them, as their progress was measured against those schedules. They argued that to achieve depth in understanding of the economics

content, they have to use active learning activities. However, because these strategies take time, teachers often resort to the traditional chalk and talk approach which they find effective in transmitting a large amount of information in a short space of time. The learners noted that they valued active learning. However, because of their heavy workloads and high expectations on them to pass, they find it difficult to engage in active learning as it requires them to do research and rehearse the activities before they can be conducted.

#### Recommendations

The teachers are encouraged to use these strategies mainly for those concepts that are not easy to understand with just an explanation. The activities should also be kept as brief as possible. The teacher should include those activities while lesson planning, to obtain an indication of how much content will be covered by those activities. Learners are encouraged to study some topics on their own, so that by the time they are treated in class, they will have some idea of the content and will not find themselves lagging behind with work.

#### 5.6.2 Findings: Number of learners and class space

Another challenge that the study found is that it is often difficult to carry out active learning strategies when there is a large number of learners in a class. The concern is that the physical space available will restrict free movement of the learners as they try to demonstrate activities. A bigger number in a limited class space would also mean that the majority of the learners would not be able to participate in an activity. Hence, they would remain passive in their seats and the desired results might not be achieved.

#### Recommendations

The study recommends that large classes can be divided in groups that will take turns to illustrate a concept using various strategies. This will create interest as learners will be eager to see how others groups approached a particular concept. To ensure that learners remain engaged in class, the teacher can also use cooperative learning exercises like the Think-Pair-and-Share and the Think-Pair-and-Square exercises. In a Think-Pair-and-Share exercise, the teacher can give learners a concept to discuss and the learner will just turn to the one seated next to him or her to discuss the concept and assist each other in understanding. In a Think-Pair-and-Square exercise the first pair of learners turn to the next pair and they start

to share their understanding of the concept, which will help them to reinforce their understanding.

### 5.6.3 Findings: Teachers and learners are often not willing to change

The study found that teachers might not be willing to use active learning methods because they believe that they have a good teaching method in the traditional talk and chalk approach and see no reason to change. One of the concerns that teachers have is that they do not have self-confidence in using these active learning strategies and therefore they do not want to risk making mistakes that might cost them valuable time. There were concerns that with this approach to learning, the teacher is giving control to the learners. Learners on the other hand showed reluctance to assume responsibility in class. Most are still comfortable with the passive role they are used to as it does not require them to do anything beyond just attending class and listening to the teacher's presentations.

### Recommendations

It is recommended that to build their confidence in using active learning strategies, teachers can start implementing them on a small scale and observe the impact and build on the start they have made. This will at the same time bring the learners on board with active learning. Over time, the teachers' confidence will grow. Once they start to realise the positive results, the scope of implementation will also increase. Learners will also realise that the intention was not to shift the responsibility from the teacher, but to help them to learn and to empower them. The Department of Education should arrange workshops training teachers in using active learning strategies and provide suitable materials on active learning. A gradual and sustained shift to the learner-centred approach is recommended, as this study recognises that classroom practice should change by progress rather than by replacement.

### 5.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 5 presented the findings of the study with regard to the teaching of economics in the high-school class. The findings of the study demonstrate that a more teacher-centred approach is still followed in the teaching of economics. The study also found that despite the dominant use of the teacher-centred methods, there is a need for the introduction of active learning methods in class. The study argues that it has potential to improve the

understanding of the subject. Willingness to change on the part of teachers was identified as one of the challenges in adopting this learner-centred method of teaching. However, the study recommends that a gradual shift from the traditional teaching methods to an active learning approach will help to bring on board all the relevant stakeholders and will also lead to a sustainable active learning environment in economics classes.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: TRANSCRIPTS

#### ANNEXTURE 1 TRANSCRIPT 1 (ANNEX TR1)

I welcomed the teachers and learners who were present and everyone introduced himself/herself to the rest of the group

Mabena: Let me start by explaining the type of research methodology that we are going to use for this study which is known as Participatory Action Research and how it differs with other research methodologies. Ok, before I proceed with the explanation let me first establish if we are all comfortable communicating in Setswana and Sesotho

Participants: Yes we do

Mabena: The reason I am asking this is to avoid the sole use of English for communication in our meeting because some people might not feel free to express themselves in English in front of people they see for the first time and because I value your opinions I want you to be free to share with the group your ideas in the most comfortable way. Ok, as I was saying the type of research we are doing is PAR. Participatory means that after a certain problem has been identified, the same people who are affected by the problem come together in an effort to solve the problem. Those people will further take action i.e. put their suggested solutions to practice. In this research the focus is not only on identifying the problem but identification of the problem must be followed by an action to try and address the identified problem. The R in the abbreviation PAR is Research and that is the research known as PAR.

If you look at our seating arrangement you will notice that there is a shape that we have taken i.e. a horse shoe shape and this is deliberate for the reason that in this type of research we don't consider anybody an expert who should be taking a centre stage or the front seat. I am also not an expert, today i am just talking more than everyone else because I am just facilitating the meeting. I do not know more than my colleagues over here and with you also none is considered to know better than the others, we all have something to contribute here. In this type of research we are all equal partners with the aim of solving the identified problem. Don't feel intimidated to air your views by the presence of your teachers

or by those who are doing a grade above yours because I have noticed that we have Grade 12 learners in our midst. When I say we are equal partners I mean equal partners in research process, what should always be of importance is respect, respect for your teachers as you respect them in class and also as your elders and also respect to your fellow learners, you should treat them as fellow human beings. The equal partnership I am referring to also mean we all have equal and same opportunities to speak and raise our views during the meetings. The success of this project therefore rests upon all of us, there is nobody from outside who can come and solve our problem. It is us who can figure out possible solutions and put them to practice.

Mr Sebola: I think this is a brilliant idea that you came up with of this research that involves us as teachers who teach the subject and learners. We should view this project in the manner that it is not only going to benefit you who are already in Grade 12 and Grade 11 as you are already almost on the exit point of high school but it is going to be valuable for those who are coming after you i.e. those who are still in Grade 9, Grade 10 for example. The information that we are going to generate here will still be beneficial to those who are still going to come. We will still apply it, make economics more practical and exciting for others who are still coming and even solve some of our challenges, challenges that we face daily in class. I believe that this research is a good thing and I am looking forward to hear your views as learners and feel free to express yourselves just as if you are at a soccer match or a music concert because you are helping us. We will appreciate any information from you which can assist to improve the teaching of the subject because there are those who are still coming after you have completed your schooling. Mr Mabena I think you are on the right track with this initiative.

Mr Tshabi: Thanks people, I believe that the previous speakers have said a mouthful and I also want to stress that in Economics one problem we are facing is that we don't link economic concepts with the day to day live, we treat them as abstract things which are far away from our lives like the one that has just been mentioned, the law of diminishing marginal utility. If you look every time you eat or drink that law applies but we continue to treat it as something vey abstract and far away from our lives. If you look at the way we live we are practising those economics concepts e.g. when you read a newspaper, when you buy in the shop we tend to distance information or experiences from such encounters with what

is in our textbooks and that is the reason we always see these economics concepts as being difficult and abstract and that is also the reason why learners do not participate in class. It is therefore necessary to try and bring this outside economic life into the classroom because you always see these concepts as new things thus leading to learner passivity in class as you just sit there waiting for the teacher to fill you with information on what the concept is about. I also think that we should also come up with ideas of bridging the gap between what is taught in the class and the outside economic world because the way economics is taught we tend to see the subject content as separate from our surroundings. That will help us to find a solution to the problem that we are talking about and as Mr Sebola has said, it will also be of benefit to those who are still coming. With the solutions that we can come up with here, they will be able to link the concepts taught in class with the outside economics surroundings and that can also lead to a general improvement of learners in Economics. I think that is what I can say for now.

Mabena: Like I have said the solution to the problem of understanding the abstract economics concepts and learner passivity in class and as my colleagues stress won't be solved only by the teachers on their own but your contribution is also of equal importance to this endeavour. Let me give you a platform to say what are your own experiences with the subject and what can be done to enhance your understanding of the subject. We will do it in no particular order, you can just raise your hand and will be given chance to speak

Lethabo : Meneer (Mr) I have realized that there is a tendency among the learners not to be concentrating or participating in the class, some are so playful in the class as if the lesson does not concern them. At the end of the lesson the teacher will just pose questions to the class as a whole without directing a question to a specific learner to force him/her to fully participate in class.

Marematlou: I think the problem with economics is that, you need to understand it deeply and know its jargon and that is always difficult for us because when we study we don't do it with understanding but just resort to cramming, something that is not good for us. It will be best if we can start to be able to apply the concepts we learn in economics in our daily lives because that will help us to answer exam questions using our own understanding.

Reabetswe: The problem that we have in Economics is actually the terms, most of them are not easily understood in plain English, they seem to be at a high level or they are more abstract and Economics requires you to be able to have a thorough understanding of these concepts and be able to apply them. I think it will be best for us if we can be able to analyse these concepts and get their actual meaning.

Mabena: Ok thanks for your contributions and I believe we all realise that it is important for the learners to be actively participating in the class to avoid the situation in which the teacher is the only one who does the talking in class. One can note from your comments that learners in most cases tend to rely on memorisation of the concepts something which does not help them in applying those concepts correctly. As you know, the economics question paper contains data response questions e.g. graphs, cartoons and case studies all which requires that learners should demonstrate a clear understanding and correct application of their economic knowledge something that can be realised if learners are actively involved with the subject matter.

