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**A study on the parents' perceptions of their
involvement in their children's literacy development in
the Foundation Phase: A case study of one of King
William's Town Primary School.**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in the

Faculty of Education

at the

UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

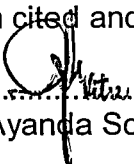
Promoter: Dr N. (Stunky) Duku

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Declaration

I, **Ayanda Someketa**, declare that this dissertation which I hereby submit for the degree of Master of Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of Fort Hare, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary education institution.

I also declare that as far as I am aware, all references used in this dissertation have been cited and acknowledged.


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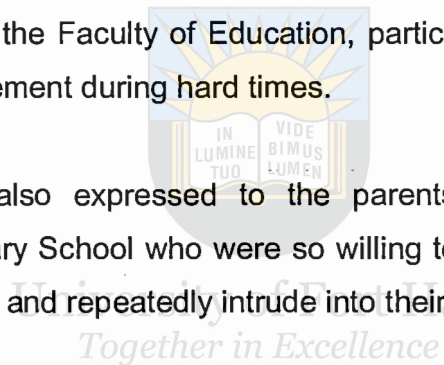
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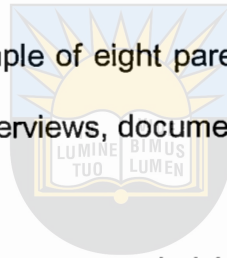
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Abstract

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the parents' perceptions on their involvement in their children's literacy development. Many studies on parental involvement assert that when parents become involved in their children's literacy development, academic achievement increases, school satisfaction increases, and there is a successful school setting. The study has been conducted in a township school in King William's Town district. The research took the form of a qualitative interpretive case study focusing on a study sample of eight parents and four educators. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations.



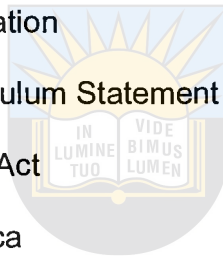
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The study examined the hidden issues or underlying causes that prevented parents from supporting their children with literacy activities at home. The findings of the study indicate that parents in King William's Town are not effectively involved in their children acquisition of literacy, for a number of reasons. These include the parents not feeling appropriately empowered to influence the development of their children's literacy development, and shortage of literacy material for some parents like newspapers, magazines, story books and computers. Another important factor is that there is no public library in Zwelitsha.

In view of these findings, the study recognizes a need for parental empowerment in terms of knowledge and skills, understanding and resources allocation regarding the education of their children. The study further recommends the establishment of a library in order to enhance the literacy levels of parents and educators.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| EC | Eastern Cape |
| JPS | Junior Primary School |
| FLP | Family Literacy Project |
| NCS | National Curriculum Statement |
| NEPI | National Education Policy Investigation |
| OBE | Outcomes Based Education |
| RNCS | Revised National Curriculum Statement |
| SASA | South African School's Act |
| UNISA | University of South Africa |



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1 CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The importance of parental involvement in their children's literacy development has been documented by many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers including Kaperu (2004), Mubita (1998) and Vassallo (2000). Henderson & Berla, 1994 state that positive effects of increased parental involvement have been known for some time. In South Africa the issue of parental involvement in education has been a concern even prior 1994 (Hornby, 2000). As such, Vassallo (2000:1) points out that, parental involvement in a child's education is a strong predictor of learner achievement: typically, the more involved the parent, the more the child achieves.

According to Morrow (1997) a collaborative working relationship between educators and parents is one of the key factors that contribute positively towards the development of children's literacy. Thus, it is important for parents to be involved with, and supportive of, their children's education. In South Africa, parents have been given the mandate through the South African School's Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 to be involved in their children's education (South African Act, 1996). Section 6.1 of the Act stipulates that parents should take an active role in their children's schoolwork and make it possible for children to complete assigned homework. Parents should also in terms of Section 6.2 attend meetings that the governing body convenes (ibid). It is at these meetings that parents have opportunities to participate in various portfolios such as serving in school committees. This would give them an opportunity to understand and/or learn the challenges faced by educators and learners in certain learning areas.

The National Education Policy Act of 1996 also stresses parental choices and responsibilities, as such; strategies have been developed to encourage parental

involvement at home and at school so as to link home and school more effectively. However, little knowledge exists regarding the role that parents should play in the development of their children's literacy particularly in the King Williams Town District. Grobler & Mestry (2007) explain that parents are often uncertain about what to do and about their own importance, and feel intimidated and unsure of their collaboration with the school. Khan (1996), Oosthuizen Smit and Liebenberg (2003) add that parents have equal strength and proficiency when compared to teachers. They can contribute and receive services on an equal footing and can even share responsibilities and accountability with the professional staff in schools. This means that when parents devote themselves to helping their children, they can actually make a positive impact in their learning process. With regard to children, the learning process becomes natural as they are familiar with their parents. Bloch (1997:5) states "parents are their children's first teachers".

In the report by the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) (1992:120), parents are seen as the focal point in the success of education in South Africa. According to the University of South Africa (UNISA) Life Project (1994:118), parents in South Africa have to take more responsibility for the education of their children than in the past. This is because literacy development does not begin with formal instruction when children enter school; instead children bring to school many concepts about literacy and certain competences in oral language, phonemic awareness, writing and reading (Morrow, 1997; Rasinski, 1995). This is confirmed by Wade and Moore (2000) when they say that "early reading experiences with parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction and adds an advantage over the peers throughout primary school level".

Parents are the child's first and most lasting educators (Primary National Strategy, 2004:5). This means that parental involvement has many positive effects on children. Parental involvement in their children's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variable, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). The importance of parental involvement in

education has been supported by Mubita (1998) who argued that parents can be incorporated into school activities in many ways; they can give lessons in the area of their specialization such as story telling, singing songs, field trips, sport activities and Bible reading. In addition, parents can be involved in school policy making which can be effective as long as teachers and policy makers examine their assumptions and views about the role of parents in the participation paradigm (Mubita, 1998).

In light of the above information, parental involvement in children's learning is a multidimensional construct that entails a wide range of parental characteristics and behaviours (Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Hall and Engelbrecht (1999:231) point out that parents need to be involved in their children's progress, involvement in decision-making and should be critical of information on educational issues.

Brown (2006) points out that working with parents is a mutual beneficial activity. For example, on one hand parents receive information about the school functioning, and assist with their children's curriculum activities. On the other hand, educators get to know what help can parents provide and are capable of giving. Brown (2006) adds that the aims of involving parents in literacy include informing educators about the child as learner outside school, fosters mutual respect, understanding and openness between parents and educators.

Benefits of parental involvement in children's literacy also include children's later reading ability (Moon & Wells as cited by Weinberger, 1996). This means parental involvement in children's literacy development is very important because they are the children's first and most powerful teachers. Furthermore, the involvement of parents in their children's literacy development is associated with higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behaviour problems at school (Melhuish et al., 2001; Gest et al., 2004; Rowe, 1991).

Despite the identified benefits of parental involvement, teachers find it difficult to involve parents because of factors such as shortage of time and tight schedules often experienced by many parents (Machett, 1995). Kenway (1998) expands that many parents, seem to face challenges in involving themselves to attend school events during the day due to lack of time. He adds that evenings are not ideal as parents have to spend time with their children while other parents have trouble with transport to attend school activities. In addition, some parents distance themselves in school affairs, and rely on teachers. These parents seem not to get involved with their children's learning, because they believe that the school knows best (Whalley, 2001). This is often because practitioners see parents as unqualified and unable educators (Edward and Warrin, 1999).

Nonetheless, despite the above stated problems, parents are most influential over children and have an enabling potential on them to learn more effectively (Hornby, 2000). For instance, the children interact with their parents long before they go to school. Parents communicate with, read and talk to the children, and this does not only help the children's ability in learning to speak and read successfully, but also their long-term academic achievement (Machett 1995). However research shows that some children in South Africa, particularly at the Foundation Phase are deprived of this due to lack of resources, attitudes towards education and literacy, shortage of text books and high cost of books and adult illiteracy (Hornby, 2000; Aulls & Sollars, 2003).

In the opinion of Gianzero (1999), an education-friendly home environment affects not only children's achievement levels but their interest in learning and future educational plans as well. Gianzero further point to a number of supportive home processes that range from strong family values routines to active participation parents in schoolwork. The most frequently cited processes include stable family routines, parental support and encouragement about schoolwork, discussion of ideas and events, high parental aspirations and standards for children's achievement, quiet places to study, emphasis on family literacy, monitoring of after-school activities, and tapping of community resources as needed, communicating moulding of positive behaviours, and knowledge

of school experiences (Henderson & Berla, 1997). They further observed in their study that the availability of reading material in the home is directly associated with children's achievement in reading comprehension at the secondary school level. It is what parents do at home with respect to homework and television monitoring that appears to have the greatest impact on student outcomes

While the parent's level of education should not be a basis for a child's success in his studies, there seems to be a difference in the performance of children with educated parents from the children with parents who haven't gone to school (Machett, 1995). Daskeo (2010) indicates that children of educated parents are smarter and more intelligent than children of those who have not gone to school or those who went to school but finished only the elementary grades the higher the education of the parents, the better is the performance of their children. This maybe because people who are well-educated have different perceptions as well as visions in life than those who are less-educated.

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According to the Development Indicators (2008), there has been a steady annual increase in literacy rates from 2002. By 2006 74% of adults were literate, with female literacy rates following similar trends and reaching 73% in 2006. Provinces with the largest number of illiterate people are KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape followed by Gauteng, Mpumalanga and North West. The lowest numbers occur in the Free State, Northern Cape and Western Cape. The language groups most affected are in isiZulu, isiXhosa and Sesotho (South African Govt Information). This scenario shows that adults with school going children are likely to have challenges in terms of involving themselves in their children's literacy development.

1.1.1 Conceptualising parental involvement

Many researchers support the contention that improving parental involvement in children's literacy increases the effectiveness of education children receive (Paratore, 2005; Chen, 2001; Rasinski, 1995; and Hornby, 2000). The other way of involving

parents in their children's education is to incorporate them in as many school activities that aim to develop their children's literacy. Morrow (1997) argues that collaborative working relationship between educators and parents is one of the key factors that contribute positively towards the development of children's literacy.

In South Africa, the introduction of an Outcomes Based Education (OBE) framework paved the way for greater parent involvement in education. The new system expects parents to play a crucial role in the education their children. Parents are required to share the responsibility of education with the state (Department of Education, 1997b:27). Furthermore the new system requires parents to use knowledge gained in helping to build and develop literacy in their community and country (Hornby, 2000). However, for most parents, the initial challenge is to understand the new curriculum and get involved with the governing bodies of schools.

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1.1.2 Practices of parental involvement in the development of children's literacy

There are various ways in which parents are involved in the development of their children's literacy. Robb (2003) and Browne (2004) suggest that the participation of parents in their children's literacy at home is carried out in the following ways:

- (a) Joining the public library and taking children to the library and letting them browse picture books and choose several books to check out and take home. This requires literate parents who are able to access the library facilities and choose books that are relevant. However, parents with little education may have challenges in that there are no literacy facilities in their communities.
- (b) Reading to children every day and then inviting them to use illustrations to tell about a book story after several reading. Nonetheless, the availability of resources such as books is a challenge in rural areas and even literate parents cannot assist in this regard.

- (c) Providing resources for learning at home, such as writing implements and books. The low socio-economic status of the parents however may affect this adversely as parents are not in position to provide the resources necessary to undertake this activity.
- (d) Translating children's stories, published books, signs, labels, notices, letters and circulars and supply materials for use in school.

Despite the above stated arguments, some studies indicate that such benefits are enjoyed mostly by children from middle class families (Soudien, 2003; Duku 2006). Furthermore, these studies have indicated that this support is greater in primary education level than in the secondary level of education (Littlefair, 1994; Driessen et al., 2004 and Hornby, 2000). Nevertheless, Dickson & Temple (1998) emphasise that parents are part of their children's reading literacy development and may thus have valuable insight into their children's reading development and abilities. In light of this, it is the aim of this study to investigate parents' views on their involvement in their children's literacy development.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 states that parents must take an active role in the education of their children. However, SASA is silent on how parents can go about performing this role. Literature reveals that parents can make a significant contribution to the development of their children's literacy (Hornby, 2000; Driessen et al., 2005; and Littlefair, 2004). The literature also acknowledges and shows that parents are the most important role players in supporting their children in learning (Hornby 2000). Whilst this is a noble idea, parents in the Eastern Cape seem to face challenges in assisting their children as most of them are illiterate (Development Indicators, 2008).

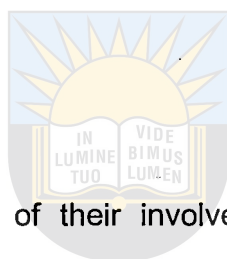
Literature also shows that children, especially those at the foundation phase need constant praise and encouragement as well as their parent's involvement in order to become confident learners (Hornby, 2000). Thus, parents have a primary role to assist

in their children's literacy development. This is more so with regard to parents with children in the foundation phase. They need to be involved in their children's literacy and therefore fulfil the obligations and responsibilities outlined in the National Curriculum Statement (NCS). However, most of the parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds seemed to be experiencing challenges in this regard, as some of them are not even aware of their role in their children's education. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the selected parent's perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development in the Foundation Phase.

1.3 Research questions

1.3.1 Main Question

What are the parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development?



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1.3.2 Sub-Questions

- What do parents view as their role in their children's literacy development?
- What are the benefits of parental involvement in their children's literacy development?
- Which activities and resources do parents use to promote literacy of their children at home?

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development.

1.5 Significance of the study

Research carried out by Feinstein and Symon in 1999 found that children of parents showing high levels of interest in their schooling can progress between 15-17% more in Mathematics and Reading between the ages of 11 and 16 compared to pupils whose parents shared no interest. The current study therefore contributes to the ongoing debate as issues of parental involvement in learning and teaching has been a concern in South Africa since 1994. Though often what is stated in policy and what happens in practice is totally different. The South African Schools Act of 1996 (SASA) gives formal power to parents as well as communities in the education of their children.

1.6 Rationale for the study

As a Foundation Phase educator since 1995, I have observed that parents are generally reluctant to participate in their children's literacy activities and events. This is despite the clear provisions of the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) framework that aimed at creating opportunities for greater parental involvement in public education at both foundation and senior phases. Although the OBE system clearly outlines the benefits of parental involvement in education (Department of Education Policy, 1997), parents still seem reluctant to participate in school activities. Parental involvement particularly in literacy activities is also supported by literature which also indicates the benefits of parental involvement children's literacy (Littlefair, 1994 Hornby, 2000 and Driessen, 2005). Literature further states that parental involvement is greater in foundation phase than in senior phase. However, research falls short in trying to understand parent's perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development in the Foundation Phase.

1.7 Delimitations of the study

The study was restricted to the Foundation School of Zwelitsha in King William's Town District in the Eastern Cape Province. The participants were educators and parents of foundation phase children. The researcher investigated the parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development in foundation level, namely (Grade R – 3).

1.8 Definition of key concepts

Literacy: on one hand is defined as the ability to read and write. It was considered a set of neutral and objective skills independent of social context or ideology (Street, 1995). Jackson (1993:3) on the other hand summarises literacy as being “much more than the ‘simple’ acts of reading and writing; it involves notions of power, of culture and community of social learning.” She defines the meaning of literacy in a school context where children engage in literacy events, of which reading and writing are only two of these events, in order to ‘make meaning’ of their worlds (Jackson, 1993:11).

Investigation refers to a systematic process of seeking answers/explanations to the research problem and by collecting and analysing data that will assist better understanding of the research problem (Gokhele, 1994)

Parental involvement is a process through which parents meaningfully participate in the various educational activities of their children, ranging from occasional attendance of school functions to intensive efforts to help parents become better educators of their own children(Myeko 2000:12).

A Parent is any adult whose role is to guide and accompany a child towards responsible adulthood. According to the South African School Act, 84 (RSA, 1996:4), the term parent refers to:

- (i) the natural parent of learner

- (ii) the guardian of learner
- (iii) a person legally entitled to custody(physical control) of a learner and
- (iv) a person who undertakes to act as a parent of a learner for the purposes of the learner's education at school.

Literacy development means that literacy is developed principally by learning to read and write (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2002). McGee & Richgels, (2000) state that educators are concerned with supporting all children's literacy growth and with thoughtful instructions, most children succeed in becoming reflective, motivated readers.



1.9 Outline of chapters

Chapter 1 which is introductory in nature provides a background to the study; research problem and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature which is relevant to the research topic as well as the literature which has informed this study. It further outlines strategies that will be used when dealing with literacy development at primary school level. Theoretical framework of research is also discussed.