I have an indication that most of you are free on Wednesdays after school as you don't have afternoon study sessions on Wednesdays. The teachers have also indicated that Wednesdays will suit them for the meetings. I think we can then have our meetings on Wednesdays.

So what do you think of using Wednesdays for our meetings.

Lesome: Yes it is okay but I suggest that next time our starting time should move from 14H30 to 15H00.

Mr Sebola: I also think that since we knockoff at 14H15 at our school I think 15H00 will suit me.

Mr Tshabi: Yes it is ok with me

Mabena: For next week let us go to our respective schools and work with our teachers to identify concepts that are problematic to us and work out some activities that will be learner engaging and use such activities to teach particular concepts. When we meet we present to the rest of the group the activities that we have designed and have other

members interrogate the activity and we will give the group members chance to respond to different questions based on the activity they have presented. As we interrogate the activity we are merely trying to all take ownership of it so that we can all be able to use it. Remember we said our research is participatory and we will continue to invite other people with interest in economics as a subject to come and share with us their knowledge but always keeping in mind that it is us who should take a leading role in the solution of the problem and there is no outside expert who can come with ready-made solutions to our problem. One of us also made an important comment in saying whatever framework we will come up with to address the problem we have raised, will go a long way in improving the teaching and learning of economics. Even after you have completed your studies people will still make reference to the document that will be produced out of your contributions to this study.

Mr Sebola: I think we could deepen our data collection because I think the group is very small and I don't think in one day we can get enough data. I don't know if we can be delegated in such a way that wherever we are stationed as educators and learners we can try collect as much data as possible from a wider sample so that when we come to our meetings to brainstorm the concepts and activities at least we would know we have had the inputs from a bigger population, ok I know from the teacher side we are always few. It is fine we have started but we should try find ways to make the group a little bigger also considering we don't have much time on this project. I can use the economics classes we have at my school which I teach to collect data from.

Mofetsi: I also think that we as learners can start engaging with other learners at school to get their views on how best they think we can solve the problem in economics maybe we can give them questionnaires which we can use for data collection.

Mabena: I agree with you, in one day we cannot do as much as we would like to, even if you read articles on people who have conducted PAR studies you will realize that in many cases their projects were quite lengthy. So let us use Wednesdays fruitfully and we can also use the suggestion of other economics classes to generate data i.e getting the views of other learners who might not necessarily be part of this group.

Mr Sebola: I think that we should also adopt rotation of the meeting venues i.e. if this week we are at school A then the following week we have our meeting at school B and so forth and so on. A hosting school should just organise a room where the meeting will be held.

Mabena: I agree with that idea because it will help all of us to take ownership of the project and encourage participation as learners would know that there will be a week when they will not need to travel but instead they will be hosting. Ok since we can safely say we now have a steering committee we also need to conduct a SWOT analysis. This will help us to assess our strengths, our weaknesses, the opportunities that we can think of and the threats we face. So in the mean time think of those things. The other thing we should talk about is the policy that will guide us e.g. Mr Sebola has raised the idea of rotation and that may well form part of our policy. Think of any other thing that can guide us.

Marematlou: I also think it will be proper to acknowledge and commend best practices and initiatives as that will motivate the learners to do more.

Mofetsi : I suggest that we be provided with writing material so that during the sessions we are able to take notes that we can use during the course of the study.

Esma : I acknowledge the fact that we come from different schools but I want to suggest that when we are here the schools should lose their identities and we should just be one big group and we should also avoid a situation where learners from one school will be seated apart from those coming from another school, we should just mix and be one family.

Reabetswe: I am also appealing for consistency and commitment of the learners in this project. We should not be seen to be active only when we are hosting but should maintain the same work rate every time.

Bushy : To encourage participation I suggest that Meneer (Mr) should make a plan to have some snacks to sustain energy levels during the sessions because if we don't do that it may lead to other learners not attending meetings as they have long had a lunch break before the session starts.

Esma: Another thing is that there will be situations where we disagree on certain things but there should not be a point where somebody is afraid to talk because he or she thinks his or

her views are suppressed, everybody must feel free to give his or her views so that we can all analyse it.

Mabena: Yes I agree, we all should all put our suggestions on the table and they will be analysed and none of us should have an impression that whatever he/she is going to say will automatically be taken or thrown away.

All in all I am happy that today we managed to meet, you can ask my colleagues for how long we have been trying to convene this kind of a meeting but due to unavailability of some educators we could not. As Mr Sebola has suggested, we can broaden the group so that even if others cannot make it to the meetings we would still have the core of the team to continue with the sessions. I also believe that all of us will reap the benefits of this initiative because as we start to identify the concepts that give learners problems because of their abstract nature we shall be focusing on all the topics covered from Grade 10 and Grade 12 which means the framework we want to develop will assist teachers and learners in all these grades. You are free to think of any activity to demonstrate a particular concept.

Let me once again thank you for attending, I believe that we had a good start and we won't lose anyone of you but instead we can rather gain more participants.

Thanks for your time and contributions.

## ANNEXTURE Transcript 2 (ANNEX TR 2)

Mabena : I teach Economics at Setlogelo Senior Secondary School. I am also a post graduate student. My study also requires of me to conduct a research and the type of research I do is known as Participatory Action Research also called PAR. Why is it called PAR, After people have identified a problem which is common to them e.g. we have identified a problem in the teaching and learning of economics, I the researcher will not try to solve the problem on my own but with all those who experience that problem on daily basis that is the teachers and the learners. So all of us need to come together and start to figure out possible solutions to the problem. Last week we started by establishing a team made up of teachers and learners from three high schools. We had an apology from one other school. One can ask why is it necessary to include you as learners to form part of the team. The reason is that learners have their own experiences and knowledge which they bring from home and from their surroundings. That knowledge might be of assistance to the problem for which solutions are sought. We want your opinions and viewpoints as we want to move away from the usual order that learners' role in class is just to receive information from the teacher but we also want to hear from the learners how do they see things and what are their views and perspectives on a particular issue.

In this type of research we emphasize the point that all participants are equal partners in the sense that your views on the problem are as equally important as your teachers views. The most important thing is that different viewpoints are analysed in terms of their potential to solve the problem. The problem that has been identified is that of learner passivity during the class which is thought to be the reason why learners have difficulty understanding abstract economic concepts. If I may ask you, who does most of the talking in class?

Hlonolofatso : It is the teacher sir

Mabena: and what is your role at that time?

Hlonolofatso: We are just listening



Mabena: what else do you do besides listening, is there any other thing you do at that time?

Reneilwe: We sleep sometimes, some are playing or make jokes

Mabena: do you think that situation that prevail at that time is normal?

Hlonolofatso: No it is not

Mabena: I agree with you because when you look at the subject Economics it requires you to have a deeper understanding of the concepts that are taught in class and that will be possible if you are actively involved in the lesson. I can make an example of the game which is usually played by the children known as Mantloane (house). This game is all about a household and different roles of members of a household. By assuming different roles in a household like the father, the mother or child, participants in the game would understand what it really means to occupy a particular position in a household. For example what do you think would be the role of the person who will be playing a mother in this game?

Reneilwe: She will be cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. The father will be going to work ensuring that he earns income to provide for the family.

Mabena: so that is why we think that active participation of learners in economics class will help them to understand the abstract concepts they are taught e.g. your law of diminishing marginal utility, cost concepts, long run and short run concepts. We might try to act them out in the classroom in an effort to bring the outside economic world into the class to try and link it with what is in your textbook. Ok, to achieve active participation of learners in the class we can make use of variety of activities. Which ones do you think could be best suited for economics?

Reneilwe: Practical illustrations of the concepts

Mmetshe: Debate

Mabena: Yes I think both are relevant for an example for one to be involved in a debate, it shows that a person understands the topic deeply that is both sides because he/she will be required to defend the position that he/she takes in a debate. Can you at this stage think of any topic in economics that can be used for a debate?

Mmetshe: Strategies for economic growth

Mabena: Yes, we might find ourselves debating over the effectiveness and relevance of particular strategies aimed at stimulating economic growth

Reneilwe: Socio economic issues e.g. unemployment and poverty

Mabena: Yes we can have a debate on the measures which can be taken by government to address the problem of poverty and unemployment in the country. Tell me during this debate who will be participating and what will they be doing?

Mmetshe: We as the learners

Mabena: what do you think will then be the value of this exercise, what impact will it have on learners

Hlonolofatso: We will have a better understanding of the topic

Mabena : Ok I understand let me say that in the last meeting we agreed that we are going to identify the concepts which are difficult to understand and develop activities that might be used to illustrate them in class and that will actively engage the learners to reduce their passivity in class. In the next meeting we will then demonstrate those activities to the rest of the group. We will also unpack the activity with regard to what you think are the advantages of the activity and what could be the limitations of the activity and how we can counter those limitations. You will also be required to inform the group as to what would be required to carry out the activity and what could be the challenges to the implementation of such an activity and what could be done to overcome those challenges.

Welcome Mr Sebola, at this stage I was busy orientating the new members of the team on what the project is about. What I like about them is that they acknowledge that during the class they just remain passive, listening or making jokes. What is interesting is that they also have good ideas on how they can be actively engaged in class.

Mmetshe: one of the activities that we can use is debate in topics that might be challenging, because with debate learners will be able to focus and pay attention

Nkamogeleng: We also spoke of drama, by dramatising for example topics like unemployment as a socio economic problem learners will learn more about unemployment and the measures which government can implement to alleviate unemployment.

Mabena: Mr Sebola, I think you can also see yourself that these learners have very good ideas which can help us, there is the other one

Lefuno: Personally I was thinking since other learners might not have the ability to debate we can also allow each learner an opportunity to present a topic in class the way he or she understands it so that he/she can be corrected where there are misunderstandings.

Reneilwe: I think we should also practically illustrate those concepts in class also doing it in the form of drama by assigning roles to learners to illustrate a particular concept.

Mabena: this really shows that you have good suggestions it is just that you have not been given opportunities to make your contributions, you have so much to offer and in this way you will be able to deepen your understanding of economics, even when you have completed your studies you would be having an understanding of how the economy works for example how the interest rates are used to control inflation and the chain reaction the decrease or increase in the interest rates will have on the economy.

Motedi: I have a problem with debating because as you know in a debate, there are two sides, one agreeing with the topic and one disagreeing with it. If I find myself in the affirmative side I will only do research on the positives of the topic forgetting about the negative side. Learners have a tendency of just focusing on just one side of the topic that is why I would suggest that we should treat a debate not as a matter of agreeing or disagreeing but we should be broadminded so as to learn more out the activity, therefore when one group is making their point others should focus on that point and in that way we can learn

Mabena: You also wanted to say something

Moduedi: Yes, but the previous speaker has made a point which I also wanted to raise.

Mabena: I agree with you, as the learner over there has said, during a debate learners will be focused, as one person will be presenting from the opposing side those in the affirming

side would be carefully listening to his/her argument which might help them to have a broader outlook and better understanding of the topic and that will be helpful to both groups. That is a good suggestion that you are making.

Lefoko: I also agree with the idea that the teacher should give us the topics to present in class because that will force us to go and prepare for our presentations because as learners we really do not like to study we only open our books when the teacher comes to class. That way will motivate us to start doing things on our own and be corrected at a later stage.

Nkamogeleng: I would think if the teacher can come across a DVD that has a bearing on the concept that we discuss in class he/she must bring it and play it in class because other learners learn the most when they see things in action.

Reneilwe: Sir, I have realised that economics has its own language and it is difficult and I am a kind of person who always try to first study something on my own and I always find that economics has difficult concepts and even if I go to the dictionary I don't often understand the meanings. It is really hard to understand some of the concepts.

Mabena: What you are saying is true, hence we embarked on this project having realised that we have a common problem with my colleagues that economics deals with abstract concepts that are not so easy to understand, even if you try to look for a dictionary meaning it is always not easy to make meaning out the concept. That is the reason we think that by using variety of classroom activities to illustrate these concepts, will help to bring economic reality into the classroom.

Ok we shall proceed as we have planned, each group will work with the teacher at their school to first identify the concepts and design the activities to illustrate those concepts. The group shall also be in a position to explain what would be needed for the activity to be successful, what are the advantages and disadvantages of the activity and what could be the challenges with the implementation of the activity and suggest ways to overcome those challenges. Remember we want to design a framework that any economics teacher and learner can use to improve the understanding of economics concepts and which they can also make improvements on.

Mr Sebola: I think this is the right way to go and I believe they can help us a lot in thinking of different activities. I have also come to realise that yes it is true they are always seated passively in the class but these meetings show that that are seating with good ideas which can be helpful to this project. Thanks Mr Mabena for providing the platform it will make economics become practical. It is unfortunate that you cannot be as free as you want to be using this approach to teach because you are always pressed for time, there is always a learning facilitator to control your work, there are common tasks to be written by the learners, there are due dates for submission of marks. It is unlike when you are in a workshop, you will be free to do these things practically but with a 48 minute class period it is not easy to finish the activity and you are forced to leave the gaps in between as you have to give over to the next teacher. I think the activity will make an impact if it can be finished in one period and like I said in last meeting this project is not only going to help you but even those who are still coming after you would still benefit from it. I didn't even know you like debating. Let us keep it this way. I was worried of the situation were two groups will pick the same concept, but on second thought I think that should not be a problem as the groups might illustrate it using different ways.

Reabetswe: I think this project will help us a lot particularly in improving our results. Again one could have been keen to follow economics as a career but might be discouraged by its difficult language but the impact of this project might assist us as learners to understand economics and follow it as a career.

Reabetswe : I think this project will also help in the long run because if you look out there most of the economists are whites and the results of this project will help more black students to become economists

Lefuno : I also agree that the project will help in improving the results, learners will pass the subject obtaining better levels e.g. 80% and above.

Mr Sebola: Once again thanks for the opportunity Sir, it is unfortunate I was not here to welcome you but I sure there is a learner who did that. We also apologise we could not organise some snacks but next time we will do.

Mabena: So for next week each group is expected to come and present an activity on one concept they have identified. We will also give each member to state his/her expectations out of this project and also do our SWOT analysis.

Let me thank you for your time and I really believe that your contributions will assist us to produce the type of economics learner who will after Matric demonstrate that he/she understands economics and that he/she was not only cramming it at school.

### ANNEXTURE Transcript 3 (Annex TR 3) Free Attitude Interview with Ms Aldam

Mabena: Good morning mam, as I introduced myself last time I am Mr Mabena an economics teacher at a local high school. I am also a postgraduate student and doing research on economics education and the title for my study is Active learning in a high school economics class. I work with a group of economics teachers and learners in an attempt to design classroom activities to teach the abstract economics concepts and which are also aimed at actively engaging the learners in the class. After the workshop your were conducting for economics teachers I realised that you can share with the group some of your experiences on the challenges for implementing active learning and the conditions necessary to implement active learning in a classroom situation.

Ms Aldam: If I come to the challenges the first challenge will be the willingness of the educators to change their way of thinking and the way of doing things. Traditionally in South Africa for many years teachers have become used to being the chalk and talk masters and suddenly now they are required to lose a little bit of control because they have to hand over some to the learners as they become active. I think that is a huge challenge and it comes from the mind frame of our South African education system. If you think of where we are coming, we come from an Oxford English British system were the teacher is a master and the student is an empty vessel and you just give him something.

If you have an American approach where they see the teacher and the learner as equal in terms of making contribution that is a huge shift and I think that is not a quick fix because it will take the teacher forever to move from that mind frame as you know they say "a monkey does what monkey sees", teachers are doing what they were seeing in the classroom and that is how they were treated for many years in our education system. It was interesting for me when I was having the first group of Americans taking them to schools, and amongst them was a philosophy professor and he said our South African education system is so British, so much you don't know I know.

Mabena: So basically the change of the mind frame poses a serious challenge to adopting an active learning approach

Ms Aldam: It is hard to use that mind frame to do it. So I think what will be one of the biggest , biggest challenge for teachers will be the paradigm shift to move from the idea of you don't know I know it all to the idea of we are equal partners and we can both contribute. I think it has something to do with control because the more you move to an active learning situation the more you are out of control, the more you have to respond to what you did the less you can follow a text.

Mabena: Ok risk of the teacher losing control could be another challenge

Ms Aldam: I think teachers are used to following a text, step 1,2,3,4,5 and so on but the moment someone come from the side and says what then, teachers get confused and I have seen it so often the teachers would say that is not what we are going to do today

Mabena: The implication might be that the teacher doesn't want to go out of the box

Ms Aldam: and they lose so much teaching opportunity. I think the biggest challenge is more in the mind and the willingness of the teacher. The other thing I think is also a challenge is demanding preparation on daily basis. You know if you are doing the talk and chalk thing and you are teaching for the fourth, fifth year up to 20<sup>th</sup> year it is smooth sailing, you just do the same thing over and over again whether it works or not but if you do active learning you have to prepare, you have to organise the things you are going to need, you have to set up the things you are going to use for the simulations. I think in terms of preparation it puts a demand on people.

The other thing that I think still has to do with the mind frame is that teachers are still not yet conversant with how to assess active learning, they are so much used to assessing passive learning where the learners sit down and write a paper and you mark it afterwards, it is so much challenging for them to assess active learning, the idea of you have a voice I have a voice, I listen to what you are saying, I interpret it and respond to it. I think that has certain demands on it.

I think the other big challenge is the system that is not ready for the change. You know the system in South Africa in terms of subject advisors, some control, the files and everything , they need to be the same at the certain time, you know that inhibits active learning because active learning requires another pace. I think looking at the system we might not be ready.



Some other minor challenge is resource based, so if you want to do active learning you need resources. It is not expensive resources, you don't need to go to the Reserve Bank to do that but you need some cards, pictures that you will use in the class to make learning active but that is a minor challenge because most of the resources you will use are paper based, so if learners have papers, scissors they can cut money and they can do things

Mabena: Yes I can remember an activity called widget production

Ms Aldam: Yes also the corn market , you know I think that is a small challenge and it can be overcome.