Chapter 3 presents and discusses the chosen research methodology in terms of research paradigm (interpretive) and the research method. The case study method will be used as well as semi-structured interviews as research tools. This chapter further explains how research was initiated and how research data was collected. Finally, ethical issues conclude this chapter.

Chapter 4 will give a detailed report on the results and findings. Results will be analysed and interpreted.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions of the study by summarising the main findings on the themes presented under chapter 4. Included in the chapter are recommendations.

2 CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of relevant literature concerning parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development. The first part of this chapter focuses on two related issues, definitions and perspectives on early literacy practices. In this section, the researcher describes how various disciplines understand and explain literacy and its meaning. Such perspectives are embedded in particular ways of understanding and are shaped by theoretical underpinnings. Different theories of literacy interaction are also discussed. Using these theories will assist the researcher to discover the levels of parental involvement in literacy development of children in the Foundation Phase of one school in King William's Town. Towards the end of the chapter, the researcher reviews studies that have relevance on parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's literacy development in the Foundation Phase.

2.2 What is literacy?

Researchers such as Gee (1990); Hannon (1995); Barton (1994) and Scribner and Cole (1981) have shown that looking at definitions of literacy is a complex task because there may be as many perspectives of literacy as there are people. Gee (1990), (as cited in Cairney, 1995:9) argues that "literacy is a social practice that has many specific manifestations". Hannon (1995:2) believes that "literacy is the ability to use written language to derive and convey meaning". Street (1984) however, suggests that "literacy is not the name for a finite technology or set of skills". Hannon (1995:13) suggests, as does Street (1984) that "there are many Literacies and one literacy comprises an identifiable set of socially constructed practices based upon print".

According to Christie (2003) the term literacy has several different meanings. It can refer to the ability to create meaning through different media (for example visual literacy), knowledge of key concepts and ideas (for example cultural literacy) and the ability to deal effectively with different subject areas and technology (for example mathematical literacy and computer literacy) Literacy enables individuals to use print or non-print, verbal or non-verbal means to think, communicate and act for a variety of purposes in school and in the world beyond school (ibid).


Traditionally literacy has been commonly defined as the ability to read and write at an adequate level of proficiency that is necessary for communication. More recently however, literacy has taken on several meanings (Kajinga, 2005). Technological literacy, mathematical literacy, and visual literacy are just a few examples. While it may be difficult to gauge the degree to which literacy has an impact on an individual's overall happiness, one can easily infer that an increase in literacy will lead to the improvement of an individual's life and the development of societies (Anderson, 2000).

Early literacy development is said to play a key role in enabling children to succeed in school (Strickland and Riley-Ayers, 2006). The value of early literacy for children's school success has been acknowledged widely and, as a result, a broad variety of early literacy programs has been developed and a lot of research on early literacy development has been initiated (Dickson and Neuman, 2006).

Garton and Pratt (1998) state that, literacy must include both spoken and written language. In terms of this definition, literacy entails mastery of spoken language and the ability to read and write. The development of written language is therefore linked to the development of spoken language (Scheffers, 2005:1). These developments take place at both family and school levels. There are different perspectives to literacy ranging from minimal literacy, that is the ability to read and write on the one hand and the complex skills used in information processing oriented scenarios, on the other (Kazembe, 2005).

What is apparent is that people learn about literacy within a social context and this develops as their relationship with other people unfolds (Aronstam, 2005:15) The explanation and interpretation that a person constructs as they engage with literacy events reflects who they are, how they interact with language and the purpose for creating them. Thus, “individuals are acculturated into these literacy practices and these meanings” (Cairney, 1995:2). Therefore, to understand literacy fully a person needs to understand the groups in which individuals are socialized into the particular literacy habits. The following section deals with developing literacy.

2.3 Developing literacy



Developing literacy, according to McGee & Richgels, (2000) is concerned with supporting children’s growth, with thoughtful instruction to become reflective and motivated readers. Learners are helped by teachers to acquire important abilities of synthesis and critical literacy is crucial for comprehending any text. Luke, (1995) explains that there are no universal skills for teaching reading and suggested a model of reading, but today is a social practice that is suitable for making critical reading needed in the present world. Allington (2002) further explains that literacy is always situated in particular political economies of education. The way resources are selected and framed has consequences on learners’ capacity to become active designers and agents in shaping their social futures and those of their communities and cultures.

Much research has been conducted on young children’s literacy development (Lonigan, Bloomfield, & Anthony, 1999: Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998), the need for parents to be involved (Rush, 1999), and the need for a parent-teacher connection (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000: NCEDL, 1999). Unfortunately, few researchers have examined parents’ perceptions of their involvement in their children’s literacy development. When parents participate in activities with their child they have a better understanding of their child’s literacy development and therefore maintain a supporting role in that

development (Lauren & Allen, 1999). As such, a strong connection between parents and teachers can serve as reinforcement to the parents' self-efficacy beliefs.

Peter Hannon (1997:1) discusses the relationship between home and school learning. He focuses on the issue of improving the teaching of literacy through parent involvement. He maintains that "much of the children's literacy learning takes place before school or out of school- mainly, at home". Hannon (1997) believes that literacy today is very different from that of the past. He attributes this to the transition in culture and technological changes. Hannon (1997:3) states "Information technology today will have repercussions in the future that are hard to predict". Written language has now taken on a new significance as a "method of human- machine communication", he says. Studies done by Hannon have questioned whether information technology will have the capacity to eliminate the need for children to acquire literacy or just alter the nature of their literacy growth.

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Hannon (1997) states that, it is an error to think that most of children's learning occurs at school and that we should not underestimate the power of home learning. He further suggests that in the pre-school years the primary teachers are usually the parents. In spite of this notable fact, research seems to be quite limited when studying home learning before school admission. Hannon (1997:37) feels this may be due to methodological difficulties and that "we know more about the 'what' of learning – then we know about the 'how' of learning in the home".

Literacy develops within a social context as an extension of interaction with other people (Neuman, Caperelli & Kee, 1998). Children learn incidentally about literacy when they observe their parents (or literate others) reading and writing various contexts (Stainthorp & Hughes, 2000; Van Steensel, 2006). Home reading activities generally have been linked to participation in reading activities at home. This may include exposure to reading activities and print materials at home (Leseman & De Jong, 1998). Not only have these experiences included observing others reading, but it also depends on the reading activities. Through this, researchers have found that home environments rich in

literacy activities (such as age-appropriate books and magazines, literacy games, or environmental print) help promote young children to be successful readers and writers (Morrow, 1997).

To develop any literacy, information literacy is required as a tool of empowering individuals and societies to develop the abilities of learning how to learn. Information literacy is an understanding and set of abilities enabling individuals to recognise when information is needed and the capacity to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information (Council for Australian University Librarians 2001:1). Learning how to learn requires a literate person to have the ability to recognise a need for, locate access, evaluate the quality of, organise, and use the information effectively (Barton, 2002:2).

Shapiro and Doiron (1987) argue that major preconditions for literacy are rooted in the home environment, and that the many facets of literacy behaviour in the home are linked to later literacy acquisition. They also claim that oral language skills develop in a natural, caring and interactive environment where modelling is taking place and adults nurture and encourage children to understand that language is functional.

Shapiro and Doiron (1987:265) identify that children learn from a young age, that is, language contains message that they can act upon, as well as interpret to understand the world around them. In this regard, these scholars that the home can provide enriching experiences that allows children opportunities to explore language and gather information to guide their learning. As they suggest "Parents are often perceived as the models that youngsters imitate, therefore the involvement of parents should be considered important for children to see adults involved in the use of literacy skills" (Shapiro & Doiron, 1987:265). Through this Shapiro & Dorion (1987) maintain that in an ideal home environment children are provided with enriching experiences that allow for language to develop whereby children are encouraged to take risks and ask questions as they explore their environment. Shapiro & Doiron (1987:264) state that "Research into the ways children approach literacy events in the home implies that children are

actually in control of highly sophisticated processes that guide their learning". Thus, given that children are active players in their own learning, it is important for them to see adults involved in the use of literacy skills.

Goodman (1980) stresses that the roots of children's literacy development stem from their experience as well as the attitudes, beliefs and views they encounter as they interact within their family environment and community. She maintains that children begin from an early age to cultivate a conscious knowledge about the forms and functions of written language. This comes about when parents read stories to their children pointing out letters and words, as well as when they engage in family games such as recognising written symbols on television and products in the home. Children therefore start to understand the relationship between oral and written language and the meaning purpose it represents. It has been shown by researchers (Doake, 1981; Hausler, 1982) that children realise that written stories represented in books usually follow a distinct format.

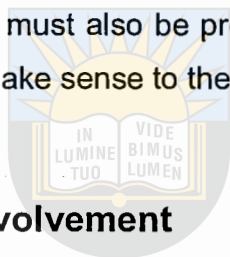
The logo of the University of Fort Hare, featuring a sunburst design with the motto 'LUMINE BIVUS TOTO LUMEN' and the text 'University of Fort Hare' and 'Together in Excellence' below it.
University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

Goodman (1989) note that learning to read is common and logical in a literate society. Goodman (1979) concludes that even children who had been characterized as 'at risk' for becoming competent readers had some knowledge about how to handle a book, the functions of print in a book as well as having and understanding about the directionality of written language. Thus the results from Goodman's (1979) study in the United States concur with Clay's findings that literacy development begins long before children begin formal instruction.

Research on children's literacy development has provided a lot of evidence on the following three predictors of reading and school success: 1) oral language (listening comprehension, oral language vocabulary), 2) alphabetic code (alphabet knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, invented spelling, and 3) print knowledge (environmental print, concepts about print) (Yetta and Ken Goodman, 1989; Goodman, 1979; Clay, 1967). As reading and writing play different roles in different families, children are exposed to different experiences with print. Thus Crawford (1995:71)

believes, “Emergent literacy has come to mean different things to different people. This meaning depends on researcher’s backgrounds and interests”.

The fundamental skills in developing literacy are through learning to read and write. Whitehurst & Lonigan (2000) mentioned that learning to read is a key milestone for children living in a literate society. This means the critical part of the foundation of children’s academic as well as after school success is provided by reading skills. It is through reading that individuals acquire more knowledge in various domains. For this to happen, Whitehurst & Lonigan (2000) suggest that one must be in an environment that promotes learning. This environment must also be presented with learning instructions and medium of communication that make sense to the learner.



2.4 Importance of parental involvement

Vassallo (2000:1) points out that parental involvement in a child’s education is a strong predictor of learner achievement: the more involved the parent, the better off the child. He confirms that the key to school reform is the parent. Vassallo (2000:1) also claims that once parents assume the responsibility of advocating for and supporting their children’s education, they will become partners with educators to create the schools their children need.

Many parents want to be involved in their children’s education but their own perceptions often influence their interactions in the home environment (Finn, 1998). Rasinski and Padak (2004) argue that as most parents are not teachers, thus, they need training that is understandable to them and that provides demonstrations, discussions, and a time for questions. Through this, parents can begin to understand what teachers expect of them and learn strategies that they can use at home to assist their children with literacy.

Puchner (1995) states that literacy is tied to parenting behaviours; this means that family members see, use, and treat written, oral material as parenting has an impact on children’s learning and development. Parents are the most important role players in

their children's lives (McMackin, 1993). They are responsible for teaching their children certain skills while they are growing up. Parents are therefore regarded as their children's first (and lifelong) "teachers", who facilitate their children's cognitive and language skill development on their way to adulthood and should be open to their beginner reader's changing attitude towards reading (Baker, 2003). These parental responsibilities happen concurrently while parents are playing with their children or singing, talking and reading stories to them (Wang, 2000). Research indicates that parents are aware of their responsibility in their children's literacy development (Anderson, 2000; Hawes & Plourde, 2005). They are, however, sometimes unsure of their new role in fostering their children's cognitive and academic growth once the children become readers themselves (McMackin, 1993).

Parents are part of their children's literacy development and may thus have valuable insight into their children's reading development and abilities (Dickson & De Temple, 1998). There are several perspectives to literacy ranging from minimal literacy, that is the ability to read and write on the one hand and the complex skills used in information processing orientated scenarios, on the other (Kazembe, 2005).

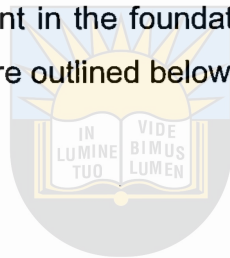
Wolfendale and Bastiani (2000) are of the opinion that if parents involve themselves more actively in their children's development and learning, then evidence shows that children will achieve more. This is supported by Epstein, Salinas, Mavis, Sanders, and Simon (1997) who are also of the opinion that parental support, encouragement, appropriate supervision and guidance as well as positive communications about school and learning positively influence children's grades, attitudes, aspirations and behaviour.

2.5 Role players in the development of children's literacy

The development of children's literacy is a broad and complex task that involves many role players with overlapping responsibilities. Epstein (1996) states that the perspective of overlapping spheres of influence posits that the work of the most effective families and schools overlap. This means that for the schools to have influence on effectiveness

of families they should give children tasks to do at home. The model of shared responsibilities necessitates unambiguous definition of roles and strategies that nurture the effectiveness of partnership. This model supports shared responsibilities of parents and educators for children's learning.

Against the background that the child is the reason for the connection between home and school, learners are the main actors in their education, development and success in school, Epstein (1996). The theory of overlapping responsibilities as advocated by Epstein (1996) suits this study which investigates the factors that affect parental support in their children's literacy development in the foundation phase level. The role players and their respective responsibilities are outlined below.



2.5.1 Parents

For the purposes of this study, a parent is any adult whose role is to guide and accompany a child towards responsible adulthood (South African Schools Act, 1996). According to Glazer and Burke (1994), field research that are focused on homes, families and developing literacy confirmed the power of the home environment and the family group in the building foundations for becoming literate. They further state that in the past parents were encouraged to only facilitate oral language. Reading instruction was left to the schools, for example language development was considered a natural part of home life, but reading and writing were learned only with educators in formal school setting.

This assumption, they say, controlled the way educators and parents dealt with literacy. Out of that parents had little to do with the process of learning, for example, the teacher was seen as the most valued influence on children's road toward literacy. While the above view attempts to separate educator's and parent's roles, it fails to see education as an inclusive process. Its application would create grey areas and/ or no man's land that when not attended to would frustrate the whole process.

The introduction of the South African Schools Act, 1996 (SASA) and the National Curriculum Statement, (NCS) (2003) has, however, changed the way learning is perceived. Parents are now mandated to take an active role in their children's school work. In line with the provision of the aforesaid act, Lessing and Mahabeer (2007) state that parents of learners have an important role to play in the education of their children and in preparing them for school, as learning about literacy begins very early in life. This means that parents should expose their children to literacy related activities.

Success in learning to read is, to a large extent dependent upon the amount of reading children do both in and out of school. Research indicates strongly that comprehension is directly affected by a reader's background knowledge (Rasinki, 1995). Learners who are exposed to reading both at home and at school are in a better position to comprehend text given to them. Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills, but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991; Gest, Freeman, Domitrich & Welsh, 2004).

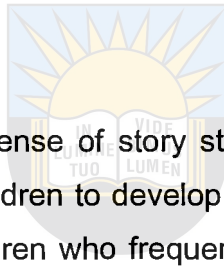
Various studies have attempted to establish the variety of ways in which parents can develop literacy for their children. This section discusses some examples from African countries and those abroad.

- **Storytelling**

Research by Heath (1983) advocates that storytelling contributes significantly to early literacy development. By telling stories, Phillips (1999) believes that children will encounter a broad range of language; new words' phrases, rhymes metaphors, and more. According to Sloan, (1991: 107 as cited in Schiro, 1997:64) stories:

- Teach children to read and write
- Help children make sense of their inner and outer worlds
- Convince them that reading is worth doing

- Provide children with enjoyment
- Motivate children to explore literature
- Allow the children to express themselves and communicate intimately with others who have expressed themselves
- Allow the child to experience, respond, reflect, understand, empathise, imagine, wonder, question and create in thoughtful and feeling ways
- Allow children to imagine themselves as someone else and experience a reality other than their own
- Allow children to observe and then model another person's behaviour, thoughts, or feelings.

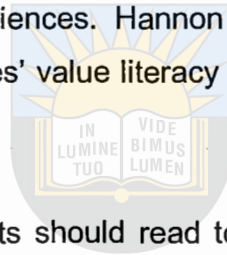


Listening to stories develops a sense of story structure, positive attitudes, toward reading and writing and helps children to develop their own stories (Morrow, 1985). Research demonstrates that children who frequently listen to stories develop more sophisticated language structures and a larger vocabulary (Lenz, 1992). Listening to stories establishes favourite storybooks and encourages children to want to read actively and to master the skills necessary to read by themselves (Sulzby, 1985). Ellis & Brewster (1991) argue that storytelling provokes a shared response of laughter, sadness; excitement and anticipation which is not only enjoyable but can help build up the child's confidence and encourage social and emotional development.