Mabena: In your experience what do you think can be the enabling factors to assist active learning

Ms Aldam: I think one of the biggest enabling factors is the curriculum, the way the curriculum is designed can really make space for simulations, make space for big concepts and if you really want to use active learning you need to focus on big concepts rather than on small detail. I think our curriculum allow for that it is really one of the enabling factors and together with the curriculum the new approach to education you know the whole curriculum review the fact that we are changing things created an environment where it is okay to change. I think the other enabling factor is the material that is available, there is a lot of active learning material available specifically for economics. We have subject advisors specifically in the Free State but in all provinces we have more than 200 subject advisors who were trained in this active learning so there are agents of change out there and that is one of the enabling factors there is an agent of change out there who can take it forward and you can make sure that they do it.

Another thing that can be an enabling factor is that economics is a growing subject, more and more learners are moving in that field which in the past was a small field and now that it is a growing field there is a lot of energy in terms of putting the resources in there, and I think those are basically the enabling factors that exist.

Mabena: So with the enabling factors that you made mention of it means active learning can be a reality in the economics classroom

I think one crucial point if you need to make a change is again the willingness of educators to do this. You know the nice thing about this is that the moment you start doing it and you start getting results and as you know success breeds success, the moment learners start understanding difficult concepts like supply and demand, equilibrium, supply shifts and demand shifts, the moment you start to say ahhhh! its working I want to do more of it. It has a built in factor of success breeds success. The success of one supports you to keep on trying. What was making it very enabling to use it was the fact that I could use resources, the stories and rhymes and reading pieces, things that learners in any case are required to do in the curriculum, so people were eager to do it and I got a good spin off of active learning.

Mabena : Do you think the size of the classroom and amount of content that needs to be covered can have a bearing on the use of active learning

Let me start by talking about the size of the classroom, if you are talking about the number of students in the class, I have done simulations with 200 people at the same time, if you are organised you can do it. It becomes a challenge if the class size is bigger than 70. I don't see class size in terms of numbers as a challenge, what I see as a challenge is physical space because if physical space does not allow learners to stand, walk around, trade and go to the market and exchange then it cannot work. For me physical space and the layout of the class can be more of an inhibiting factor to the whole process. Like I have said I have done simulations with more than 200 people at the same time so if you are organised you can do it. Class size is therefore not a problem to me.

Another challenge for the teachers is the length of the class period. You cannot do a simulation if you have less than an hour. You cannot do active learning if you have less than an hour because active teaching asks for dialogue and dialogue asks for time, so I think the system , the way the system is set up in terms of so many periods e.g. only twice or thrice a week, those are the things that put more challenges on the system than necessarily the number of student. What I mean with that is that the mind frame of the officials who are in control is also in the frame of Oxford British and not in the frame of we are equal partners in education and both of us have a voice and I think that is more challenging. The other thing that is challenging and related to the system is the kind of prescribed approach which the

subject advisors have, you have to do this on day one, that on day two, the schedule, the prescribed schedules. I think it inhibits people to do what they want to do and even the prescribed textbook, you know the prescribed textbook takes power out of the teacher's hands to have freedom to do what they want to do but remember we have a legacy.

Mabena: I agree with you the influence from the past still dictates how the classroom order should be.

Ms Aldam: I think the other thing that can also be a challenge in terms of the present schooling system I know is the work distribution and work division among staff, you know because sometimes you find that a teacher is not teaching one subject and someone cannot be focused and zoom in to become an expert the way our schools are set up. And then absolutely one other factor that inhibits active learning is our examination system. We are so high stakes examinations driven that we kill any active learning approach

Mabena: There seems to be a need by all the stakeholders in education to change their mind frames to accommodate change in the approach to teaching for active learning to be a reality in our classes

Ms Aldam: If you ask me if I want to do it today what will be the inhibiting factors, is my own unwillingness to do it because I do not have the confidence in it, I am afraid I am giving power away, you give power to the pupils who talk with you and you are no longer the one in control who can only talk and that is a scary concept for teachers who grew in a country where for hundreds of years they were the only ones with power in class.

Mabena: Thank you very much for your time and thanks a lot for sharing this valuable information, the team will appreciate it as it will go a long way to help us in improving the teaching of Economics in our schools.

ANNEXTURE Transcript 4 (Annex TR 4)

Mabena: Today we shall start talking about what is needed for active learning in the teaching of Economics to succeed i.e. for it to be acceptable as especially by the learners, what do we need to make it a reality in the classroom. We shall talk about different strategies that can be used to actively engage the learners. We will also talk about the challenges you have realised and the enabling conditions for this approach to succeed.

Lefoko: So does it mean everyone has to respond to all of them?

Mabena: Any contribution you can make

Lefoko: Ok sir

Mabena: You can also talk about challenges of implementing such strategies and what is needed to implement them. You can start anywhere we will sort them accordingly.

Nkamogeleng: I think for this to succeed the teacher must first explain to the class what is going to happen, say he or she wants to introduce a role play he or she must first explain what a role play is and why teach a concept with a role play. The teacher can demonstrate how a role play works by asking for volunteers and obviously those who like acting will be the first to start the exercise and others will also follow and might even realise that they have some hidden talents.

Mosa: I think the teacher must first explain what is active learning, how it works and how learners can benefit from its use. Learners can then be able to compare it with the current teaching approach in economics.

Nkamogeleng: I think if the teacher can introduce active learning very well to learners , give us reasons for it and how we could benefit from it we can start to appreciate it. The teacher must give us all the reasons behind all the activities we are going to engage in and emphasize on how we will learn from such activities I think it will succeed.

Reneilwe : I think the teacher should explain the limitations of the traditional teaching method in terms of understanding economics and show the learners how active learning can improve on those limitations. I also think that the teacher can even demonstrate it by

making a practical example. I think he or she must bring along the necessary materials to class to be able to explain a concept using a practical example. Once the learners can see how different the concepts are explained from the usual way of listening to the teacher explanations they will start to see how important active learning can be in class.

Mosa : and immediately they start to see that it works for them they would start to like the subject and their interest in economics will increase and they will be motivated to take part in the active learning activities.

Motedi: there other thing we need to implement these strategies I think is the resources

Mabena: eh, resources as a necessary condition

Motedi: Ok

Mabena: resources like what ?

Motedi: resources you will need will depend on what you are going to do, like if you want to play a game your might need a monopoly

Mabena: Ok , a board game like a monopoly, right , any other thing that you can think of, which activities can you suggest to be used in class.

Nkamogeleng : I think debate and role play they are the best ones that are suitable for active participation of learners in a class because every learner will be given a chance to say something in class, other learners are visual learners, so if a lesson is presented in a role play and they see things in action they will remember when they write a test or exam.

Reabetswe : yes I also think role play can be effective method especially in a difficult subject like economics which does not only require you to just read but you also need to do things practically and be actively engaged in class so the you can start to understand it better and by reflecting on the roles that were played by different learners you can easily remember the topic on which the role play was based.

Moduedi: It is going to help us understand, I mean sir let's say we dramatize a particular concept, we can add jokes during the dramatisation and that will help us to remember the

concept even in the exam you will remember that we once made a joke based on such a concept and will remember its meaning.

Mabena: Then according to you, role play will help learners to remember what was said in class.

Moduedi: absolutely sir

Mabena: Any other suggestion

Motedi: I think a group discussion, let say we have completed a particular aspect, we sit down in a circle and you must also be part , you sit in the middle and we discuss so that everyone can share with the group his or her understanding of the topic under discussion. And since we are now in Matric, we need to change this of 75% cramming and 25% understanding and we want to have it the other way round

Reabetswe : Group work also works because it allows everybody to get involved by making inputs to the topic, it will also help the teacher to identify the weaknesses and strong points of the learners and decide on the appropriate intervention or assistance to those learners.

Mosa: I think group work can assist us a lot although it has some challenges e.g. learners who are lazy who will be depending on the others to do the job for them, they know that the hard working learners will go out search for information and other material needed to complete the task.

Reabetswe: yes group work can be useful but like she said there will be some learners who do not want to work and they depend on others but as I said it can be a very useful strategy.

Mabena : but is there something that can be done to deal with such a situation.

Nkamogeleng: I think if the teacher can identify all those who usually do not want to participate and put them in one group, it will force them to work on the task they are allocated.

Mosa : I also think the best way is to put them aside in their own group so that they can start doing things for themselves.

Reneilwe : Sir I believe that the teacher knows his or her learners, so what he or she can do is not to allow the learners to group themselves because their groups may be based on friendships which will instead hamper what they are supposed to be doing in a group. The other suggestion is to make sure that every member of the group is allocated a responsibility towards completion of a task.

Mosa: In that way everyone will start to realise that he or she has a responsibility and is also personally accountable for the performance of the group.

Mabena: right that was a group work, apart from working in groups what other methods do you think can help us to improve understanding of economics concepts

Lefoko: We talked about debate

Mabena: How do you see a debate helping the learners understand economics much better and how does it differ from the normal way of doing things

Lefoko: Debate requires you to do research about the topic that you are going to talk about, and as you do research you will have more information about the topic i.e. you get more information on the two sides of the topic i.e. is the opposing side and the affirming side

Mabena: right that is the value of a debate

Nkamogeleng: and to add on to the use of drama, drama is like art, as learners we have many talents, the other one can recite a poem, another can sing, so if you have been assigned a topic to present one can recite a poem on it or write a song on it and other learners can easily understand the topic if it is presented in the form of a poem or song

Bushy: I think presentations, I think it has some advantages because each learner will be participating, all will get an opportunity to present and by so doing the learner won't forget what he or she was presenting because the more you talk about something you can easily retain information. As the learner is presenting he/she will also be making graphical illustrations in some instances and as he/she talks the more he/she gains understanding and improves on retaining that information

Motedi: and other learners are posing questions to the one who is presenting, that will help the presenter to deepen his/her understanding of the topic as he/she responds to the questions

Lethabo: I think games can also be helpful, games will also encourage participation of learners, games will motivate the learners to be actively involved in the lesson, we can use games to illustrate the application of certain economic concepts

Mabena: ok we have talked about drama, group discussion, debate, presentations and games, is there any other that you can think of at this stage. Right it is not only those, from time to time you can think of others. Then in a nutshell why do you think these activities are a better way to follow than the normal way of doing things in class.

Motedi: I think the main advantage is that all the learners are participating and they will be able to gain understanding as they see things in action

Moduedi: Sir, when it is only the teacher who does most of the talking in class, learners start to sleep and I think if learners are given roles to play in class just as the teacher teach, they will not sleep during the lesson

Nkamogeleng: I also think that will also give us a platform to grow to become better people, there are learners who are shy who are introverts and this will help us to grow as people, will help us to work together with others and break the barriers to communication and improve one's self complex.

Mabena: Right let us go back to what is needed for all these strategies to succeed in class, as you said we need some resources i.e. materials that can be needed to carry out some of these activities.

Reabetswe: Discipline, learners must be disciplined because if we are not disciplined we are going to take long and might not even see the need to engage in these activities but if we are disciplined and positive about what we are doing we will be able to learn from these activities and do them to completion like we mean business we start something and complete it because the duration of the class period is also little.



Motedi: and also support from the teacher. When we rehearse the activity the teacher should not exonerate him/herself from the exercise, you should not develop an attitude I am a teacher why should I be part of that exercise. We want you to be part of us.

Moduedi: time management, let's say a group has a particular activity to carry out, we need to set time frame for the completion of the activity so that we don't find ourselves lagging behind.

Mabena: any other thing that you think can make this thing to be successful, remember we talked about resources, discipline, cooperation, commitment, teacher support and time management. Ok we can now talk about the challenges. What are some of the things that you think can make it difficult to implement the strategies we are talking about.

Hlonolofatso: lack of discipline, if learners are not disciplined and if we are not positive about what we are doing and we don't have belief in what we do or we just do it for the sake of doing it we won't end up benefiting from it, so we need to have that positive attitude and confidence in what we are doing.

Mabena: so without discipline, without confidence it will be difficult, by the way what makes a person confident is when he or she does something he/she is sure about.

Hlonolofatso: and you are doing that thing wholeheartedly, it opens you up to the task

Mabena: meaning if you not sure about something that you are doing you won't be confident and I think you won't want to take chances. Right any other challenge

Reabetswe: It is time, our time as Grade 12 learners is limited and we have lot of work to cover. These activities e.g. a drama might take time to complete and we might find ourselves lagging behind with the work syllabus.

Bushy: I think vision, if we don't have vision in terms of what we want to achieve we won't succeed in what we are doing because we will still be doing it just for the sake of doing it without knowing our target.

Mabena: right, lack of vision can also be a challenge in the successful implementation of this framework, is there any other that you can think of

Nkamogeleng: If the principal does not approve of whatever we want to do then we will not be able to succeed

Reneilwe: If the teacher does not want to give learners opportunities in class to try and do things the way they think can help them because sir, we as learners are the once who are affected by this problem and we can always come up with ideas that we can use in class to help each other and you as the teacher might also start to adopt and implement the ideas and methods we might think of.

Mabena: Ok then, to make this thing successful and make it our culture of teaching economics what do you think should be done

Motedi: I think sometimes we must force negative things outside and force positive ones inside, I think if there are those who are negative minded we need to convince them to understand what we are doing and stop from being pigheaded, we need to take action to show them that we are serious about what we are doing irrespective of how old a person can be we need to show them we are serious about this thing and it carries so much potential. Like for an example we might approach the principal about something and he/she might just dismiss you as a child who can't tell him/her anything . Therefore we need to be united and when we approach him/her, he/she must be convinced that we are serious about what we are doing and we should be given an opportunity to implement this active learning framework.

Nkamogeleng: but before we can make demands we need to be sure of what we want to do, put it to practice, see how much it can helps us, identify its limitations and how we can improve on them and have it polished before we can talk about it to other people, so that when they see we believe in it they can also be sure that it can take us somewhere.

Mabena: basically what you are saying is that we need to be sure of what we want to do before we can try to sell the idea to others and as you say those who were initially negative about this framework would start to realize that this framework is yielding positive results and might also start using it. Right it means we should not just go out there and force it unto people when we are also not sure about it. Ok I think in the absence of anything we can pause here and map out the way forward. Thank you for the contributions.

## ANNEXTURE TRANSCRIPT 5 (Annex TR 5)

Mabena: Colleagues let me take this opportunity to welcome you to this meeting where we shall reflect on the project, the project that we started some time ago. Right what we can do today will be to highlight on the necessary conditions for active learning to be successful in class. For example you can share with us whether learners and teachers will automatically accept this approach as a way of teaching and learning given the fact that teachers have become accustomed to the chalk and talk method and learners on the other hand are used to their passive roles in the class.

Mr Sebola : Let me also say something on that, you know , this thing is not automatic, it is not going to happen automatically, given the background that we come from as teachers. I mean I have been teaching for, for, eh, eh, ey I can't tell for how long I have been teaching I have been teaching for a very long time. The way I was trained and the way teachers who came after me were trained there is no difference, even with the previous curricula you would still find that learners were still going through what I term 'banking education' that is a situation in which the teacher in class acts as if he/she is depositing of money in a bank account and expecting nothing in return at that time and on the other hand learners view knowledge as if it is money deposited in a bank ATM, and that knowledge would only be reproduced during the test or exams. So there was nothing really motivating for the learners to be actively engaged in the classroom, they have just developed the perception that learning is a spectator sport and not a participatory sport. So I think active learning will not happen automatically, we need to change training of teachers and the mind sets of the teachers. I mean curriculum has changed a couple of times and emphasis was to move away from the teacher centred and textbook driven approach to learner centred, active learning approach but how many of us have implemented this learner centred strategies in class. We fail in most cases because we are still comfortable with the traditional way of teaching. We often don't use those strategies because we do not know them or in cases we know them we don't use them because we don't have enough time to try them out in class. That is why I am saying it is not going to happen automatically, we need to change the mindsets as teachers especially those who were trained in the old system of education and we must also have confidence in these active learning strategies, we need to see them working and then we can apply them to keep the learners active.

Mabena: then on the part of learners, how do we motivate them to shed their passive roles in class, how do we bring them on board

Mr Sebola: the learners will definitely want to be on board, only if you have devised the means to involve them in the lesson, for example, when teaching them the concept of diminishing marginal returns by the usual chalk and talk method it becomes difficult for them to understand that concept. You can instead use a demonstration in class to illustrate that concept. The teacher can use a tape to demarcate an area on the class floor which will represent a factory building. One learner is given papers to cut taking a shape of a shoe which will represent production of shoes. The others start to count the pair of shoes which can be produced by that learner/labour in a particular time period. After that time period has elapsed one more learner/labour is added in the same factory to do the same job and others compare the numbers produced by each worker with those in the previous round, more and more workers are added to same factory and observation is made on the production levels per worker as compared to the previous rounds. So by the time the teacher explains that as more of a variable input/labour is used together with a fixed input/factory building output per worker starts to decrease, learners shall have observed that trend from the recording sheet they were completing after every round. In that way learners will easily understand the concept as they saw it in action. They would also be ready to volunteer themselves to participate in other activities which will be undertaken in class because they start to see the value of such activities. And you can also use that one where they were eating sweets, I think they were illustrating the concept of diminishing marginal utility with those sweets if I can still remember well.

Mabena : yes, they were illustrating the law of diminishing marginal utility on that day, and you can remember they had so much fun using that demonstration, they really enjoyed the activity and showed better understanding of the concept.

Mr Tshabi: one other thing is that some of the topics we treat in economics are far away from the learners real life situation, if you use the example of sweets it is something that they experience on daily basis so you can always have an active learning activity for that but with other topics it is difficult to use active learning activities e.g. balance of payments is something very remote from their daily experiences and learners will find themselves

passive in class as you explain the concept the traditional way as they find it difficult to relate to that concept. Another thing is that we have become results oriented than acquisition of deeper knowledge. Learners would just do anything like memorising information from the teacher just to get a pass mark in the test or exam.

Mabena: and that leads me to think of another factor which is also seen as a challenge in applying active learning strategies in class, and that is content coverage and depth of coverage. Do you really see that as a challenge and how then do you deal with it.

Mr Tshabi: that is a challenge, because as you teach you want the learners to learn and acquire deeper understanding, you want the learner to answer any question from the topic treated by showing understanding. At the same time you must be able to cover a certain amount of work in a particular period of time as per the work schedule that you have to follow and if I want to use demonstrations, blah, blah, blah, I will find myself running out of time. So the use of active learning depends on other factors like time available. You might spend a week teaching a certain concept using active learning but only to realize that you are now behind the pace setter, (interjection, Mr Sebola, exactly, exactly) so at the end of the day I have to use the approach that will address both content coverage and depth of coverage. I might be forced to reduce the use of active learning to cover content even though I am trying to move away from the direct transmission of knowledge. In essence active learning is good even though there are some barriers to its implementation that we must break.