- **Reading aloud**

Reading aloud to children has been identified as one of the most important activities for building the knowledge required for success in reading and establishing closeness between the parent and the child (Armbruster, 2003:8). She further argues that reading aloud with children who participate actively helps children to read new words, learn more about the world, learn about written language and see the connection between spoken and written words.

Adams (1990) also stresses the importance of reading aloud to children, as she sees it is an activity that builds knowledge and develops skills. Children need to become active participants when having stories to read to them. Hannon (1997:9) outlines that literacy is strongly related to out-of-school factors, particularly home circumstances. He says instead of considering children's literacy separately from parents or adult literacy, it would be more beneficial to think of the family's literacy in its entirety. The literacy that parents bring to the family usually exhibit their own personal interests and upbringing. Even though parents will certainly influence and dominate their youngster's literacy development, the child's own literacy will also reflect their own personal experiences. Hannon thus believes that many factors control the extent to which families' value literacy and this helps shape the direction of the future learning.



Epstein (1997) notes that, parents should read to their children individually and in small intimate groups. Furthermore, Epstein indicates that parents should establish daily story times during which they read to their children and listen to their children as they read to them or to one another (Ibid). Armbruster (2003:14) is of the opinion that reading times can be brief, and be within the attention span for younger children and still be of great value.

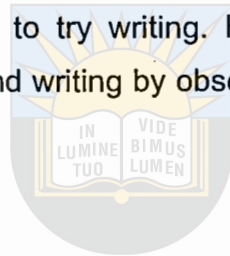
- **Writing**

Reading and writing are mutually supportive and interactive processes. Good researchers tend to be good writers, and good writers tend to do well in reading (Teale & Sulzby, 1989). These findings are in line with the First Additional Language and Home Language Policy Document, (2003) which suggest activities that could lead to the competencies that will develop literacy of the children as follows:

- Listen to/sing songs
- Recite rhymes
- Listen to stories and retell
- Read aloud

- Practise writing
- Extend vocabulary
- Read frequently in the reading corner of the classroom or library
- Show respect for books and handle them with care

Baghban (1989) argues that with little encouragement, children's reading and writing development will proceed on parallel tracks, meaning that writing is one of the important literacy activities emphasized in Lower Primary Curriculum (2005). He further posits that even a young child who sees the adults in her life writing letters, grocery lists and telephone messages will also want to try writing. Heath (1983) also mentions that children learn much about reading and writing by observing the reading and writing that occurs in their families.



- **Talking**

Hart & Risley (1995) found that the amount and kind of talking that parents use with their young children is highly predictive of valuable educational outcomes. Parents who talk more with their children and who use affirming supporting responses to children tend to have children with vocabularies. Another study which highlights the pivotal role played by talking in literacy development was undertaken by Heath (1983:350). The study revealed that when parents talk more to their children, they are more likely to succeed in school.

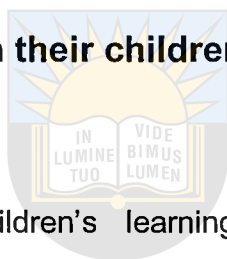
- **Playing**

Play can support literacy by providing settings that promote literacy activities, skills, and strategies. Play also offers language experiences that build associations between oral and written modes of expression; and providing opportunities for teachers to instruct children in functional literacy skills (Neuman & Roskos, 1992). Play also incorporates literacy concepts, skills, and processes (Neuman & Roskos, 1992). When appropriately facilitated by an adult, play and literacy can be integrated

to comprehend books and increase memory for stories (Rowe, 1998), and assist children in learning to read environmental print (Vukelich, 1994).

Isenberg and Jacob (1983:272) claim that symbolic play, the process of transforming an object or oneself into another object, person, situation, or event through the use of motor and verbal actions in a make-believe activity, provides an important source for literacy development. It does so because both play and literacy involve handling words in such a way as to present objects, ideas or actions.

2.5.1.1 Parental involvement in their children's literacy development in South Africa



Parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's performance at school (Fan & Chen, 2001) in both primary and secondary schools (Feinstein & Symons, 1999), leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons *et al.*, 2001). Early reading experiences with their parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child's has been found to be the most important determination of language and emergent literacy (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995).

Parental involvement in children's learning is a multidimensional construct that entails a wide range of parental characteristics and behaviours, but broadly refers to activities in which parents engage to support the academic achievement of their children (Dempsey and Sandler, 2005). Hall and Engelbrecht (1999:231) point out that:

Parents need to be involved in their children's progress, participation in decision-making and being critical of information on educational issues, however parents have different backgrounds due to apartheid era, poverty and socio economic constraints.

Hence parents' active involvement in their children's learning, such as monitoring or helping with homework, influences children's academic success through modelling, reinforcement, and instruction which in turn support children's attributes for achievement, such as confidence and self-regulation (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001).

Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich & Welsh, 2004), but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 2004). Parental involvement in their child's literacy practices is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004), while reading enjoyment is more important for children's educational success than their family's socio-economic status (OECD, 2002).

Most parents in liberate societies want their children to acquire literacy; all have opportunities to observe their child's literacy – related skills and abilities; and they participate in home practices that support literacy development in many varied ways (Barton, 1995; Taylor, 1997; Dorsey-Gaines, 1988; Tizard & Hughes, 1984). Educators need to design programmes that offer assistance to parents who find it difficult to help in literacy development of their children.

Morris & Taylor (1988) argue that school in-service support for teacher's development of parental involvement skills is an important strategy for enhancing the incidence and effective of parental involvement. The school may also empower teachers for involvement by making parental involvement a routine part of staff reasoning and planning. Badenhorst (1993) suggests the following strategies to improve parental involvement at schools, the training of teachers for parental involvement and creating a parental body with working communities, training both teachers and parents for parental involvement. Furthermore, the government should give parents in-service training for their role as members of governing bodies.

A release by Connecticut's Parenting Resource (1999) confirms that active parental involvement improves student's morale, attitudes and academic achievements. This means that when parents take an active role, they reduce the risk of failure in their children's education. However, in the South African context, parents sometimes are not available to attend school meetings due to working related problems and other domestic commitments (Duku, 2006). Parents' attendance to such meetings is very important as well as their participation.

South African School Act (Act 84 of 1996, section 18) stipulates that governance in education is concerned with relationships between people: individuals, interest groups, direct stakeholders and institutions in the education system. Governance should be seen as co-operation and partnership to bring about positive educational through collaborative leadership and management. Stakeholders' relationships are therefore very important to the task of leading and managing in schools.

Cole (1996) mentions that communication between home and school should set a tone of openness and co-operation that encourages parents to take part in the children's school experience. Children can encounter conflict especially when their own culture determines a sense of what school should be that is different from the actual culture of school they attend. While parents of young learners want to support their children, but many do not know how to bridge the gap difference in cultures.

On the other hand some parents may push their children to learn to read by listening to them reading. For example, parents seek to attend an inside range of information and evidence which they use in different ways. In the school where I work, parents and teachers need to be jointly involved in problem solving and decision-making at the level of individual children, the classroom and the school.

Materials and activities in the home are the resources parents and children are encouraged to use to develop literacy skills. Some educational television programmes

provide strategies for helping parents to help their children enjoy reading and other literacy-related activities (Graces and Wendorf, 1995, McKes and Rhet, 1995). Given the strong interest in parental involvement in literacy, it is no surprise that many specific initiatives to focus work with parents on early literacy have been developed (Morris, 1997). Therefore such work builds on strong foundation of research and practice. Teachers therefore need to meet parents to set up a partnership by sharing professional knowledge with parents.

Similar situations are observable in South Africa as can be deduced from Machel's study when addressing literacy problems in disadvantaged communities in South Africa:

Family practices actively channel children's development through the creation of sets of experience and opportunities. Socialisation can occur either direct or indirectly.....They will also learn the basics uses of literacy through watching their family, for an example, they will see their mothers making a shopping list, writing a message or a phone number, consulting books to find something out. By the time these children go to school, even though they may not be able to read and write, they understand how books work and the role that literacy will play in their lives... (Machel, 2001: 3).

When parents know what their children are learning and how schools are doing, they are better prepared to help that child to succeed. Barton, (1999) states that, the importance of family participation in children's literacy cannot be overemphasised. However, parents need to extend the use of literacy at home and in their community, and then literacy will occur naturally during the routines of daily living. Heath, (1983) discovered that children would achieve more when their home language patterns and values for literacy resemble that of the school. To improve literacy on young learners there are cultural differences in the kind of assistance that mothers provide to their children's learning of language, such as essential to the acquisition process, and also there must be implications for child's subsequent language development.

Morrow (1996) mentions that parents, who read to their children readily help them with writing. These parents read a great variety of materials, including novels, magazines,

newspapers and work they bring home. They own or borrow books for themselves and for their children. Homes have been a major catalyst for the new look in early literacy strategies, because many children come to school reading and writing apparently without formal instructions. Such children are said to have learned to read naturally.

Parents, who provide a natural home reading to their children, ensure that their children develop positive attitudes towards reading and therefore become motivated to read (Anderson, 2000; Baker & Sher, 2002). Parents, who view reading as a source of entertainment, are more likely to have children who also enjoy reading and become skilled readers (Baker & Sher, 2002).



2.5.1.2 The benefits of parental involvement in children's literacy

Literacy develops within social contexts as an extension of interaction with other people (Neuman, Caperelli & Kee, 1998). Children learn incidentally about literacy when they observe their parents (or literate others) reading and writing in various contexts (Stainthorp & Hughes, 2000; Van Steensel, 2006).

In the opinion of Gianzero (1999), education-friendly home environment affects not only children's achievement levels but their interest in learning and future educational plans as well. The most frequently cited processes include stable family routines, parental support and encouragement about schoolwork, discussion of the ideas and events, high parental aspirations and standards for children's achievement, quiet places to study, emphasis on family literacy, monitoring of after-school school activities, tapping of community resources as needed, communicating or modelling of positive behaviours, and knowledge of school experiences (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Brown (2006) points out that working with parents is a mutually beneficial activity. On the other hand parents receive information about the school functioning, they assist with their children's curriculum activities. He also states that the aims of involving parents in literacy include informing teachers about the child as a learner outside school, fosters

mutual respect, understanding and openness between parents and educators (Brown, 2006). Early reading experiences with their parents prepare children for the benefits of formal literacy instruction. Indeed, parental involvement in their child's reading has been found to be the most important determination of language and emergent literacy (Bus, van Ijzendoorn & Pellegrini, 1995).

Involvement with reading activities at home has significant positive influences not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expressive language skills (Gest, Freeman, Domitrovich, & Welsh, 2001), but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in the classroom (Rowe, 1991). Parental involvement in their children's literacy practises is a more powerful force than other family background variables, such as social class, family size and level of parental education (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Pahl & Rowsell (2006) identified some benefits of parental involvement in children's literacy. They state that when a child arrives at school, he or she possesses a wealth of knowledge about the world to support his or her learning.

Although parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years, its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into the teenage and even adult years (Desforges & Aboucheer, 2003) found that parental interest in their children's education was the single most powerful predictor of achievement at age 16. The benefits of parental involvement extend beyond the realm of literacy and educational achievement. Studies show that children whose parents are involved show greater social and emotional development (Allen & Dally, 2002), including more resilience to stress, greater life satisfaction, greater self-direction and self-control, greater social adjustment, greater mental health, more supportive relationships, greater social competence, more positive peer relations, more tolerance, more successful marriages, and less delinquent behaviours (Desforges & Aboucheer, 2003).

Parents, who are aware of their role of encouraging their children to read and write outside school, display this awareness by structuring activities to allow their children to

be actively involved in reading and writing (Hughes et al., 1999). These parents ensure that they have enough books, magazines or other printed materials at home to read to their children or to motivate them to page through on their own or read independently (DeBaryshe, 1995; Ferreiro, 1986). Parents' expectations of their children's abilities influence their support of their children and the provision of positive home reading environments. Children do better at school when their parents have high expectations of them (Anderson, 2000). On the contrary, parents, who perceive that their children are not interested in learning to read or who are not yet engaging with the printed word in their interactions with books, do not have the same expectations of their children to do well at school, are more likely to provide books and academic games for their children and take them to a library (Anderson, 2000).



2.5.2 Educators

Garton & Pratt (1998) state that one vital ingredient for facilitating literacy development is an interested adult who is prepared to help by interacting with the child. An interested adult can be a parent, caregiver or an educator. The role of an educator is to create environments and to guide children in ways similar to that of caregivers in earlier years (Glazer and Burke, 1994). In performing this role educators become observers of behaviour. This requires educators to have knowledge of human growth and development and to apply that knowledge to behaviours they observe in children. Educators can then plan appropriate activities and instruction to meet individual academic, emotional, social and physical needs. The Early Children and Literacy Development Committee of International Reading Association (1986) suggested the following roles for teachers:

- Build instruction on what the child already knows about oral language, reading and writing. Children first learn oral language at home. Their initial exposure to reading and writing does also; to an extent take place at their home situations. In order to avoid confusing and conflicting environments in the mind of the child, it is desirable that the home and the school environments are not separated. The instruction of the educators should be built on what the child already knows. This

makes the role of the educator easier as well as making the learning faster on the part of the child.

- Respect the language the child brings to school and use it as a base for language and literacy activities. Children first learn oral language at home. Their initial exposure to reading and writing does also; to an extent take place at their home situation. This instruction of the educators should be built on what the child already knows. This makes the learning faster on the part of the child.
- Provide reading experiences as an integrated part of the broader communication process which includes speaking, listening and writing. Communication takes place in various forms such as speaking, listening, writing and reading. It is important that educators perceive reading as an integral part of the communication process. By providing reading experiences as an integrated part of the broader communication process, educators are developing the communication abilities of the child which is core to literacy development of children.
- Use the material for instruction that is familiar, such as well-known stories, as these provide the child with a sense of control and confidence. The use of unfamiliar material and stories ignores the experiences the children have from home situations. It also makes the school environment to the children more strange resulting to fears and uncertainties that affect the moral of children. On the other hand, the use of familiar material and stories eliminates possible fears thereby making learning an enjoyable experience. The educator also builds on available experience and this brings about closer working together. The familiarity of material and stories also boost the confidence and motivation of children as they feel in control of the situation.
- Make parents aware of the reasons for a total language program at school and provide them with ideas for activities to carry out at home. Parents may not be

able to assist when they are not aware of the reasons of the school program and the activities to be carried at home. This makes parents unaware of what roles to play in the development of their children's literacy. Parents are key stakeholders in the education process and should therefore be kept abreast of the total language program. In order for parents to assist in the development of their children's literacy, it is necessary that educators provide them with ideas for activities to carry out at home. This improves co-ordination between parents and educators and simultaneously makes parents aware of the educator's expectations and the children's performance.

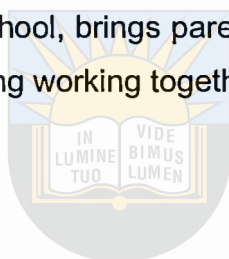
- Encourage children to be active participants in the process of learning process rather than passive recipients of knowledge, by using activities that allow for experimentation with talking, listening, writing and reading. Children have the role to play in their own development. This can be achieved if they are active participants in the process. Their involvement and full participation creates ownership of the process and resulting in full commitment as they do not see this as an educators' or parents' responsibilities only. Use of knowledge and experimentation also helps the children to apply and attach meaning to the information obtained.

The same views about roles of educators are shared by Glazer and Burke (1994) who outline the following:-

- Educators must observe children in order to determine their strengths and needs in language learning settings. Disregarding the strengths and paying no attention to weaknesses and needs of children in language learning settings frustrates the entire learning process. It is therefore important that educators observe these so that they are able to build on the strengths as well as addressing the weaknesses and needs of children. This observation also assists the educators to know the areas of focus that require more

attention. However, with large numbers in classes this becomes a challenge to educators.

- Educators, as professionals, are expected to guide parents in understanding the relationship between children's behaviour in and out of school. The development of children's literacy is expected to have a bearing on their behaviour as a whole. Because of what they learn at school, their behaviour at home may change and parents may not understand the causes behind such changes. The understanding of the relationship between children's behaviour in and out of school, brings parents closer to their children as well as educators thus improving working together and clarity of roles.



2.5.3 Learners

Glazer and Burke (1994) suggested some of the roles that children can play in the development of their literacy which are discussed hereunder. They also state that time has come for the children to take responsibility of their own literacy by:

- Becoming actively involved in the teaching and learning process. Learners are beneficiaries of teaching and learning process in that all endeavours made by other stakeholders are directed at learners benefit. The success of any program demands active involvement of its beneficiaries. It becomes difficult for educators and parents to assist when learners are passive recipients of knowledge. In such situations educators are not able to learners in the problem areas that learners experience. Monitoring and evaluation of progress becomes difficult. The active involvement brings about co-ordination and inclusive decision making that is critical in programs that involve groups of individuals.
- Making decisions about their learning. By being involved in decision making make learners feel part of the process. Collective decision making create opportunities for all members to participate fully and be more committed to the

success of the program. In this way children also learn at an early stage to take charge of their own lives and development. It also sharpens their leadership abilities as future leaders.

- Reading and writing is a purposeful exercise. Learners are, ideally, involved in reading to achieve a predetermined purpose. Where learners read and write without a purpose the exercise loses its direction thus defeating the main goal. In such instances there is, however, no yardstick against which progress can be measured. Reading and writing helps learners to understand their shortcoming. It also assists educators and parents in assessing progress and determining area wherein learners encounter challenges and how these can best be addressed.
- Listen and respond. The development of children's literacy is communication process that warrants listening and response on the part of the recipient of information. It is through listening that learner can hear and decode the information imparted to them by educators and or parents. Responding to information received enables the sender to understand that the information is approximately decoded by the recipient. The response of learners puts educators on a better footing to assess and monitor literacy development accordingly.
- Continuously evaluate them in order to notice strengths and needs. The success of any program can be determined by continuous evaluation and monitoring of the program made. It is therefore, incumbent upon learners to continuously evaluate themselves in order to notice strengths and needs. Monitoring and evaluation gives learners opportunities to detect their shortcomings so that they can work on them for their own success and achievement to development of their literacy. This can also enable them to determine the areas that need more attention and or assistance. If learners do not continuously evaluate themselves

they may not be able to notice their strengths and needs thereby creating a frustrating situation for themselves, educators and parents.

2.6 Home environment for literacy development

Kajinga (2005:18) indicates that the home environment plays a crucial role in early child literacy development. Home education is done either by the mother reading to a young child, or by making provision for reading materials and storytelling. Similarly, Bloch (2002:11) argues that the environment in which literacy learning takes place needs to be one where children see regular reading and writing happening and where they get the opportunities to behave like readers and writers. This means that there needs to be sufficient appropriate materials for reading and writing in children's homes. Kupetz (1993) also points out that an environment rich in libraries can help parents who feel uncomfortable with reading to their children.

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Baker, Serpell and Sonneschein (1999) claim that the home literacy environment may include observing parents reading (books, magazines, newspapers, bills) and writing (shopping lists, menu planning, budgeting, letters); opportunities and materials for the child to draw and write; the number of books in the home (adult and child), library visits with parents; opportunities for the child to read independently and engaging in shared-books reading with parents. Orellana & Hernandez (1999) suggests that parents can take "literacy walks" with children, pointing out signs and print seen in the community and discussing colours, pictures, and numbers. They further suggest that parents and children can collect food labels that children recognize and make a game with them, such as matching similar labels.

2.6.1 The connection between home and school

The home environment influences young children's literacy development as families provide children with various literacy enriched environments and activities. These literacy environments stimulate the children's awareness of the printed word. Therefore,

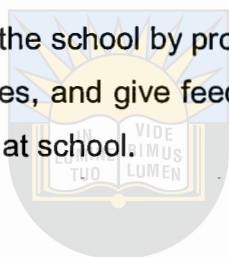
many teachers try to create a classroom environment similar to that, which the children are used to at home, a place where they can lie down or sit comfortably and enjoy reading their favourite books (Saracho, 2002). The successful development of literacy skills in children, who commence school, seem to be partly related to supportive literacy experiences within the home and school contexts (Koppenhaver, Evans & Yoder, 1991). Therefore, it is important to use the foundation established for literacy learning at home as scaffolding on which to build instruction at school (Faires, Nichols & Rickelman, 2000).

Parents, regardless of economic and literacy level factors, are still their children's first teachers, and the family remains the primary source for learning even after children enter school (Knoetze & Wessels, 2006). Parents need to be involved in the education of their children for it to be effective (South Africa, 2005b: 55). However, parental involvement in their children's formal education may be hindered by language barriers, limited schooling and lack of information as well as external issues such as work schedules. Parents are concerned about their children's academic performance but do not always know how to express concern or how to participate. Cotton and Wiklund (2001) stress the importance of the home environment in academic development of children. Parental involvement from an early age at home and at school ensures better reading and thus general higher academic achievement of children. This involvement includes reading to children, explanatory talk during reading sessions and in general conversations and participation in school activities (South Africa, 2005b: 55; Mikulecky 1996; Pretorius and Machet 2003).

Epstein (1992) states that to accommodate the current needs and realities of families, schools should communicate regularly through the following means: phone calls, progress reports, parent meetings, personal notes from the teacher. Epstein went further and suggested that schools should do the following:

- Help parents increase their knowledge of child development and support them in their parenting skills.

- Encourage many different types of involvement and develop strategies of increasing involvement.
- Communicate regularly with parents in a variety of ways to keep the informed about their children's progress and school activities.
- Accommodate parents' work schedules and time constraints when creating parental involvement opportunities.
- Ensure that school staff is accessible to parents and families.
- Learn about the various ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds of children and to communicate with diverse families; reach out to families.
- Make parents feel welcome in the school by providing opportunities for parents to visit the school, observe classes, and give feedback. Consider building a parent centre for parents to use while at school.



2.6.2 Home support for literacy

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The most commonly recognised way in which parents support their children's literacy development is by reading to them. As parents read books with their children, they introduce conventions governing reading (Snow & Ninio, 1986), specialised ways language is used in books (Pappas & Brown, 1987; Purcell-Gates, 1988), and varied ways books organise and present information. Book reading also provides a context within which children have opportunities to acquire new vocabulary (Beals, DeTemple, & Dickson, 1994; Senechal & Cornell, 1993; Senechal, LeFevre, Hudson, & Lawson, 1996; Beals & Tabors, 1995). Other indicators of home literacy activity have been found to predict a child's later development. Senechal and colleagues (1996) found that home literacy environment (e.g., number of books in the home, library visits, parents' print exposure) related to children's vocabulary growth. Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1991) also found that the preschool home literacy environment, a measure that included library use and number of books in the home, correlated with high school literacy levels.

2.7 Barriers to parental involvement in literacy development.

Parent's involvement in their children's school activities is influenced by a number of factors. Common factors have been identified were lack of education, lack of understanding, low self esteem and lack of materials (Baker, 2003).

2.7.1 Parent's level of education

Kohl, Lengua & McMahon (2000) found the more educated the parent, the greater their involvement in their child's education. They found that having a more limited educational experience meant that some parents lacked the relevant skills to get involved. Parents' educational level also has an influence on the amount and quality of literacy activities taking place in the home (Baker, 2003).

Beginning readers often start school with very little book experience. Early, positive developmental behaviour is important because behaviour that is dysfunctional often continues to be throughout a child's year in school (Finn, 1998). As a result, it is important to look at the influence of the parents' educational level in relation to the amount of reading they are doing at home (Baker, 2003). Lynch et al. (2006) found that parents' beliefs about literacy are related to their educational level. As a result, their beliefs affect the amount of interaction they believe is appropriate in the home. For example, a mother and father of three children with only a high school degree may believe that the literacy activities their children do in school are enough because they believe that learning should be done in school, not at home (Lynch et al., 2006). On the other hand, they argue that a family of four where the parents both have a college degree understand the importance of literacy and reinforcing and practising concepts at home. The quality of the interactions parents have with their children influences children's literacy development and motivation for reading (Baker; Meckler, Sonneschein, & Serpell, 2001). In addition, parents may not have the skills needed to support their child while reading.

2.7.2 Lack of materials

The amount and variety of reading materials in the home is an important aspect of promoting and using literacy outside of school (Edwards, 1992). Edwards argues that many children come from homes where few books are available for their use. She says that if books are available, they are often not interesting to children or are not written at the appropriate level. For example, homes may have mainly adult books that are gender specific, which are not interesting to all children. Children who come from homes with little reading materials often start school with very little book experience (Finn, 1998). In addition, Rasinski and Padak (2004) found that many parental involvement plans fail because homes do not have appropriate reading materials. As a result, they suggest that teachers provide parents with these materials so that they can find success in helping their children read.

However, it is important to note that materials alone are not the main factors in successful home literacy (Brown, 2007). Weinberger (1996), for instance, noted the importance of a variety of experiences with print material. He suggests that going to the library, reading environmental print, and watching educational television can all have a positive impact on reading skills. These reading materials may include newspapers, magazines, books, a dictionary, or computer games which all promote the use of literacy and provides children with multiple options (Finn, 1998). The more literacy is promoted within the home, the more experience children will have when they begin school and the more likely they will be to succeed (Purcell-Gates, 1996).

2.8 The impact of parental literacy

Parental participation in a child's learning process is critical as a parent is the child's first and most influential teacher and role model (South-DeRose, 2009). Teens and adults who have never been given tools or tutoring to help improve their reading skills have never had the opportunity to explore the joy and knowledge that can be found inside the covers of a book (Krolak, 2005). They cannot pass on that wonder or enjoyment of

books and reading to their children. Sometimes, although a child has the advantages of reading programs in the public schools, without parents who have the literacy skills to nurture those skills and perpetuate the positive aspects of reading in the home, some children still fall behind (Stiftung Lesen, 2004:30 as cited by Krolak, 2005:3-4) .

The parent-child interactions that take place in the home are important because research has found a relationship between parent-child literacy activities and children's success in school (Leseman et al., 1998). Parents' beliefs about literacy relate to the amount of reading in the home, motivation, and achievement by their child (Baker, 2003). In addition, literacy activities are often viewed and valued differently in many homes, especially in the homes of minority or disadvantaged families (Linder et al. 2002). As a result, they are unable to assist their children because they are unsure of what to do themselves. Furthermore, parents often believe they lack the skills needed to help their children with reading and schoolwork (Edwards, 1995; Rasinski & Padak, 2004). Consequently, these parents may make mistakes or simply choose not to participate in literacy activities with their child out of frustration (Finn, 1998). Parents in the situation may have negative perception of the literacy events that take place in the home environment.

2.9 Strategies for parental involvement

Success in school depends on a triangle of interaction between the following components: teacher, parents and child (Ekwall & Shanker, 2000). Evidence shows that parents' involvement with their children's reading and learning is more important in helping children fulfil their potential than most other factors (Ekwall & Shanker 2000). Even in cases where a parent cannot read at all, the child who reads to the parents at home improves his or her own reading skills (Nelsen et al., 1998; Gunning 1998). Parental involvement leads to parent awareness and the informed parent better understands the child and how the child perceives his or her world as well as the child's inner resources or potential to cope or deficiencies in coping with his or her world.

Prinslo (2005) emphasizes that the parents and the norms they embody have a greater influence than intentional education as it also facilitates behaviour patterns: “Parental involvement in education can be explained in terms of intentional and functional education roles. An intentional education role is the purposeful intervention of parents with a view to agree with, prevent or correct specific behaviour of their children. Functional education results from the presence of the educator” (Landsberg 2005:459).

Parents should view themselves as being in partnership with the school which is then a formalised extension of the family. The partnership has been emphasised by legislation such as the South African Schools Act (Act 90 of 1996). Some of the benefits of parental involvement for children are a significantly increased cognitive development, an improvement in the child’s motivation towards learning, a stronger parent-child relationship and, of course, increased academic achievement (Kreider, 2000 cited in Hayes, 2004). Therefore, the role of parental involvement is to get parents to have a more active role in their children’s education (Browne, 2004), and this can be done via many different approaches.

There are two kinds of parental involvement strategies. The first is school-based and includes running the library or book club/shop; help with school drama productions and listening to readers (Browne, 2001). Another kind of involvement is home-based and focuses on activities that parents can do with their children at home (Kenway, 1998). However, it has been observed that few teachers involve parents through home-based activities, partly because of the amount of time involved in developing activities and partly because of time constraints on parents. Furthermore, some parents are not optimistic in getting involved with their children’s learning, because the school knows best’ (Whalley, 2001). This is often because practitioners see parents as unqualified and unable educators (Edward and Warrin, 1999). However, as stated previously, parents have the most influence over children enabling them to learn more effectively.

Parents’ expectations of their children’s abilities influence their support of their children and provision of positive home reading environments (Baker, 2003). Children do better

at school when their parents have high expectations of them (Anderson, 2000). If parents perceive that their children are interested in learning to read and trying to read, they are more likely to have awareness that their children will be fluent and competent readers. On the contrary, for many parents the obstacle to becoming involved is lack of time (Kenway, 1998). Working parents are often unable to attend school events during the day. In addition, evenings are the only time these parents have to spend with their children, and they may choose to spend time with their family rather than attend meetings at school.

Children need their parents' assistance to be able to understand the relationship between the printed word and oral language, because not all children grasp the link between print and words immediately (Ferreiro, 1996). Parents should realise that they stimulate their children's adult intelligence and lay the foundation for formal reading instruction during story-book reading with their children (Anderson, 2000). It is therefore important that the critical role that parents play in providing a natural reading environment for their children should not be underestimated.

Studies by Hughes, Schumm & Vaughn (1999) and Ferreiro (1996) state that parents who are aware of their role of encouraging their children to read and write, display this by structuring activities to allow their children to be actively involved in reading and writing. They further state that parents for whom reading is a part of their everyday life make an effort to stimulate their children's reading development. DeBaryshe (1995) also agrees with the above mentioned statement, that these parents ensure that they have enough books, magazines or other printed materials at home to read their children or to motivate them to page through on their own or read independently.

According to Baker & Scher (2002), parents who view reading as a source of entertainment, are more likely to have children who also enjoy reading and becoming skilled readers. Research done by Aulls & Sollars (2003) state that in homes where reading materials are freely available, parents read aloud to their children at least five or more times per week. In contrast, in homes where reading materials are not as freely

available, the majority of the parents tend to read to their children only once or twice per week. Anderson (2000) also points out that parent expectation of their children's abilities influence their support of their children and the provision of the positive home reading environments.

The model of the parental involvement process under consideration here suggests that parents' involvement decisions and choices are based on several constructs drawn from their own ideas and experiences as well as on other constructs growing out of the environmental demands and opportunities (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). At the first level, the model suggests that most parents' fundamental decision to become involved in children's education is a function primarily of three constructs: (a) the parents' construction of his or her role in the child's life, (b) the parents sense of efficacy for helping her or his child to succeed in school, and (c) the general invitations, demands and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the child's school.



Kopasci and Koopmans (1992) analyzed parent's involvement following the five major types of parental involvement practices identified by Epstein and Becker (1987). The types of practices include home conditions for learning, school-to-home communication, parent involvement at school, and parental involvement in learning activities. Homework, governance and decision-making are roles for parents. Research reveals that parents can make a significant contribution to the development of their children's literacy by providing a stimulating environment around language, reading and writing as well as supporting at home the schools literacy agenda, both during the early years as well as the primary and the secondary years of schooling (Hornby, 2000 and Driessen, 2004).

2.10 Types of parental involvement

Although there are many classifications of parental involvement types, Epstein classifications appears to be the most influential in parental involvement literature, and

therefore it is worthwhile to explore her classification in more details. According to Epstein (1991:81) and her colleagues from Johns Hopkins University, six types of involvement exist.

2.10.1 Parenting

This category includes the basic responsibilities of families such as providing housing, health care, nutrition, clothing, safety, and creating home conditions which support children's learning, for example, purchasing the necessary books and being responsive to their children, communication with them and supporting their development.

2.10.2 Communication

This type of involvement concerns the basic responsibilities of schools, including establishing two-way communication between the family and school. These kinds of involvement assume that schools keep parents informed about school matters by sending those newsletters or progress reports, visiting parents and employing other means to communication.

2.10.3 Volunteering

Brent (2003:33) points out that the term "volunteer" usually refers to persons who devote their spare time to work on routine basis without monetary compensation, usually in support of educational activities and school operations. He clarifies, however, that parental engagement in Parent Teacher Association, Parent Teacher Organization or other types of decision-making body involving parents, teacher and perhaps learners and other community members, are not voluntary, but a must for children to develop in learning.

2.10.4 Learning at home

This type of involvement suggests that parents be involved in curriculum-related activities occurring at home, for example, assisting with homework, discussing books with their children and brainstorming ideas for school projects.

2.10.5 Decision making

Parents who are involved at this level advocate for children's interests. These parents often participate in the parent-teacher associations, advisory councils and committees.

2.10.6 Collaborating with the community

This type of involvement relies on the understanding that helping these organizations contributes to schools, students, and families (Epstein *et al.*, 1995:4, 1997; 111).