Mabena: ok , but in terms of acceptance of this way of teaching do you think there is support from all the stakeholders e.g. the school, department of education and others

Mr Tshabi: it is still a concept, you might want to implement it but when you try you are met with resistance, take for example an Art & Culture class, learners will be having their paintings on the classroom walls but for an outsider that will look more as if children are just playing instead of learning. The same can be observed with a Life Orientation (LO), someone who is not clued up with that learning area will always have a perception that learners are always outside the class, just playing during the LO periods. Someone in the street will just see learners making noise instead of being taught, so at the end of the day you end up failing to achieve the desired results you wanted to achieve with active learning exercises.

Mabena: ok, meaning for this approach to succeed, it takes us back to the point that was highlighted earlier that there is a need for a change in the mindset of people.

Mr Sebola: to elaborate further on that point, I think we saw that or there was a need for a change in the curriculum, but did we get all the stakeholders on board with what the new curriculum is about, no we did not, we only trained the teachers and for about five days, which not even a equivalent to what the new curriculum requires, remember we got about four years of training to become teachers. The parents who come from the traditional system will naturally complain when they see the activities which the learners do, some will even go to the department of education to complain, and we as teachers we still have a bit of resistance because of how we were trained. So other stakeholders like parents although they have a constitutional right to be involved, we did not define their roles on how they should be involved i.e. how to check whether their kids are learning and whether they are taught relevant things. So the change in the mindset must be across the board but the learners I am sure they are ready, once you can give them an opportunity to role play, to demonstrate something in class they will definitely do it.

Mr Tshabi: the other thing relates to the external factors, for example the family background of the learners, say you give the learners something to do while at home and to report on it the next day in class, e.g. you assign him/her to prepare a role as a governor of reserve bank and talk about the interest rates, the learner might not be able to get assistance on that role at home because parents do not have any information with which to assist the learner, that will hamper the active involvement of the learner in class.

Mabena: so in terms of resources what do you think is needed.

Mr Tshabi: you need the normal resources, space is important, you need enough space, computers, internet and library to facilitate information search, you need variety of textbooks, writing material and you also need financial support so that all those resources can be availed.

Mabena: do you think the teachers are capable of developing active learning material on their own or will they just bank on whatever has already been developed.

Mr Tshabi: in my opinion, teachers can be in a position to develop their own material but it is some of the barriers that we have mentioned that can prevent them from doing it. I don't think teachers want to rely only on what is in the textbook they can also want to develop their own activities to suit their circumstances, as long as they have the resources.

Mabena: you know the reason I am asking that is that sometimes you have a teacher saying I don't have time to develop my own activities

Mr Sebola: let me chip in there, you know there is this perception that if you are employed you are remunerated only about 30% of your worth unlike when you are self employed or you are in business. You might then feel as an individual teacher that the sacrifice you make in developing this active leaning material is not paying off in terms of the remuneration you get. You know one can just say that the investment that he/she makes in developing the material is not being rewarded for and that can discourage the teachers from investing their time in developing this active learning material. They are capable of course, but people want to be motivated and also want some incentives. And if you develop it with the purpose to sell it, that might be considered an unethical conduct on the part of the teacher given the code of conduct of the teachers. Teachers might then have to resort to activities that will be possible with the material that is readily available, e.g. if you want to treat a lesson on markets you can just cut papers to represent money, divide the learners in groups , so that they start to see how markets develop from local markets to international markets.

Mr Tshabi: I was also thinking of this board game, monopoly, you can bring that board game to class and have the learners play it and let them reflect on the end results of the game and how they are linked to the market structures they learn in class but because of limited class period it becomes difficult to play the game in class. And as my colleague has said, it is time consuming and also you will not get any incentive for providing such materials. At the end of the day one can say that the limited time we have makes it difficult for teachers to be innovative.

Mabena: in terms of the numbers you have in class do you think they have a bearing on the application of active learning

Mr Tshabi: numbers will always be a case but of utmost importance is the physical space that is available, it becomes difficult to group learners if you have about 60 in one class because not all them will participate in a class activity

Mabena : but should you have a bigger physical space, can you be able to implement such activities?

Mr Tshabi: yes if I have enough space I can be able to put the activities in practice and the challenge that I will be facing will be that of time

Mabena: ok I understand you, let us then talk about the effectiveness of the active learning strategies that you have used in your class for example experiments or demonstrations, do you see them working, especially in addressing the problem of bringing the abstract concept to the classroom environment.

Mr Tshabi: demonstrations and experiments always have a positive effect on learners but the things that hamper their effectiveness are for example limited time to complete a demonstration in one class period, lack of resources, lack of space and this thing of content coverage as against depth of coverage. Sometimes it is not always easy to judge the effectiveness of a role play for example, in some cases it does work but in some cases it does not but not because the method on its own is wrong but because of the barriers that might exist or the circumstances under which the method was used.

Mabena: in cases where you have used small groups work did you see it work differently from the usual way of teaching?

Mr Tshabi: I am one person who believes the smaller the number the bigger the rewards, it is easier to carry out some tasks in small groups as monitoring and guiding becomes easy. When they work in small groups I see good results because even those who in a normal class situation do not participate, they push themselves to be active members in a group and it becomes easier for them to get assistance from their fellow group members.

Mabena: let us look at role play, simulations and games, do you see them yielding better results in terms of understanding of the material taught?



Mr Tshabi: this strategy also has an impact because it engages the learner with what he/she is doing, by acting a particular role the learner is put in the shoes of the character he/she is playing and can then start to understand things from a particular point of view and in this way learners get a better understanding of the economics concepts in practical terms and how the economy works.

Mabena: in terms of power and control in the classroom, do you think the teacher will be willing to relinquish some of the power and control which they have in the class to allow learners to be actively involved and make contributions in class?

Mr Tshabi: I think the teachers can use that as an indirect form of assessment. By actively engaging the learners, the teacher can be able to gauge how much the learners understand, what are the problem areas and that will be possible to achieve because the teacher now allows for the voices of the learners to be heard in class as they participate in debates, role plays and group discussions. The teacher can then start to assist them where they seem to be struggling.

Mabena : thanks colleagues for your contributions, is there anything that you might have left behind or that you want to add?

Mr Tshabi: all I can say is that the concept of active learning in economics is a good one and can bring about positive change provided that the barriers we have identified can be addressed and I believe it should be implemented at an earlier age so that learners and teachers become used to it and so that we can be able to confront the barriers to it at those early stages.

Mabena: colleagues once again let me thank you for your time

## ANNEXTURE TRANSCRIPT 6 (Annex TR 6) Free Attitude Interview with Mr Sebola

Mabena: Mr Sebola you will remember that the last meeting we had you could not be with us for the duration of the session due to some reasons, but I thought it could still be good for the team to hear what you could share with us on certain issues. One of them being the active learning classroom order as compared to the expectations which the society has on what constitutes a good classroom order. Is there a clash between an active learning class and the classroom order that people grew up knowing?

Mr Sebola: yes I think so, I think that is still the case from the side of the teachers, teachers might find themselves under pressure from the school management, you know those people who are in management positions, the principal and the deputy principals, some of them are from the old school, they perceive an orderly class as one in there is silence, the whole school, there should be silence in the whole school, they think that when there is silence in the school it is then that effective teaching and learning is taking place. The principal will get out of his office to respond to noise as a result of an activity the learners might be engaged in, because learners cannot be silent when carrying out some active learning activities. The same mentality which principals have, is also held by members of the society who went through a school system long time ago. Even some teachers would complain about certain noisy classrooms, the principal will also be complaining not knowing that the activity in which learners are engaged will enhance their understanding. So I think we need a paradigm shift and we must take the society on board when we change the curriculum, let them know that with the curriculum change we want the learners to start to discover things on their own and move away from the practice where the teacher is the only source of knowledge in class.

Mabena: ok, the way I understand you, the expectation on what constitutes good a good classroom order can pose a challenge in the implementation of active learning.

Mr Sebola: definitely, definitely

Mabena: but as you say the challenge can be overcome by bringing all the stakeholders on board showing them what the active learning approach entails. The other thing is that to actively engage the learners in class, as you say the teacher must step out of your dominant,

expert position in class and start to give learners an opportunity to show what they can do or how much they know. Do you think the teacher be willing to lose some control he has in the class or give the learners some power vested on him as the one who should be in charge in the classroom, do you think the teachers will accept this teaching approach which requires them to relinquish some of the power they have in class to the learners?

Mr Sebola: I think we have two types of teachers in this situation, we have those who come from the old school and those who are new entrants to the profession. In most cases, teachers from the old school are the ones who are in the managerial positions, they are the senior teachers at schools and they are the ones who believe that silence in the classroom means order. On the other hand, the teachers who are recently trained might come with innovative methods of teaching which are learner engaging but find themselves in a dilemma when they have to practice them. They find themselves in a catch 22 situation, on the one hand they will be told by the senior teachers that they do not have classroom management skills as learners are always making noise in their presence and they would not want to appear as if they really can't manage their classes. At the same time they want to practice active learning which is seen by others as disturbing order in the class. So those who come from the old system will continue teaching in the traditional way without taking into consideration how well do learners actually learn because they are afraid to explore new territories which they have never ventured. The recently trained teachers will want learners to interact with the content by using active learning but with the mind frame of those they find in the system they will find it difficult to use active learning. There are those who still do not get used to the fact that curriculum has changed and that approach to teaching has to adapt to the changes in curriculum.