2.11 Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's provides a useful theoretical framework that helps us better understand the social construction of literacy. The home background and environments of well-resourced families and the studies on early literacy development have directed my focus towards theories that are socio-cultural in nature. This perspective was selected because it acknowledges that social interaction profoundly influences cognitive development and that biological and cultural development does not occur in isolation (Aronstam, 2005:16). Vygotsky's Social Development Theory has been identified as having relevance to this study as he "focused on connections between people and the cultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences" (Crawford, 1996:43).

Rutgers (2004:14) states that "literacy is a complex social practise which is learnt through dialogue and apprenticeship in specific communities". She says that besides

the process of coding and decoding, the broad overview of how people make meaning of their daily literacy experiences in their different cultural contexts needs also to be highlighted. Gee (1990) has stated that literacy is not always acquired by direct instruction, but that children learn through guided and unguided participation with people who have already mastered the process. This social cognition learning model asserts that culture is the prime determinant of individual developments. Thus a child's learning development is influenced by the culture of the family environment in which he or she is enclosed.

Biddle (1979) defines role theory as concerned with the study of behaviours that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain or are affected by those behaviours. The role theory has been applied to help professions including counselling, social work, education and healthcare to cope with demands of individuals (Rheiner, 1982; Hardy & Conway 1988; and Payne, 1988).

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The Social – Constructive theory of Vygotsky emphasizes the influence of the family and the nature of story – book reading on the child's literacy acquisition (Cook – Cottone, 2004; Dodici & Peterson, 2003; Purcell - Gates, 1996; Rashid *et al.*, 2005). For constructivists, the child, other individuals (parents), social systems (family) and culture, play a role in the content, processing and organization of new knowledge (Cook – Cottone, 2004). The child's brain processes new experiences based on past experiences (Cook – Cottone, 2004). Sulzby, (1986) describes the role of parents as mediators between the child and written language, as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development. Parents provide structure, order and the necessary scaffolding to ensure access to new knowledge for the child (Cook – Cottone, 2004).

Within the Piagetian tradition, the physical environment is also relevant to the development of reading and writing (Sulzby, 2005). Parents of fluent and competent readers use a specific procedure, which includes scaffolding, to assist children to comprehend stories, for example, by reaching them how to make predictions in a story (Saracho, 2002). These parents read the same story – book multiple times, talk less

and assist the child to be more active in reading or telling the story (Saracho, 2002). In contrary to this idea Saracho, (2002) found that parents of poor readers apply uncreative procedures such as decoding and concealing the pictures to keep the child from guessing the word. Baker *et al.*, (2001) agree that the struggling reader may find this experience very unpleasant.

Theoretical work on roles which include expectations held by groups for the behaviour of members, individual's beliefs and expectations regarding their own behaviour as a group member, and behaviours that come to characterize various members' participation in the group. Roles include beliefs and expectations about one's own and other group members' responsibilities, rights and obligations. They also include social expectations and scripts that guide group members' behaviour in various situations (Hoover-Dempsey *et. al*, 2004). These authors also suggest that ideas about the roles they should assume in their children's literacy development. Also suggest that parental role beliefs and behaviours are influenced by personal ideas and those of important others about the goals of children's education. They are also influenced by personal observations of, and interactions of others who also hold responsibilities related to children's educational outcomes.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory stresses the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition as well as the central role that community plays in the process of meaning making. Riddle (1999:1) states that, Vygotsky's belief was that "humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environment". Initially, children develop these tools to be used for social purposes and ways to communicate their needs.

Hoover-Dempsey, (2004) further explains that roles are also characterised by their focus on goals held by the group and its individual members. These goals include socialisation of the child, instilling of appropriate behaviour, learning specific subject matter, development of children's unique talents and interests. They further argue that

roles are characterised by goals which include socialisation of children and they know these roles and play them effectively and efficiently.

2.12 Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the literacy development of children in the Foundation Phase. In the process the concepts of literacy development, parental involvement were defined. Challenges that parents faced in trying to assist their children in the literacy development were explored. The chapter also addressed the importance of parental involvement in education. The chapter also looked at strategies that could be employed to assist challenged parents in helping their children with reading and homework. The following chapter will give a description of the methodology and methods of data collection used in the investigation for this study.



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3 CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the reader with an overview of the research methodology and techniques chosen for this study. This chapter discusses the type of paradigm, research methodology and methods used in the study. The Qualitative research method will be used in this study to gather record and analyse data. The researcher will end the chapter by providing a description of the ways in which the analysis process was undertaken, the ethical considerations as well the limitations of the study.

3.2 Research approach – Qualitative approach

I used a qualitative case study method for this research. This method is regarded as the most suitable approach because it allows the researcher to observe participants in their natural setting (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993:374). Janse van Rensburg (2001:16) states that this method reflects an interest in contextual meaning making rather than generalized rules. Instead of surveying large groups, this method takes close look at individuals or small groups in “naturalistic” setting. According to Maykut & Moehouse (1994:45), a natural setting is a place where the researcher is most likely to discover, or uncover, what is to be known about the phenomenon of interest. In a natural setting, human behaviours can be truly reflected on and their meanings interpreted. Qualitative research requires methods that “probe deeply and analyse intensively” (Cohen & Manion, 1994:106). I adopted a qualitative case study approach because it provides more information and a more intensive detailed examination of the phenomenon.

Qualitative research as broadly defined by Hoepfl (1997:17) means “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or

other means of qualification". Bryman (1998, as cited in Silverman, 1997:64) agrees by stating that "the most fundamental characteristic of qualitative research is its express commitment to viewing events, actions, norms, values, etc., from the perspective of the other people who are being studied" as opposed to producing results that emanate from figures. Ravele (1997) states that, "data is usually collected, through sustained contact with people, in the settings where they normally spend time". This, allows the researcher to enter the world of the people s/he is studying and to listen, hear and observe the participants.

Qualitative research is an umbrella term used to describe forms of enquiry which will assist us to understand and interpret the meanings of social phenomena, such as language, within a social setting, such as a classroom (Merriam, 2001:5). The terms qualitative research and interpretive research are often used interchangeably and are based on the same philosophical assumption that reality is ever changing and constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds (Leedy, 2001). The qualitative research and interpretive paradigm advocate that the world be studied in its natural state, rather than in controlled laboratory-type experiments, and with minimum intervention by a researcher.

Qualitative research tends to focus on meaning and motivation that underlie cultural symbols e.g. (language), personal experiences and phenomena and on detailed understanding of processes in the social world (Ravele, 1997). The goal of qualitative research is to understand processes, experiences and meanings people assign to things. Emphasis on qualitative research is individuals' own interpretations, of their observations of conversations and other forms of social interaction, the use of symbols and increasingly images (Cohen and Manion, 1994:38).

Qualitative research involves the use of a collection of empirical materials that include case studies, personal experiences, life stories, interviews, observational methods, historical methods, interaction methods and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings of individual lives (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Crowl

1993; Denscombe, 2003). This is so because qualitative research is concerned with meanings and the way people understand things, a concern with patterns of behaviour characteristically, qualitative studies attempt to describe events or discern pattern of behaviour exhibited by an individual or group (Morehouse, 1994:45).

Qualitative methodologies can be used to comprehend more effectively any phenomenon about which little is yet known (Cohen & Manion, 1994). They can also be used to gain new perspectives on matters about which much is already known, or to acquire more in-depth information that may be difficult to disclose quantitatively. Maja (as cited in Ravele 1997:63) suggests that researchers who use qualitative approaches are “interested in the quality of a particular activity, situation and relationship. Emphasis is on a rich and holistic descriptions rather than numbers”. The use of qualitative research helped in investigating parent’s perceptions on their involvement in their children’s literacy development in the Foundation Phase.

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The researcher is a better position to probe respondents with questions to clarify views and opinions given during the interviews. The particular methods of qualitative research vary, depending on the disciplines within the research occurs. Nevertheless, all qualitative studies share the common goal of presenting findings in the form of written, verbal descriptions rather than in terms of statistical analysis which is the characteristic of quantitative studies (Crowl, 1993).

Key (1997) identifies the following advantages and disadvantages of qualitative research which are discussed in the following section.

(a) Advantages

- Produces more in-depth, comprehensive information. The study attempted to use a case study method to investigate the in depth on the parent’s views on their involvement in their children’s literacy development.

- Uses subjective information and participant observation to describe the context or natural setting, of the variables under consideration as well as the interaction of the different variables in the context. The researcher's method of gathering data was used on parents, where parents were free to talk about their views on parental involvement in their children's literacy development.

(b) Disadvantages

One of the major disadvantages of qualitative research is that the very subjectivity of the inquiry leads to difficulties in establishing the reliability and validity of the approaches and information. The researcher by all means tried to avoid situation where leading suggestions for respondents were given. Qualitative research is criticised for being contemplated at early or exploratory stages of a study (Silverman, 2000). The researcher used the observation and documentary analysis as means of trying to estimate the extent of the problem in the school governance situation.

In order to ensure validity the researcher remained non-judgemental throughout the study process and reported what was found in a balanced way. McMillan & Schumacher (2001) state that, qualitative method follows no strict rules. This means that, researchers are cautioned not to allow mindlessly inventive. Qualitative research should be done artfully, but it also demands a great amount of methodological knowledge and intellectual competence.

3.3 Research paradigm: Interpretive paradigm

This study employed an interpretive paradigm. According to Patton (1990:479) "a paradigm is a world view, a general perspective, and a way of breaking down the complexity of the research was located within the interpretive paradigm, as the researcher was interested in understanding the views, perceptions and experiences of parents on their involvement in children's literacy. Interpretive paradigm deals with human behaviour based on the participants that construct and understand it (Gray, 2004). Litoselliti (2003) concurs with Gray (2004) that the methods of the natural

sciences are not governed by law-like regularities but mediated through meaning of human agency. The researcher believes that interpretive paradigm was more appropriate and effective in this study because it seeks actual reality and experiences of individuals on a specific situation. Carson et al (2001) state that, interpretive approach allows the focus of the researcher to understand what is happening in a given context. As the above discussions suggests, the researcher gained an in depth understanding of the factors that influence parental involvement in the development of their children's literacy at foundation phase level.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:23) believe that interpretive researches begin with individuals attempt to understand their interpretations of the world around them. They work directly with experience and understanding, and theory emerges from particular situations and must be 'grounded' in the data generated by the research process. The knowledge gained from this understanding is 'inductive' in that it is hypothesis- or theory generating (Merriam 2001: 4). This means that rather than testing existing theory, it builds concept, hypothesis or theories, and is often undertaken either because there is a lack of theory, or because existing theory is not adequate in explaining a certain phenomenon (Merriam 2001:7).

Bassey (1999:40) sees interpretive research as a category of empirical research. He describes the latter as being research which focuses on data collection. This research falls under the interpretive paradigm which advocates that the world should be studied in its natural state, rather than in controlled laboratory-type experiments and with minimum intervention by a researcher (Cohen et al, 2000). This according to Cohen et al. (2000), accorded a situation that was not controlled by the researcher. For instance, an interpretive paradigm gives the interviewees freedom to express their views on the question without the intervention of the researcher (ibid). Neuman (2006) also shares the same view that an interpretive paradigm wants to learn what is meaningful or relevant to the people being studied and how individuals experience daily life.

3.4 Research design: Case study

Gorman, Hammersley and Foster (2000:3) define the case study as referring to research that investigates a few cases, often just one, in considerable depth. The value of a case study lies in the potential richness of the data, and the extent to which the researcher can convey a sense of how the case functions. This unit may be a school or even a setting within it, or a teacher or a parent.

The case study approach has been chosen because it provides a unique example of real people and events in real situations, which might enable the reader to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories and principles (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, and 2000:181). A case study strives to portray 'what is like' to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and 'thick description' of participants' lived experiences of a situation of their thought about and feeling for a situation (Cohen et al., 2000). In order to reinforce this notion, I allowed the parents to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated by me.

The underlying emphasis is the description of the study of a particular case, a single unit or a "bounded system" (Smith 1978 as cited in Merriam 2001: 19 and Stake 1995: 2). This allows us to see the case as a single thing, an entity, and a unit around which there are boundaries. Miles and Huberman (1994, in Merriam 2001: 27) describe it as a "phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context," and graphically illustrate it as a circle with a heart at the centre. The heart is the focus of the study, while the circle delineates the case. With the present research in mind, the parents are the case, and the heart is literacy.

State (1995: xi) describes a case study as "the study of the particularly and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances." He adds that it is an "integrated system" (1995:2) with a boundary and working parts. Merriam (2001:27) describes a qualitative case study as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit." Mac Donald

and Walker (1977:181, cited in Merriam 2001:29) describe it as “the examination of an instance in action.”

Stenhouse (1985, cited in Bassey 1999:27) identified two broad styles of a case study, of which his description of *educational case study* seems most pertinent”. *Educational case study* [is where] many researchers using case study methods are concerned neither with social theory nor with evaluative judgement, but rather with the understanding of educational action. They are concerned to enrich the thinking and discourse of educators either by the development of educational theory or by refinement of prudence through the systematic and reflective documentation of evidence.” (Stenhouse 1985: 50 quoted in Bassey 1999: 28)

Yin (1993) categorized three forms of case studies, of which his definition of *descriptive case study* is applicable to the present research. “A *descriptive case study* presents a complete description of a phenomenon within its context.” (Yin, 1993:5). Gummesson, (2000) believes that a case study is an in-depth investigation into a specific and relatively small area of interest. Mwingi (2000) concurs with Gummesson that a case study is a method that allows the individuality of each case to come out as a persuasive voice.

In line with the above argument, Cohen et al. (2007) states that a case study is an approach that uses in-depth investigation of one or more examples of a current social phenomenon. As a result of their robustness, case studies combine data collection methods such as archives, interviews, questionnaires and observation (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Cohen et al., (2007) states that, a case can be an individual person, an event, or social activity, a group or institution. Literature reviewed in chapter two revealed that parental involvement in the primary education of children had been undertaken by various researchers. The case study design in this study therefore, will give an in-depth detail on parents' perceptions of their view on their involvement in their children's literacy development at foundation level.

The following quotation from Merriam aptly sums up the value of case study, and in particular the method used for the present research project:

“The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in are rich and holistic accounts of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meaning that expand its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base.” (2001:41).

In line with the protocols of a case study design, this study used a combination of methods as follows:

- (a) Interviews
- (b) Document analysis
- (c) Observations



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3.5 Research methods

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994:19), the term research instrument refers to any plan of action that helps the researcher in gathering the relevant data. In the spirit of qualitative research, this study made use of multiple data collection methods as follows:

3.5.1 Interviews

Cohen and Marion (as cited in Robson, 1993:229) explain that “an interview is the one initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining relevant research information and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation”. Robson (1993:228) adds that “an interview is the best tool to use in conducting a research of a small-scale inquiry. The interview is the flexible and adaptable way of finding things out. It is a kind of

conversation with a purpose". The researcher used a set range of questions in the field setting to collect additional data and then recorded these interviews.

Interviews were guided conversations rather than structured queries: meaning although one would pursue a consistent line of inquiry; the researcher's actual stream of questions in a case study interview could easily be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

This research was more interested in the depth of the data rather than breadth and required the researcher to play an active role in the data collection (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997:84). "Qualitative research is a useful mass media tool only when its limitations are recognised" (Wimmer and Dominick 1997:85). The researcher carried out the interviews using a tape recorder and playing it back to the respondent to make sure correct information was captured. Frey and Oishi, (1995:01) define it as "a purposeful conversation in which one person asks prepared questions (interviewer) and another answers them (respondent)". This is done to gain information on a particular topic or a particular area to be researched. Interviews are a useful tool which can lead to further research using other methodologies such as observation and experiments (Jensen and Jankowski, 1991:101). Interviews can have one of two basic structures. They can be either structured (closed interview style) or unstructured (open interview style).

Open-ended or unstructured interviews are defined by Nichols (1991:131) as "an informal interview, not structured by a standard list of questions. Fieldworkers are free to deal with the topics of interest in any order to phrase their questions as they think best." This type of structure uses a broad range of questions asking them in any order according to how the interview develops (Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Schwa 1995:231). Open-ended questions allow the interviewer, if they wish, to probe deeper into the initial responses of the respondent to gain more detailed answer to the question (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997:156). The richness of the data is therefore entirely dependent on the interviewer. The participants themselves, must judge how much or little they should probe or say themselves.

There are, of course, both advantages and disadvantages to this type of structure. It is particularly useful as a pilot study. To test out what people responses would be to a particular issue. It may throw a completely different light on an issue that the interviewer had previous never considered (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997:139). Freedom for the respondent to answer how they wish to is important in giving them a feeling of control in the interview situation. This version also has its advantages, namely in terms of the amount of time needed to collect and analyse the responses (Wimmer and Dominick, 1997:139).

An interview is an interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest for production of knowledge (Cohen et al., 2000). Research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information and focused by the researcher on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation (Ibid)

Interviews can be structured, unstructured and semi-structured. Structured interviews can be defined as a professional discussion between two people or a group of persons (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1993). The advantages of this method are that the interactions and behaviour of the interviewee can be observed and results can be noted. It can also be used to lessen tension between the individual and the researcher and even motivate the subject to participate in the research.

➤ **Semi structured interviews**

The researcher administered in-depth, semi-structured interviews to the parents in their home language. The atmosphere enabled the researcher to clarify points and raise fresh questions so as to gain a deeper meaning phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews do not offer a limited, pre-set range of answers for a respondent to choose, but rather listen to how each individual responds to the question (Cohen et al, 2000).

The great advantage of semi-structured interview is 'its flexibility' as Markson and Gognalons-Callard (cited in Stones, 1998:152) point out. In this type of interview the ordering of questions was less important and the interviewer was free to probe any interesting areas that arise. The duration of all interviews was one hour. The participants were interviewed individually. I used a tape recorder to record responses in order to supplement the interviews and also obviate the necessity of writing during the interview. It was less time consuming. The reason I used tape recording was that it was useful to check the wording of any statement I might wish to quote and to check that my notes are accurate. Another thing in tape recording everything said is preserved for analysis. I transcribed and translated the interviews. Probing questions were asked to allow the interviewees to express their feelings and to give the participants more time to think. I gained information on how parents helped their children in literacy development and the challenges they faced in trying to help their children.

The advantages of semi-structured interviews as identified by Bless and Higson Smith (1995) are that:

- They help to clarify concepts and problem and they allow for the establishment of a list of possible answers or solutions which, in turn, facilitates the construction of multiple-choice questions, the elimination of superfluous questions and reformulation of indefinite
- They allow also for the discovery of new aspects of the problem by investigating in detail some explanations given by respondents. The researcher used semi-structured interviews to allow respondents to tell their stories as much as possible.

For Cantrell (1993), interviews allow for the collection of data in the subjects' own words, thereby affording the researcher an opportunity to discover the subjects' perceptions, interpretations and the meaning that they give to their actions. Interviews are very effective data collection tools, according to Ochurub, "because the interviewer could clarify the questions which are vague, or respondents could be asked to elaborate

some issues” (Ochurub, 2001:149). For Walker “interviews could be seen as the most rewarding and potentially the most informative way of carrying out a small-scale study to collect data” (Walker, as cited in Ochurub, 2001:149).

I interviewed eight parents and four educators, the selected parents were from the same community. The reason for interviewing four educators was to get different views on the issues rather than relying on viewpoints from the parents.

3.5.2 Document Analysis


Document analysis falls in the context of the collection techniques. As is the case study for all collection techniques the choice depends on suitable technology on the respective situation and various other conditions. With the document analysis, written sources of information are consulted for the procurement of information. Leeds (2001) describes document analysis as a detailed and systematic examination of documents on a particular organization for a purpose of identifying patterns or themes. The primary documents analysed by the researcher included the parent minute book from 2008 up to 2010 and policies formulated during the said period regarding parental involvement in the school. The parent minute book is the document where parents are present in a meeting, whilst the policies analysed included parental involvement policy. The main aim of collecting these documents was to find out whether the school had put in place any policies regarding parental involvement at the school. The minute book which entailed communication during meeting, as well as agendas of meetings was looked at. This helped the researcher to see whether literacy issues were up for discussion in the meetings.

Analysis of documents was undertaken on available documents that were given to the researcher. These entailed attendance register for the meetings of School Governing Body and parents and minute book for meetings between parents and educators.

3.5.3 Observations

Observation is a systemic method of data collection that relies on a researcher's ability to gather data through watching the behaviour of a person or a group of people or an event in a certain place for a specified length of time (O'Leary, 2004; Gomm, 2008). The researcher developed an observation guide that guided him during the observation stage of data collection. For the non-participatory observation, the researcher did not participate but remained an outside observer (Bless & Smith, 2000; Mouton 2005). The researcher interviewed parents in their homes. In this study the parents interviewed are coded as parent 1 to 4. Educators' meeting are coded as educator 1 to 6

3.6 Sampling



Schumacher and Macmillan (1993:598) define the word "sample" as comprising a number of individuals selected from a population for study. Sampling is about deciding the place or site and the respondent or person from who the data will be collected (Punch, 2006). The process of selecting a particular sample for particular entities in a study is called sampling (Ormrod & Leedy, 2005). Flick (2002) noted that the issue of sampling is about making a decision on which persons to focus on when a researcher makes an inquiry. In an interview study, for instance, the researcher should decide which persons to interview. Fraenkel and Wallen (1996:111) similarly define sampling as a process of selecting individuals who will participate in a research study. Sampling is done whenever one gathers information from only a fraction of the population of a group or a phenomenon under study (Walliman, 2006). Ideally, one should try to select a sample which is free from bias. This is necessary as the type of sample selected greatly affects the reliability of the subsequent generalizations.

The study used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the process of selecting individuals who can offer an authentic account of the research topic and might be considered to share sufficient common experiences with others as to represent a group (Yin, 1994). In purposive sampling, information-rich cases are those from which one can

learn great about issues of central importance to the purpose of the study (Cohen et al., 2007). In purposive sampling which is often a feature of qualitative research, the researcher handpicks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought. In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs. As the name suggests, the sample has been chosen for a specific purpose. In selecting the site and participants the study applied purposive sampling because these were seen as instances that were likely to produce valuable data.

In the study purposeful and convenience sampling were used. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:169) define convenience sampling as a group of subjects selected on the basis of being accessible, appropriate or convenient. The researcher looked at what she or he wanted to know, what was useful, what was credible, and what could be done within the constraints of time and resources (Patton, 1990:184). In this study, purposive sampling was used to select the research site and the respondents as follows:

3.6.1 Sampling the research sites

I conducted my research at Yanda Primary School (pseudonym). The problem I had in mind was a clear description of 'rural' since the school I wanted to conduct my research at was about 20 kilometres from the city. It was chosen because of its close location to my home and that it would be convenient in all aspects for my research. I knew the school principal prior to carrying out this research and when I approached her about using her school as a case study she welcomed the idea.

3.6.2 Sampling the respondents

For purposes of this research, I interviewed 8 parents and 4 educators. The use of few participants in the research was purposeful and this carried out was in line Patton (cited in Cantrell, 1993) who states that, interpretive research uses small samples or even

single cases, selected 'purposefully' to allow the researcher to focus in depth on issues important to the study.

3.7 Negotiating entry into the research site

Hoepfl (1997:25) suggests that the "participants are the ones to grant someone access to their lives, their minds, and their emotions, therefore permission has to be sought". In line with the above assertion, permission was sought from three sources and these are; i) Department of Education, ii) the school and iii) parents.

As stated previously, the researcher used a Junior Primary School as a case study. Yanda J.P School (pseudonym) is located in an urban with approximately 19000 people. Disadvantaged students receive free meals since the school is quintile two, meaning that it is the no fee school. The administration at this school allowed me access to educators and parents of the school, as they are participants for the study. The researcher visited the school to seek permission to conduct the study. A letter from the supervisor, Dr Duku containing information about the research topic was handed to the principal (Appendix B).

Educators from each grade that is grade R to grade three gave the researcher the class lists containing parents' information. The researcher chose the first and last parent appearing on the class lists in each grade. After preliminary information was collected, eight parents were selected. I phoned parents requesting an opportunity to interview them. A meeting was arranged with the parents on the 10th of September 2010. The meeting took longer than planned due to the nationwide strike that started on the 18 August 2010 up to 7 September 2010. On arrival at the school the researcher introduced herself. She outlined the purpose of the study and ethical considerations that are to be adhered to during the research study. In the meeting the researcher also explained the aims and objectives of the study as well as the whole process of the study. Appointments for interview dates and times were set by telephone to the parents involved in the research. Interviews took place at different times and places. The information that was collected from parents was used for analysis.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Tuckman (1992:15) states that the issue of ethics is an important factor for educational researchers, since their subject of study concerns the learning of human beings. The nature of such research may disturb or embarrass those who are participating in the research.

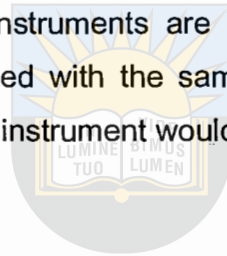
Ethics embody individual and communal codes of conduct based upon adherence to a set of principles which may be explicit or implicit, abstract and impersonal or concrete and personal (Zimbardo (1992, as cited in Cohen and Manion, 1994:362). As Mile Hierberman (cited in Kolagano 2000:65) said, "We cannot focus only on the quality of the knowledge we are producing, as if its truth were all that counts. We must also consider the rightness and wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work".

In the opinion of Ormrod (2005), within certain disciplines namely the social sciences, education, criminology, medicine, and similar areas of study-the use of human subjects in research is, of course, quite common. And whenever human beings are the focus of investigation, we must look closely at the ethical implications of what we are proposing to do. Most ethical issues in research fall into one of four categories: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and honesty with professional colleagues. This section raises concerns related to each of these categories and also describes the internal review boards and professional codes of ethics that provide guidance for researchers. Researchers should not expose research participants to undue physical or physiological harm. As a general rule, the risk involved in participating in a study should not be appreciably greater than the normal risk of day-to-day living. Participants should not risk losing life or limb, nor should they be subjected to unusual stress, embarrassment, or loss of self-esteem. In cases where the nature of the study involves creating a small amount of psychological discomfort, participants should know about

this ahead of time, and any necessary debriefing or counselling should follow immediately after their participation. In order to protect the privacy of the participants, in this study respondents a code system was used to conceal their identity and interviews were carried out in the privacy of their homes.

3.8.1 Reliability

Van den Aardweg (1993:201) defines reliability as a statistical concept that relates to consistency and dependability. According to Descombe (1998:22), the criterion of reliability is whether the research instruments are neutral in their effect and would measure the same results when used with the same people. In this study reliability refers to whether or not a measuring instrument would yield the same results if anybody else used it.



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3.8.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Participants' confidentiality was not compromised, as their names were not be used when collecting data. The researcher made sure that no private or secret information was exposed because the privacy of the respondents is to be considered or respected. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and requested not to give their names when responding to the interviews. McMillan and Schumacher (1997:195) state that information about subjects must be regarded as confidential unless otherwise agreed on the through informed consent. Only the researcher has access to names and data.

3.8.3 Informed consent

In Leedy and Ormond's (2005:217) view, research participants should be told the nature of the study to be conducted and be given the choice of either participating or not participating. Furthermore, they should be told that, if they agree to participate, they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Any participation in a study should be strictly voluntary. A dilemma sometimes arises as to how informed participants

should be. If people are given too much information- for instance, if they are told the specific research hypothesis being tested they may behave differently than they would under more normal circumstances. A reasonable compromise is to give potential participants a general idea of what the study is about (e.g., "This study is investigating parents' views on their involvement in their children's literacy development).

I gave the participants sufficient information about the study in a simple way so that they understood what was involved thereby enabling them to exercise their right to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the study. I gave them an opportunity to ask questions about the study to help them decide if they want to take part. All the parents expressed their willingness to participate and appointments for interviews were made. Most parents 75% arranged after working hours for the interviews, and 25% parents preferred interviews to be during the day after they finished the chores at home. Research protocol was written in their mother tongue to accommodate every parent.



3.9 Data analysis process

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and gathering the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials that the researcher accumulates during data collection in order to increase his or her understanding of the phenomenon and ultimately to be able to present what have been discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998:150). Hence the culminating activities of qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation and representation of the findings (Patton, 1990:371). Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to the mass of collected data which results in the production of patterns, themes, constructs and inferences

In this study, qualitative data consists of field notes and transcripts of interviews. The analysis procedure involves the reading and re-reading of the field notes and interview transcripts (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994:123). Thereafter, significant words, sentences and paragraphs of phrases were underlined and grouped suitable headings. As data emerges, relevant extracts of the text were then grouped under themes, which were

subsequently clustered into categories to provide systematic meaning (Hatch, 2002:148). Extracts from the raw data were selected and either paraphrased or quoted to illustrate the patterns. Findings of the analysis are set out in Chapter Four.

Data for the study was conducted in two phases as follows:

3.9.1 Pilot study

Denzin and Lincon (1994:213) advise that: "Before devoting oneself to the arduous and significant time of the qualitative study, it is a good idea to do a pilot study. "Pilot & Hungler (1983) defines a pilot study as a "trial run of what is intended to be a later larger project". Bless & Higson-smith (2000) in de Vos et al., (2005) argue that a pilot is a small study conducted prior to a larger piece of research to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis are adequate and appropriate.

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De Vos (1998:179) views the pilot study as "the dress rehearsal of the main investigation which is similar to the researcher's planned investigation but on small scale".

Blaxter et al (2001:42) sees piloting as an early initial try out through which you can judge the feasibility of your overall research plans, and then make modification where necessary. They mention that by doing so, one is not committing him/herself but checking and focussing one's ideas. If you do piloting early, it should enable you to alter your strategy (Blaxter et al, 2001:43). Whereas Cohen et al (2006:260) argues that piloting serves to eliminate ambiguities or difficulties in wording, to gain feedback on response categories for closed questions, for appropriateness of specific questions or stems of questions, and to check time taken to complete observations or interviews.

As a qualitative researcher, I was the only instrument for data collection and analysis, therefore, all information obtained was through the researcher's insight. Cohen *et al* as cited in Lincoln and Guba (1985:146) emphasize that "the planning of the conduct of the

interview is important, including the background preparation, the opening of the interviews, its pacing and timing, keeping the conversation going and eliciting knowledge, and rounding off and ending the interview". They make mention that careful consideration be given to the several stages of the interview. For example, at the planning stage of the interview attention will need to be given to the number (per person), duration, timing, frequency, setting/location, number of people in a single interview situation (e.g. individual or group interviews) and respondent styles (Le Comte and Preissle, 1993:177). So it is very important to pilot a study, so as to prepare for the main study, which is, gaining more confidence, rephrasing some questions and eliminating some questions.

I conducted pilot interviews to determine the length of the interview, suitability of questions, ethical issues and practical issues related to the use of tape recorder. The main purpose was to discover which areas would need attention and to make some adjustments if necessary. Pilot interviews involved parent and educator respondents whom I selected purposefully and conveniently in order to meet the needs of the study for accessibility. The reason I chose them is that I hoped that they would provide me with necessary feedback.

3.9.2 Main study

Data for the study was conducted using three data collection techniques as follows:

(a) Semi-structured interviews

During the interview sessions, the researcher read the topic guidance exactly as written. The questioning allowed room for the respondents to give out his or her thoughts and feelings about the topic in question. Where there was brief response, the researcher would ask the respondent to explain more. The researcher was more attentive to the responses from the participants so that he could identify new emerging lines of enquiry that are directly related to the phenomenon being studied. Generally, the respondents

were keen to respond to the interview questions on their personal background, their experiences and challenges in the development of literacy for the children.

The flow of the interview rather than the order in the guide, determined when and how a question was asked. Depending on the responses from the respondents which on many occasions required probing as the interview progressed, a question previously planned for later in the interview was sometimes asked earlier. The researcher noticed that respondents often answered a question before it was asked. This happened during questioning and/or probing. In such situations, the researcher skipped the already answered question. The scheduled time for the interviews varied according to the individual respondents. The variation of time taken depended on how the interviewees were able to express themselves and also probing from the researcher. The interviews with parents were conducted in isiXhosa because the participants felt comfortable in expressing themselves in their mother tongue. For the educators, the interviews were in English and took place after school. For the parents, the interviews took place in their homes in the afternoon and/or after work.

(b) Phase 3: Document analysis

The third instrument dealt with the analysis of documents. The usage of documentary analysis was negotiated by the researcher through the school principal. The primary documents analysed by the researcher included primary school level minute book from 2008 up to 2010 and policies formulated during the said period involvement at the school. The minute book which entailed communication during meetings, as well as agendas of meetings was looked at. The minute book indicated that there were meetings held, however they were called by the SGB to discuss school governance issues. These issues included payment on fund raising, discipline, school uniform and the school maintenance.