Mabena: I understand your point, then coming to the active learning strategies you have implemented from those we suggested earlier on to try and concretize these abstract economics concepts and enhance learner engagement in class, do you see them working.

Mr Sebola: In my experience the learners do respond to the demonstrations and classroom experiments unlike when I am in front of them trying to explain a difficult concept e.g. globalisation, before I could teach them that topic, I first showed them a video on globalisation. I then divided them in groups to go and find out more about the advantages

and disadvantages of globalisation. There after we had a class debate on the positives and negatives of globalisation, it was quite exciting for them and the exercise was accommodating to all learners unlike when I tried to teach it the usual textbook method. They did well in the class test I gave them on globalisation and I realised that they have actually learned so much from that exercise.

Mabena: I think what you imply is that learners got a deeper understanding of the topic and retained more information from the activity hence a good results in the class test.

Mr Sebola: exactly, exactly, what I picked up during the activity is that when one learner made a certain point, others will go to their notes to ascertain whether the point being made is correct and that helped them to go through the content, ask questions and store the information in their long term memory unlike when they have to rely only my presentations in class. Sometimes they even sleep when you are the only one doing the talking in class.

Mabena: yes, I agree with that, do you think they are able to help each other when working in small groups, is there cooperation that one will expect from them. You know in class, you will find that you have those learners are a little bit slow to grasp the material you teach and those who do it a little bit quicker, are those who learn quicker able to assist the other group members.

Mr Sebola: actually those who are slower are able to learn from others, unlike when I try to impart knowledge directly, because time is not always on our side as teachers, I am not really able to accommodate them because I have to be on par with the work schedule and the pace setter. When they work in groups and provided I ensure that order is maintained throughout, everybody gets a chance to ask question and make some contributions to the topic under discussion, even those who are shy to speak in class they find it easier to talk in small groups. That motivates them, they start to realise that they can be capable to stand up and present the concept under discussion to the class, it gives them confidence unlike in a one way kind of environment where the teacher is the only one talking in class.

Mabena: yes it is quite true what you are saying, because I have also realised that when teaching using the traditional lecture method, it is just here and there where you will find a

learner asking questions and answering questions in class. Majority will always just be silent even if they do not understand they are afraid to ask. But when I put them in small groups I often come across comments like "sir you know we were arguing about...". Such comments will show me that there was a debate about a particular issue and learners really wanted to understand it and that is where I would usually come in and use that as a teaching moment during the group discussions. The other strategy that I have used is the role play or simulation. For example in treating the topic inflation, especially looking at the policies that might be used to control inflation i.e. the monetary policy and the fiscal policy I would divide the class in groups, one will be the monetary policy committee, the others will represent trade unions, media and the business sector. The monetary committee will be responsible for assessing the economic situation at that time and decided on what to do with the repo rate. The chairperson of the committee will then hold a media brief to give a picture of the current economic situation and explain the reasons for their decision on the repo rate being it an increase or decrease. The others groups will be posing questions to the chairperson and the committee. In so doing I realised that the learners get a better understanding of the real economic issues and how the different policy instruments are applied.

Mr Sebola: Personally I have not used the role play in class but now that you mention this one, it will be a perfect example of the monetary policy. I usually attend the monetary policy forums of the Reserve Bank, now you have given me an idea and I think the learners will benefit from such a strategy. You know in those forums, we are addressed by one of the members of the monetary policy committee members sometimes even by the deputy governor who will be accompanied by an economist.

The audience would be given an opportunity to ask questions on the presentation made and on the decisions of the monetary policy committee. I think if we can simulate such situations in class, say for an example we give a learner a role of an economist being interviewed on current economic conditions and how such a situation will have a bearing on the decisions of the MPC on the repo rate, that can create an interest in the subject. They will want to continue studying the subject even after Grade 12. I think that I now understand role playing, it has a great impact, it will create interest in the subject and will help the learners to understand the concepts better.

Mabena: Mr Sebola. I believe that if we can successfully implement this active learning framework in class, the teaching of economics will take another direction which will be to the benefit of the learners and as you said the other time, this framework will not only help the current learners but will still be beneficial even to those who are still coming as the framework would have gone through rigorous testing to try and find out what are the challenges in implementing it and how best to deal with such challenges, it would still be subject to improvements and refinements as time goes by.

Mr Sebola: I am glad that I was part of this project and as a teacher I believe that there is a need to change the way we teach to benefit the learners, we should move away from the position of Mr Know it all in class and start to accommodate these learners, because at the end of the day we should create opportunities for them to acquire knowledge and also create opportunities for them to apply that knowledge and the only way to do it is through active learning strategies and I think that is the why we need a paradigm shift.

Mabena: Thanks once again sir, thanks for your time.

## ANNEXTURE TRANSCRIPT 7 (Annex TR 7)

Mabena: The teachers often indicated that they have become so accustomed to the traditional chalk and talk method which they see as an effective method of information transmission in a short space of time and hence it becomes difficult for them to adopt active learning strategies in class. In your opinion what do you think are the factors that can make it difficult for learners to become active participants in the learning teaching and learning process.

Mosa: Personally, as Grade 12 economics student, I think it will be a challenge to adopt active learning in class because as learners since doing economics in grade 10 we have become used to the fact that the teacher will come into the class, read and explain things to us and ours is just to underline certain concepts he or she is referring to and it ends there. It is against this background that learners will always find it difficult to take an active role in class.

Nkamogeleng: I also think that as learners we will always expect that as it has been the case before the teachers would always just come to class and present the lesson without learners having to do more than listening or writing notes while others may even sleep during the presentation.

Reneilwe: Since from Grade 1 we just got used to just coming to class and passively listening to the teacher as if we are in church listening to the sermon by the priest. Learners have really become used to that , they see their role in the class as comprising only of listening, writing notes and submitting assignments. Sometimes you find that there is a learner who is aware of the fact that , this passivity in the classroom could be one reason why they fail to understand the subject, but because that learner is scared to be active in class because he or she thinks other might see him or her as trying to be better than other learners in class. The learner would then continue with the flow of the class. The approach of the teacher in teaching might also not accommodate such a learner because the teacher is just pushing to complete the job.

Reabetswe: the teacher does not even give us the chance to say something in class, he or she will just present the lesson and when the bell goes he or she will just leave and because

of this classroom culture learners might struggle to adapt to the active learning environment.

Moletlo: most learners seem to be comfortable with the old way of doing things in the class, because they know they can simply hide behind the others in the sense that, there is usually only one or few learners who will be asking or answering questions in class. With active learning I think we can get positive results because it gives learners opportunity to learn from each other as they participate say in a role play exercise, instead of just depending on the teacher to provide them with all the information.

Mabena: ok so we can say the challenge is the way learners were taught from an early age, they seem comfortable with that way.

Mosa: yes most still think their role in class is just to listen and write notes

Mabena: but do you think they will be able to learn when they still have such an attitude.

Mosa : I don't think that attitude will help them because by seating passively there the next moment the learners has fallen asleep and at the end of the day when you ask him or her what did he or she learn during the economics period he or she won't even tell you but yet the learner was in class.

Moletlo: but with the use of role play exercises for an example we can ensure that learners participate in the class by giving them roles to play in the exercise and that will encourage our participation and understanding of the lesson. Even by the time you write a test or exam you would still remember what was happening in that exercise.

Mabena: ok let's look at the impact of various active learning strategies you have tried on addressing the problem of learner passivity and in trying to bring the abstract economics concepts to your level.

Mosa: personally I think I have benefited a lot from those practical activities because I could understand the working of the law of diminishing marginal returns from the demonstration we had in class. I could see that if the firm keeps on increasing the number of workers in a factory, production per worker ends up decreasing because those workers are sharing a limited space and are always in each other's way. I think that demonstration was effective in



helping me to understand that concept. On the other hand the group work also helped me to talk, I was able to explain certain things to my group members and at the same time I could also ask where I did not understand.

Mabena: if you say your understanding of concepts was better, how different was that from when you listen to the teacher explaining such concepts or reading from the text book.

Moletlo: I would say the difference is that when we do practical illustration we can see the meaning of the concept in action unlike when you are just reading from the textbook or listening to the explanation, you get a better understanding.

Reneilwe: as Moletlo is saying, in that illustration of the concept of diminishing marginal returns we could see that as more workers are added to the same factory size, workers were crammed in a small space and could not work properly as when they started with few workers hence production started to decrease.

Moletlo: and at first we thought that if more workers are employed production will increase, the experiment showed us what does the concept short term mean in economics.

Reabetswe: with the experiment we did to illustrate the law of diminishing marginal utility I think the experiment managed to bring the theory into the classroom, it helped us to see what we read about in the textbook . In that experiment we could see what happens when more units of the sweets are consumed one after the other i.e. learners started to record less satisfaction as more sweets were consumed.