(c) Observation

The researcher applied direct observation method. In the opinion of Wagner and Turnery (1998:15) this method entails observing the respondents on his or her place in

the production process. In this study, the researcher employed the non-participatory-observation approach, where the researcher makes her presence and objectives known to the group being studied (Frankfort-Nechmias, 1992:275). Observations focussed on home environment issues, like availability of resources parents claimed to be using to develop literacy of their children. Observations took place during interview time with the parents. During this time I checked if they had reading materials like books, magazines and newspapers lying around or neatly stacked in certain corner. I also checked for electronic media such as televisions, radios and computers. During interviews the researcher noted and recorded what was found in the house that could enhance literacy development. At the end of interviews information was captured together with the interviewees' details



3.10 Data analysis

Data analysis is any approach, qualitative or quantitative, to reduce the complexity of the information and to come to an interpretation of what is real and what is not real (Martin, Bauer & Gaskel, 2000). As advised by Punch (2003), the researcher, after having collected the data, went back to think about the central role of the research questions. The researcher, after having collected the data began to summarize, deduce and create the variables. After having created the variables the researcher showed the distribution of the variables across the samples. In doing so the researcher was able to realise which data was needed.

3.10.1 Analysis of data from the interviews

The researcher, after collecting data by means of interviews, sorted them according to themes. The main task in the data analysis stage was to identify common themes from participant's description of their experiences (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The researcher organised, categorized, indexed and arranged the data in such a manner that she was able to identify the essence of the content (Collins, du Plooy, Grobbelaar, Puttergill, Terre Blanche, van Eeden, van Rensburg & Wigston 2000).

3.10.2 Analysing data from the observation

In analysing the data from the observation the researcher compared and contrasted the data she had gathered from different observations. He sorted them and connected them to the themes that that were identified in the interviews. Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein (2006) argued that sorting data involves making connections among several related sources as in qualitative research. This means that no single piece of data stands alone by itself as evidence.

3.10.3 Analysing data from the documentary analysis

The documents that were used as secondary sources in this research were parent minute book and parental involvement policy. The researcher made notes by summarizing these documents. The summary of these documents helped the researcher to interpret them. In interpreting these documents the researcher was able to identify related themes from different minutes. These themes were connected to the themes that had already been identified in the other research methods. By analysing the documents the researcher was able to get the detailed information related to parents' involvement in their children's education. Leedy & Ormrod (2005) noted that data analysis in the case study involves the organisation of the details about the case, categorization of data, and interpretation of single instances, identification of patterns

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the Methodology of the study. The interpretive paradigm and Case study research design was used in this study. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, observation and documentary analysis. The discussion also focused on the population and sampling procedures, reliability, negotiated entry into research sites, data collection analysis, and ethical considerations. The next chapter focuses on the presentation of data.

4 CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present and discuss data obtained through semi-structured interviews and observations with selected parents and educators. These data were collected in response to the following research questions:

The main research question: What are parents' perceptions on their involvement in their children's literacy development?

Sub questions

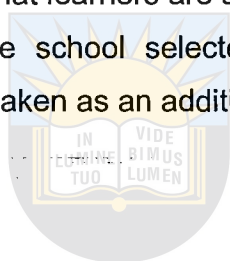
- What do parents perceive as their role in their children's literacy development?
- What are the benefits of parental involvement in their children's literacy development?
- Which activities and resources do parents use to promote literacy of their children at home?

The chapter is structured as follows:

- 4.2 School Profile
- 4.3 Biographical data of the participants and the research site
- 4.4 Presenting the findings
- 4.4. Data discussion
- 4.5 Conclusion

4.2 School profile

This study took place in the township of King William's Town. The school uses isiXhosa as a medium of instruction from Grade R to Grade 3, whilst from Grade 4 English is used as a medium of instruction and isiXhosa as a subject. This is so in recognition of the Language in Education Policy in South Africa which indicates that learners at the Foundation Phase should be taught through an additive approach to bilingualism, meaning that learners' home language (commonly known as mother tongue) should not be removed but rather supported so that learners are able to use and be literate in more than one language. As such in the school selected for research the medium of instruction is isiXhosa and English is taken as an additional language



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Table 4.1: The profile of the selected school

| | | | |
|--|--|----------|----------|
| NAME | PHYSICAL LOCATION (Town, village, settlement)-township | | |
| | Yanda JP School | | |
| HISTORY | 1) Date Established-10 January 1978 | | |
| | 2) Major events-Opening of the school on the 25 th March 2010; by the Minister of Education Mr.M.Qwase. | | |
| SCALE | 1) Number of classrooms-13 | | |
| | 2) Number of teachers-11 | | |
| | 3) Number of support staff-4 | | |
| | 4) Number of learners | | |
| | Grade R | 40 | |
| | One | 60 | |
| | Two | 45 | |
| | Three | 50 | |
| | Four | 40 | |
| | 5) Number of unused Classrooms | | |
| FACILITIES | | Y | N |
| | Library | x | |
| | Laboratory | | x |
| | Staffroom | x | |
| | Office | x | |
| | Feeding Scheme | x | |
| | Photocopier | x | |
| | Fax machine | x | |
| | Computers | x | |
| | Electricity | x | |
| | Piped Water | x | |
| | Sports Facility | | x |
| | TV | x | |
| Comments: The school has adequate infrastructure but lacks sporting facilities. | | | |
| SAFETY | | Y | N |
| | Fence | x | |
| | Guard(s) | | x |
| | Alarm | x | |

| | | | |
|---|-------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Comments: The school is well secured even though there is no security guard | | | |
| | | | |
| Language | | School's Medium of Instruction | |
| | | Foundation Phase | |
| | | Other Phases | |
| Learner's Languages | Home | Xhosa | English |
| | | x | |
| Staff | | | F |
| | | Gender | M |
| | | | x |

Yanda is a Junior Primary School (JP) that caters for learners from grade R to Grade 4. This is a township primary school situated in Zwelitsha in the King William's Town district. The school has been in existence since 1978. The principal reported that this school was established in 1978 and it was the only school in the area. As a result Yanda JP experienced overcrowding of the classes. The community, according to the respondent decided to build Yanda because they wanted to create a long lasting legacy for the community.

The learners of Yanda JP were divided into two with those who attended in the morning and those who eventually belonged to Yanda attending in the afternoon, through the system called platoon. This allowed educators and learners to start school at 12 noon to 5pm although this proved to be very difficult for young children. The school had twelve teachers, ten of whom were fresh out of school and two experienced teachers made things work. Miss Gaushe* and Mrs. Lube* were managers at the time fulfilling the roles of principal and deputy principal respectively. They worked tirelessly to create a well rounded school.

Because of their dedication to education especially that of black disadvantaged child they were promoted to be inspectors. Miss Ngcwele took the reigns and became the principal. Their community was most probably a poor community that lived in abject poverty but was determined to make sure that their children would never live the same way. Miss Ngcwele* managed through hard work, focus and because of her dedication

as a teacher and mother, she managed to get this site and they built Yanda J.P. as it stands today. The school was officially opened by the Minister of Education Mr. M .Qwase on the 25th of March 2010.

(Note * not real names)

4.3 Biological data of the participants

4.3.1 Biographical data of the Parents

In this section the profiles of the parents and educators who participated in the study are presented. Table 4.2 describes biographical data of the parents that participated in this study. As indicated in Chapter three coding was used for the sake of anonymity of the respondents. As can be seen from the table below, educational background of parents varies.

Table 4.2: *Profile of parents*

| Parent | Gender | Age | Educational qualification | Professional career | No. of school going children in the household | Grade |
|----------|--------|-----|---------------------------|---------------------|---|----------|
| Parent 1 | F | 35 | B.Cur | Professional Nurse | 2 | 3 & 4 |
| Parent 2 | F | 31 | Grade 12 | Receptionist | 1 | R |
| Parent 3 | M | 39 | Grade 10 | Security | 2 | 1 & 2 |
| Parent 4 | F | 30 | Grade 12 | Unemployed | 2 | R & 3 |
| Parent 5 | M | 37 | B.Ed | Educator | 1 | 1 |
| Parent 6 | F | 39 | Grade 9 | Housekeeper | 3 | R, 2 & 4 |
| Parent 7 | F | 33 | Grade 10 | Cashier | 2 | R & 2 |
| Parent 8 | F | 40 | Grade 10 | Unemployed | 1 | 3 |

The majority 6 (75%) were females and 2 (25%) were males. The dominance of females in the sample could be attributed to the fact that mothers are generally more involved in their children's education than the fathers. Furthermore, the majority of the children in the Eastern Cape (EC) tend to stay with their mothers (Duku, 2006). Out of this cohort 2 (25%) were single while the majority, 6 (75%) were reportedly married.

The ratio of males versus females confirms Duku's findings (2006) that in the Eastern Cape child minders mostly tend to be females who are single mothers, grandmothers, divorced females and widows. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) also substantiate the view that mothers often experience stronger role expectation than fathers for day to day involvement in children's schooling. This view is also confirmed by Anderson (2000) that females tend to report more positive attitudes towards literacy than males do.

Table 4.2 also indicates that the average age of selected parents is 35 years; this may be indicative of the fact that these were the biological parents; and the assumption is that they are more committed to their children's education.

With regards to their educational background, they vary between cashier, security, receptionist, educator and professional nurse. This indicates that a minority of the respondents had obtained a junior degree while majority of respondents' possess only grade 9, 10 and 12. The educational qualifications of the parents were of interest to the study as it would shed light on the capability of parents in helping their children in literacy development. Data reveal that 12.5% of the parents left school at Grade 9, whilst 37.5% left at Grade 10 and 25% at Grade 12 meaning that these parents left school before completing matric. The minority (12.5%) of parent respondents have matric and Bachelor of Education degree and Bachelor of Nursing degree.

The majority of parent respondents (75%) have secondary education and 25% have tertiary education meaning these parents can do more in helping their children to develop literacy. All the interviewed parents were staying full time with their children, though 75% were employed and work related problems might crop out due to the time they come from work, the 25% parents are unemployed thus they might be involved in their children's literacy development.

4.3.1 Biographical data of the educators

The Educators' interviews consisted of four participants: all females. The educators were interviewed despite the fact that the focus of the study was parents. I saw it necessary to include them so as to triangulate the data. The educators ranged from 41 to 52 years of age and had more teaching experience than of males (in terms of years of service).

Table 4.3: Profiles of Educators

| Educator | Gender | Age | Grade | Academic Qualification | Teaching experience | Current Studies |
|------------|--------|-----|-------|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Educator 1 | F | 42 | R | Early Childhood Diploma | 15 years | |
| Educator 2 | F | 53 | 3 | B.Ed Honours | 30 years | |
| Educator 3 | F | 45 | 2 | JPTD and FDE | 20 years | B.Ed |
| Educator 4 | F | 41 | 1 | B.Ed | 18 years | B.Ed Honours |

Table 4.3 shows that four educators participated in the study. Indicated are the qualifications of educators which give an indication that the school is staffed with qualified educators. Also of service by the educators illustrates that the educators are experienced in the current positions. This may also suggest that most respondents have a thorough knowledge of teaching in primary school. Furthermore 50% of educators are still furthering their studies. The researcher established the teaching experience of the respondents as it could have a bearing in the way literacy is developed in schools.

4.4 Presenting data

As indicated in Chapter three, this study made use of semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis to collect data. The next section will present findings collected through interviews. The aim of these interviews was to distinguish parents who were able to develop literacy for their children.

4.4.1 Resources available at homes to promote literacy development

The parents reported that they were involved in assisting their children's literacy development using different resources. They reportedly were using resources available to them such as newspapers, magazines, Bible, computer, storybooks, radio and television. From the interviews respondents reportedly defined literacy development as promoting reading, writing and disciplining the children. Parents identified the resources they use to develop literacy for their children at home. The importance of this kind of involvement these parents provide is as confirmed by Melhuish et al. (1999) who state that parents and caregivers should be aware of the contributions they could make to their children's learning by providing a stimulating environment at home. **Parents 1, 2, 5 and 7** reported using old books, magazines and newspapers, the resources they reportedly could afford. Availability of resources at home reinforces the view of Aull & Sollars (2003) that the quality of home environment could influence print awareness and book and code knowledge.

Table 4.4: Resources used by parents

| Resources | Parents | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Newspapers and magazines | ✓ | X | ✓ | X | ✓ | x | ✓ | x |
| School books | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Bible & hymn book | ✓ | X | ✓ | X | ✓ | x | x | x |
| Computer | ✓ | X | x | X | ✓ | x | x | x |
| Television | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Radio | ✓ | X | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | x |
| Story books | ✓ | ✓ | x | x | ✓ | x | x | ✓ |

Table 4.4 above offers a summary of the resources that parents reported to possess at home, and which parents reported to be using at home as well as literacy activities that parents might be involved in. These resources help to promote literacy development. It emerged from this study that resources are of importance, as they are referral points

when dealing with homework. Resources provide needed information hence lack of resources can affect literacy development of children.

Data from Table 4.2 also indicates that the academic and possibly social background of the parents influences the value parents place on books and other printed matter. With regard to the large cohort sample, the data in the section suggests that many of the families have access to a variety of resources in the home environment. As a result they claim to be aware of importance having books in their homes for children. 75% of the parent respondents indicated that when choosing books they take note of children's interests, age, language and cultural relevance. They also raised a concern that they experience problems in obtaining resources for literacy development in the home language of the children.

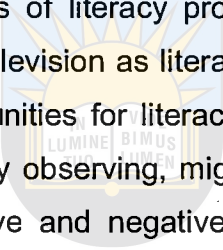
Learning aids are instructional materials and devices through which teaching and learning are done in school. Examples of these learning aids include visual aids and audio-visual aids. Interviewed parents had materials in their home to support their children to develop literacy. While each parent had some resources, the amount and type of resources varied from one household to another. Parents 2, 3, 4 and 7 with a low yearly income seem to have fewer resources than parents 1 and 5 with high yearly income which has a bearing on the literacy development for their children

- **Television**

The majority of parents (87.5%) mentioned that the television was widely used as a telecommunication medium for receiving news and other images. Nowadays television has a big role as a learning tool, because it often has educational programmes that suit children of different ages. There are programmes that are televised in different indigenous languages that can be understood by children even before they go to school.

Parents said they find it easy to keep their children motivated when watching television because their children will ask questions sometimes about written words. Parents said their children enjoy programs that are interesting to them. These programmes include,

among others, Takalane Sesame, Yo TV and Take Five. The educators added that they do help families make television viewing, learning and interactive experience that develops critical thinking skills. There was also a concern from the educators that Television can also interfere with children's valuable learning time. To avoid Television interference, children should be encouraged to read the Television guide.

It emerged from the study that the school has three sets of television. These televisions are used as sources of entertaining learners. Learners were reportedly paying a sum of two rand to view Television as a fundraising exercise. What was not clear was whether these televisions were used in terms of literacy programmes on a daily basis. The majority of parents (80%) regarded television as literacy component and they see it as routine family interaction and opportunities for literacy experiences. From the study it emerged young children who learn by observing, might try out some of the behaviour they see from television both positive and negative. Therefore, when children are exposed to educational programmes on Television, they are likely to mimic those and perform well in their school work.  *Together in Excellence*

However whilst the use of television for education purposes is commendable, some parents condemned over-reliance on television as a source of entertainment. **Parent 5** declared that: *"By letting a child watch movies on the television for a long time you are robbing your child creating imaginary in his/her head. When we provide too much visualization in child's life he/she become passive thinkers instead of active thinkers."*

About 75% of parent respondents agreed that children watch television for lengthy periods of time unsupervised. Educators said that they would prefer it if children were told to keep records of what they watched and narrate it when parents return from work.

Even though Television was regarded as an important literacy resource, they were a few voices that reiterated that computers were more important than television. **Parent 4** declared that: *"I don't think television is more important than the computer though I don't have one. We have to look at the future of our children; all the jobs require someone*

who is computer literate. You don't have to buy books because all the information is in the computer". Educator 1 added and confirmed what Parent 4 said by saying that: "I think that television and computers are very important because we have to look at the future. Most of the jobs that are done require a person to be computer literate. You don't have to go to the library; it's all there in the computer".

There were some suggestions by majority of educators (100%) that parents need to be role models to their children by turning off the Television and be seen reading newspaper, books as well as other reading materials. This confirms what Henderson & Berla (1997) suggested by saying that it is what parents do at home with respect to homework and television monitoring that appears to have the greatest impact on student outcomes.

- **Newspapers**

While the majority of parents were content with the amount of support they were providing, the interviews revealed that parents with low income have fewer newspapers as a literacy resource, than those with better income. Parents who had more stable, secured jobs indicated that they have bookcases full of literacy resources. These included books, magazines, newspapers, books and literacy games. These parents reported that newspapers had influential effect on the desire to help their children with listening skills and make children to be aware of what is happening in the world. Fenhol (1995) provides series of activities that use the newspaper as a learning resource to develop both reading and life skills.