Mabena: with that group exercise you engaged in, I remember there was going to be in a sort of a quiz competition with other groups asking each other questions on the topics you were allocated and getting points from you answers, what was the impact of that exercise on understanding the topics you were given.

Mosa: it helped us to assist each other because when one learner did not understand something he or she could ask from the group members , all the members also made sure that they contribute positively to the group without just relying on others to do the job for them.

Moletlo: it also helped in the sense that we made sure that on the day of the competition every group member understands everything about our topic so that whoever was to be picked by another group to face their questions would be able to provide answers.

Mosa: we tried to ensure that everyone understands what is meant by an entrepreneur, labour, capital, natural resources i.e. everything about all those factors of production.

Reneilwe: I can also say that group work assisted us a lot because we came out of our groups empowered in the sense that a group member was to face questions from another group without having to check for answers from the textbook and we could also ask them questions on their topic and judge their answers without going to the textbook.

Moletlo: and we were able to learn more because we had to study our own topic and also the topic of our opponents so that we could be able to ask them questions on their topic and know if their answers are correct or wrong.

Reneilwe: and I regard that competition as being of value to us because at the end of the day all groups could learn from each other.

Mabena: yes it was competition in a constructive manner. Let us look at role play exercises or simulations.

Mosa: it also has a positive impact because when you write a test you are able to recall information from the role play that you that was done in class.

Nkamogeleng: from the role play I think we learnt a lot when those learners we illustrating the process of money creation, it was fun, I can still remember the character Sophy, the atmosphere was more relaxed than in a normal class situation, you know the learner's concentration span is very short, so by adding humour to a role play, focus and concentration can be sustained and learners will be having fun while learning at the same time.

Mabena: and for you to participate in class you need to have information which means you have to do a research on your topic before the activity is carried out. Will the learners benefit from doing a research this type of information search or should they rely on what the teacher provides them.

Moletlo: no, it is best for the learners to research on the topic so that they can have more information on the topic to be presented in class and such information will be useful to the whole class as it will be shedding to light on the topic under discussion.

Mosa: that information will be helpful to the learners who might not have understood the lesson as it was presented by the teacher, they can therefore use that information to have clarity on the concept discussed.

Reneilwe: one other thing is that the mere fact of going out to do research will go a long way, remember we are different in the class, so if one learner comes with information on the topic and the others do the same, we can be able to use that information to understand a topic from various points of view which also improves our understanding.

Mabena: ok in wrapping up, let's talk about some advantages that you see from this active learning approach.

Moletlo: I think active learning will help us, the pass rate in the subject will improve.

Nkamogeleng: I think if it were possible to teach everything in economics with demonstrations we could be getting very high marks because in a demonstration of a certain concept e.g. inflation I am able to see how it works in real life and by the time I study for the exams I would still remember what was in that demonstration.

Mosa: with active learning, learners will be focused and will push themselves to study so that they understand economics.

Mabena: speaking of understanding, there are cases were you find that a learners has obtained vey high marks in a test but when you ask the learner to explain or talk about the subject matter that was in the test he or she is not able to do so.

Mosa: I think the reason is that the learner was just cramming for that test, the learner did not study with understanding the subject matter.

Moletlo: but if you study with understanding, you can even explain things to others who did not even know a certain concept using your own examples.

Reneilwe: sir I think if was the government I would ensure that active learning is implemented in class, because if you look at economics as a subject, it is something that happens in our daily lives, almost everything we do has a bearing on economics. I think if we can adopt this approach in our class, it will eliminate the problem of learners cheating in the test or exams and as Moletlo has said it will also improve the results. Teachers in other subjects when they see it is working will also adopt it. Personally sir ,I don't want to lie, I am one of those learners who easily lose focus when listening to a long presentation by the teacher and I also find myself drifting into a sleep, not unless the teacher can make some joke that will spice up the lesson. So being actively engaged in class my increase attention span a lot.

Mosa: sir I also have the same problem of sleeping in class, but I think with my active participation in class I will be able to overcome that problem and I will be forced to take responsibility for my learning. I will be less dependent on the teacher to read and explain things for me.

Mabena: I think I understand you, like I said before, this project is something continuous, the intention is to get the use of active learning in the economics class off the ground by developing the framework which for now will be comprised of the classroom experiments or demonstrations, cooperative learning exercises in the form of small groups work and role play exercises or simulations. We will continue to build on it given the challenges we identify in its implementation, the conditions under which it can succeed and also looking at the effectiveness of its current components in addressing the research problem.

Reneilwe: I think sir this project was relevant to us because the problems we were talking about are what we face in the class and with the ideas raised here we can be able to provide some solutions.

Mabena: thanks once again, thanks for your contributions and for availing your time.

## APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

RESEARCHER : GL SEKWENA      STUDY LEADER Dr MM NKOANE  
e-mail:                                  University of Free State  
sirkwena@vodamail.co.za      Nelson Mandela Drive  
Bloemfontein  
T : +27(0)514012377  
e-mail: nkoanemm@ufs.ac.za

23-4-12

### INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear Educator

I would like to invite you as an Economics teacher to take part in this research project:

(ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASSROOM: A FRAMEWORK FOR LEARNER ENGAGEMENT).

This study is about the use of active learning strategies aimed at increasing the learner engagement in the teaching and learning process of the subject Economics. We would like you to participate with us in this research because of your experience in teaching the subject Economics. We believe that you will be able to share your knowledge of various teaching methods that can be used to create an active learning environment in the class. The reason we are doing this study is to create a framework that will enhance learner engagement in the teaching and learning process in an Economics classroom.

You are going to be assigned you a pseudonym for this study to protect your identity. You will not be exposed to any kind of risk by participating in the study. We believe that you will benefit from this study as teacher because during the data generating process, joint meetings with four other Economics teachers and Economics students will be held were active learning strategies will be discussed. You will also have an opportunity to observe how other teachers implement the active learning strategies in their classes.

While I greatly appreciate your participation in this important study and value the contribution you can make, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you do choose to take part, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time stop your participation with no further repercussions. If you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way the research is being conducted, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it, and also note that you are free to contact my study supervisor (indicated above). Should any difficult personal issue arise during the course of this research, I will endeavour to see that a qualified expert is contacted and able to assist you.

Yours sincerely,

GL Sekwena

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Title of the research project: .....

Name of the researcher: .....

Details of the participant

Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data generated from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO THE PARENTS TO PERMIT THEIR CHILDREN TO PARTICIPATE IN  
THE STUDY

RESEARCHER: GL SEKWENA STUDY LEADER: Dr MM NKOANE

Email@ email address  
[mrsk@vodamail.co.za](mailto:mrsk@vodamail.co.za)

University of Free State  
Nelson Mandela Drive  
Tel+ 27 (0)514012377  
Email@ email address  
nkoanemm@ufs.ac.za  
23-4-12

INFORMED CONSENT:

Dear Parent

I would like to ask your permission to allow your child as an Economics learner to take part in the research project with the title:

(Active learning in a high school economics class: A framework for learner engagement)

This study is about the use of active learning strategies aimed at increasing the learner engagement in the teaching and learning process of the subject Economics. I would like your child to participate in this research because he/she will be able to share his/her views with other learners on how best learners can be engaged in the class in an attempt to improve their understanding of the subject.

The child will be assigned a pseudonym for this study to protect his/her identity and will not be exposed to any kind of risk by participating in the study.

I am sure your child will benefit from this study as an economics student because during the data generating process, joint meetings with other Economics learners will be held where active learning strategies will be discussed and he/she can learn from the meeting discussions.

While I greatly appreciate your child's participation in this important study and value the contribution he/she can make, participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to release the child to take part in this study. If you do choose allow him/her to take part, and an issue arises which makes him/her uncomfortable, you may at any time stop his/her participation with no further repercussions. If you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way the research is being conducted, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it, and also note that you are free to contact my supervisor (indicated above). Should any difficult personal issue arise during the course of this research, I will endeavour to see that a qualified expert is contacted to assist your child.

Yours sincerely,

GL Sekwena

Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Title of research project: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Details of the parent

Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

- I hereby give free and informed consent for my child to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I he/she is participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from his/her participation, subject to the stipulations he has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX D: ETHICAL CLEARANCE FROM THE UNIVERSITY



Faculty of Education Room 12  
Winkie Direko Building  
Faculty of Education  
University of the Free State  
P.O. Box 339  
Bloemfontein 9300  
South Africa

### Ethics Office

T: +27(0)51 401 9922  
F: +27(0)51 401 2010

[www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)  
[BarclayA@ufs.ac.za](mailto:BarclayA@ufs.ac.za)

23 May 2012

### ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPLICATION:

#### *ACTIVE LEARNING IN A HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMICS CLASSROOM: A FRAMEWORK TO ENHANCE LEARNER ENGAGEMENT*

Dear Mr G Sekwena

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of Education, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research, with the following stipulations (as determined by external reviewers):

- There are elements of the template informed consent form that still need to be edited – it cannot be sent out as it currently stands.

Please submit the above changes to the ethics office before commencement of your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

**UFS-EDU-2012-0033**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise. At the conclusion of your research project, please submit a project report stating how the research progressed and confirming any changes to methodology or practice that arose during the project itself. This report should be under 500 words long and should contain only a brief summary focusing primarily on ethical considerations, issues that may have arisen and steps taken to deal with them during the course of the research.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Barclay  
Faculty Ethics Officer