Parent 5 mentioned that: *I don't read everything in the newspaper for my children; I usually pick up the interesting part of their age, and this part must be understood by them".* Of similar concern by was raised by **Educator 3** that: *"Parents should encourage their children to read and write by buying newspapers, magazines and simple reading story books."* **Parent 5** added that when he is reading newspaper with his son, he helps him with words he doesn't know yet.

Parent 3 shared that the: *"Newspaper keeps you current at all time, I'm a parent who working nightshift duties most of the times, I don't have enough time to watch the news of different channels. With the newspaper I get the news."* **Parents 3 and 5** mentioned that they felt most comfortable when using different forms of literacy development as they want their children to be successful, though issues of time and strategies to apply literacy information make it difficult. People who can't read listen as others read newspaper out loud.

- **Bible and Hymn book**

Parents 1, 3 and 5 reported on using the bible and the hymn book as a literacy resource. They use the bible for Christianity purposes since it is a collection of sacred scripture readings. These parents revealed that hymn books assist in reading when singing the songs. **Parent 1** responded that: *"We sing songs from the hymn books, those songs are sang as well in our church on Sundays. Once a week I read Bible stories for my children this helps them to know what is good or bad whilst they are still young"*.

In addition to the above statement, **Parent 3** alleged that: *"I read Bible "stories for my child, for her to become aware that Jesus Christ is our Saviour, and then we will pray before bedtime"*. The above mentioned parents expressed an interest in helping their children to spend fewer days and fewer minutes in reading the Bible to understand the phonemic structure of language where children will be able to recognize letters.

- **Story Book**

Some parents (50%) reported that they used story books to develop literacy. These are parents 1, 2 and 5. They revealed that the books they normally choose for their children reflect different cultures including those of participants and provide readers with the opportunity to learn a about variety of topics. **Educators 1, 2 and 3** alleged that: To have storybooks at home is of importance, more especially interesting ones this will result for children to love and adore books. We have noticed that when children have

passion for books their reading and writing improves day by day. Children must read for pleasure when reading stories and be able to link the story to their personal experiences. In this way they develop the sense of the story.

Oral skills are promoted through storytelling mentioned by the parents. Parent 5 used storytelling as means of entertainment for his children. Whereas educator 2 indicated that with stories she makes the learning fun and interesting. Children need to be prepared for story time. For instance, if you're going to read a book about a fish, play a CD with sea sounds and ask those questions about what are they listening to. When in class the educator can hold a book cover and ask the children what they think the story is going to be about. By the time you start reading, learner's imagination work and become excited to hear the story.

Parent 8 revealed that: *"My child has love for books since she was young, though I don't have means to buy these books since I'm not employed. I depend on my neighbour who is a domestic worker in town, she usually give me some story books as well as the magazines that are expensive from her employer. My child cuts some pictures when needed at school from these magazines."* It emerged from the interviews that stories are used to transform abstracts into concrete by creating in the imagination a real or concrete thing to take its place. Stories are also used to teach social behaviour as well to teach proper attitudes and actions. The study revealed that parents seemingly were not making opportunities available for the children to role-play what they know from their own environment and experiences.

- **Radio**

Data revealed that 87,5% of parent respondents had radios and Television sets in their homes. They reportedly used the radio for literacy development. The programme they reportedly listened to with their children was English in Action on Umhlobo Wenene FM. **Educator 4** stated that even in their classrooms they do have radios whereby learners listen to English in Action for about thirty minutes. Educators revealed that the opportunities provided by radio for learning must be considered because this is a first

step in the process learning to listen. If no educational programs were broadcasted there would be no learning from listening to the radio. Even if half an hour of the broadcasting hours is devoted to educational broadcasting pupils would look forward to that period of unscheduled learning.

My observation confirmed the statements made above about the resources used by parents for literacy development. During the interviews I conducted at their homes, I noticed that there were some old books, magazines, bibles and story books lying around in the house. Some parents were free to show me some of these resources they used for literacy development.

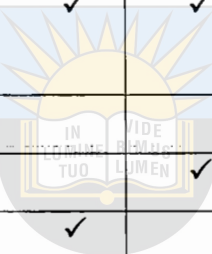
4.4.2 Strategies used by the parents to support their children's literacy development

This section describes a variety of strategies and activities reportedly used by parents to support literacy of their children. The majority of parents agreed that they have a responsibility to support their children in the development of literacy. The reading and writing activities given as homework include English and isiXhosa. **Parents 1 and 5** reportedly understand the school's role in promoting children's abilities to speak, write and read through homework given at school. Work related problems and lack of time were stated as challenges when parents had to attend to children's activities after school that aimed at developing reading, writing and speaking abilities.

Reading and writing to parents include helping children with homework that is submitted the following day in class. **Parents 3, 6, 7 and 8** revealed that they do assist with homework. They specified that they only assisted with homework tasks related to their home language only. **Parent 3** also further added that he would narrate a story to his child, and then his child would retell the story to him.

Table 4.5: Strategies that parents claim they do to support the literacy development of their children

| Strategy | Parent 1 | Parent 2 | Parent 3 | Parent 4 | Parent 5 | Parent 6 | Parent 7 | Parent 8 |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Storytelling | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Reading aloud | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Talking to children | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| Praying together | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Singing | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | | | | ✓ | | | | ✓ |
| Playing together | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |


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The study sought to find out the parent interaction with their children in activities that help to develop literacy. Table 4.5 summarizes how parents are involved in the literacy development of their children. Their strategies, as reported by the parents include storytelling, reading aloud, and writing, praying together, and playing together.

The individual strategies as per order of importance are discussed in the following section as follows:

- **Storytelling**

Table 4.5 showed that 75% of the respondents interacted with their children through storytelling. Storytelling was reportedly a time when parents catch the attention of their children as they interest them in folk stories, bible stories and true stories from the print or electronic media. The majority of parents reported that through storytelling children are provided with enjoyment and also are willing to express themselves. They further argue that sometimes these stories provide warning to children in instances where

various forms of child abuse as **Parent 1** noted. She said through the Daily Dispatch (newspaper) she narrates stories from it for her children. She further stated that it was the major resource she uses to develop literacy for her children.

The majority of the respondents view storytelling as an important activity. **Parent 7** and **8** mentioned that stories they tell to their children were from the Bible stories about Adam, Eve and Jesus Christ. There are also stories of things that were read from the newspapers, to make them to be aware of crime that is taking place as well as issues of child abuse. These were real stories that are sometimes aired on the televisions. Through real stories there is that connection point to real life situation. It emerged from the study that through storytelling listening and retelling skills are improved.

Parent 1 revealed that: *"I buy Daily Dispatch almost everyday; the reason is that I read to my child about stories of children who are raped and later killed. Sometimes there are also stories of children whose bodies are mutilated for the multi purposes. These stories are on radios as well, but during the day the children are at school and therefore are not able to get the news. Children become aware of the crime that is taking place in South Africa. When they are old enough they might be able to tell their children of these gruesome stories."*

She also assured that she uses the Daily Dispatch to tell stories. The Daily Dispatch is a regularly scheduled publication containing news, information and some advertisements; it has different current stories that appear almost every day. These stories are local and international stories. **Parent 1** further reported that she used them to tell stories for her children. Some of the stories could also be seen on Television or others heard on the radio. This parent had a different educational background from other parents as she is a qualified nurse who claims not to have time for other story books apart from the newspaper.

Parent 5 revealed her experience as follows: *"At home we were a family of eight; we were blessed to listen to stories narrated by our grandmother with kind and warm*

feeling .The most important thing was the love we could feel between ourselves and our grandmother. I think that is a fondest memory we will never forget, and we need to pass these memories to our children.”

Parent 6 alleged that: *“At school they expect a child to know stories, this result to my child ending up memorizing the story without knowing the meaning .Children should read various stories and be able to retell them with understanding. Stories vary others are for morality and for good things .I’m going to tell you a story about Jackal and the Wolf {telling with confidence}. The moral in this story is that dishonesty is not a good thing. We need to be honest at all times.* Parent 6 mentioned that storytelling is a social experience that is done both at home and at school. To her point of view when her child does not understand the story, the child will end up memorizing the story.

Parent 8 shared that: *“Stories must have something that you learnt at the end, my child shows interest in stories .She laughs and want me to repeat again and again, though she becomes scared when the story is about the ghost.”*

Educators 1, 2 and 3 revealed that parents can read to their children, they can tell stories and ask the children to retell the stories, they can give help if they don't know how to read. If parents are illiterate they can ask older siblings even neighbours to help. If they cannot help them the school is there to help. Learners feel free to do storytelling using their mother tongue than the second language. The reason might be the fact that parents at home prefer mother tongue in order for their children to be interested, listen attentively and to laugh as well.

Educators 2 and 4 concluded that it is a great idea to allow parents to come and tell stories to children in classrooms about their ideas and their experiences. Parents tell stories to their children to teach them about what is happening in the outside world, they also narrate Bible stories, folktales etc. Parents teach their children to be aware of the social problems in their society.

From these interviews, parents used the storytelling strategy for the following purposes:

- Reading aloud
 - Talking
 - Play
 - Writing
 - Praying
-
- **Reading aloud**

The majority of the parents (75%) viewed reading as a vehicle to learning in other subject areas. About 75% parents claimed that they read to their children as often as they could. **Parents 3, 7 and 8** however reported that they could only read from Xhosa books. They mentioned this was due to the limitation in their own language (isiXhosa) development. However, because **Parents 1, 2 and 5** know how important reading is, they reportedly using resources available to them such as the bible and the newspapers.

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About 75% of the parent respondents recalled that they learnt to read when they started formal schooling because there were no emergent literacy development programmes taking place in their homes prior to schooling. This has resulted in the fact that parents seem not to see the home as an important factor for developing literacy skills. This is evidenced by the revelation from the following parents;

Parent 1: *"I couldn't read before I went to school. I learnt everything at school but my child like Xhosa folktales .I spend lot of time telling these stories to him and he can tell better than I can. He has a good imagination and it is very funny to listen to him tell these stories."*

Parent 2 narrated that: *" When we were young we played and read a lot because a television set was not available, we relied on the radio that was operated by batteries, when the batteries were flat we put them in the sun so that they could recharge again.*

When I go to town I ask for books which are of children's age that will interest them. This enables me to become closer to my children by reading together."

Parent 5 claimed that: *"For reading I buy newspaper, magazines and simple reading books for my children, we do shopping and explain things in the shop as buying. The reason I'm doing this the school where my child is has the library because there are shelves and books, but I'm not sure if they have someone trained for it."*

Educators 1, 2 and 3 agreed that there is a library at their school but it is not in use. They mentioned further that the library needs a specialist who knows how to classify books on the shelves, and when books are not enough for the library people tend to lose interest of using it.

Parent 6 maintained that: *"Reading is important in life because in order to succeed in school you need to know how to read. I do assist my children in reading and helping them with homework they bring from school. When it is difficult for me I refer them to their father for assistance if he is at home. The reason for this is that the father is better educated than me."*

The majority of the parents concurred that reading is important and they stated that they made an effort to help their children read. However, there were a few who reported that they could not assist because of the lack of time as **Parent 7** indicated: *"It is very difficult to help my children with reading because of my education and the time I come home. I don't have enough time to help my children with school work. I leave in the morning at six o'clock and come back at eight o'clock in the evening. I rely on my sister who is in the upper grade than my children."*

Parents emphasized the importance of reading, because reading opens doors to learning for all academic subjects chosen by children in school. Reading aloud at home is being done either by parent or older sibling. Parents claimed reading newspaper, Bible for religious purposes and storybooks in promoting children's abilities like

speaking and reading. However, to the educators, most parents were not doing their duty to help children on their literacy development, and reading in particular. The educators further noted that this may be due to the parents' illiteracy levels.

- **Talking**

The majority of the parents reported that they talked to their children in a bid to improve their vocabulary and linguistic skills. Talking to children frequently from a tender age helps children develop their literacy while parents can also identify speech defects in their children. Through this they recognize speech sounds, and know which sounds make the words that are important to them. About 25% of parent respondents also mentioned that they do talk to their children on a daily basis. These are **Parents 7** and **8**. Both parents reportedly went as far as grade ten educationally, they are also single parents one is unemployed and the other one is a cashier.

Parent 7 declared that: *"I try to talk to my child before she goes to bed and how her day went, such as what she likes and dislikes. My child talks about her friends at home. I think it's good for her to be around other kids who are not her family members."*

Parent 8 asserted that: *"At my home I talk about social problems such as alcohol and drug abuse and so on, as these are crucial issues amongst our youth. By doing this I want to show them the right way they should take and not to follow the wrong ways that will make them not to complete schooling. Drug abuse is a popular thing in the area where I live more especially amongst the youth. If we don't talk now to convince them, and then I don't know what will happen later."*

Parents do realize the importance of talking to their children; though at times it seems they are challenged due to pressure and nature of work related issues. This was confirmed by **Parent 3** who is a security guard reported: *"I am working night shift most of the time and I leave my children with my sister. I usually leave early before we have time to chat due to transport problems. I think this is not good for my children at school but I hardly stay with them for few minutes because of being tired after work."*

Parent 6 who is a housekeeper also shared the similar sentiments with **Parent 3** when she reported: *“Lack of time is a problem because in the morning when I come from work I am tired and want to sleep and the children have to go to school. When they come back from school I am getting ready to go to work.”*

Parent 1 and **5** raised the issues that parents who frequently talk to their children help them to have a larger vocabulary. Children begin to imitate sounds and children learn by listening to family members. Parents claim to talk to their children on different issues like social problems, general issues and discipline to moral and cultural values children are expected to have in a society. It emerged from the interviews that parents see talk as an opportunity to moralise rather than to support their children’s developing language and literacy.

- **Play**

Some parents reported that they play time to develop literacy in their children. According to these parents, play is a wide range of voluntary, motivated activities that are normally associated with pleasure and enjoyment. Play-time does not cease to be a useful activity, as children grow older it continues to be an important part of literacy development and experiential learning. This is an important part of young children’s development. Play-time can be done anytime anywhere. The majority of parent respondents claimed they only watched their children play at home with their friends.

Parent 5 reported playing games like hidden object games, playing card game, puzzle game and sport games with his children. Other parents claimed they seldom played with them, because these games need a lot of attention span. Though they are aware that playing is a very important aspect of child’s development, it emerged that only 25% parent respondents joined in a game of soccer with their children. These are **Parents 3** and **5**. This may be due to the fact that both these parents are males. The other parent is a qualified educator with Bachelor of Education degree. The second parent left school at grade ten and is a security guard of a private company. These parents seem to have

different backgrounds but what is common is their involvement in their children's sport activities.

Parent 1 alleged that: *"I do playing with my children anytime; anywhere whilst we are in the bathroom they count clothes in the laundry basket, in town when we are travelling them count number of green cars, red cars etc. This is fun to them. Playing keeps my children confident and they perform better at school."*

Parent 8 claimed that: *"I'm too old to play, but I can talk a lot. My child listens to me when I'm talking. Usually I ask my child to share her ideas with me. I ask her questions that require her to talk."*

Play activities support literacy development and play needs to be meaningful and enjoyable. It is through play-time that a child discovers language and learns to communicate. Play promotes creativity and self confidence amongst children. It occurred that 30% of parents care about their children and value playing; their busy lives may make it more difficult to spend quality time with their children on playing activities. Children's play is open-ended meaning there is no fixed sequence in play as children use their imaginations and try out new roles and ideas.

- **Writing**

Writing includes many languages such as English, isiXhosa and other. The minority of the parents reportedly helped their children in writing to develop literacy. These include **parent 4** who is a matriculate but is not employed and **parent 8** who stopped studying at grade eight and is also not employed. Though these parent levels of education seem not to be that much, they reported that they are willing to help their children with writing.

The issues of lack of time as well as lack of finances are some of the challenges faced by these parents in developing writing abilities for their children. For example, **Parent 1** who is a nurse declared that she is extremely busy in the evenings to help her children with reading and writing. In turn, this may affect her child's school performance and be a

risk factor that parents and educators need to be aware of the fact that writing might involve connecting people outside classroom. This can be done through sending letters through postal services.

Parent 4 suggested that: *“Parents should upgrade their level of education, read newspapers, and watch news on different channels of the television. This will enables us to be current on what is taking place in the outside world.”* This was supported by **Educator 4** when she mentioned that *“I feel that it does not help to develop literacy of the children without first developing the literacy of the parents.”*

Parent 8 confirmed that: *“I usually tell my child about the importance of reading and writing, I tell her when you cannot read or write it’s not easy to get a better job and you end up being unemployed. Life become difficult, you suffer and ending up doing wrong things like drug trafficking”.*

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From the interviews there seemed to be no link between the school and home as far as literacy development is concerned. Parents need to understand what their children’s teachers are trying to accomplish, and teachers need to know about the parent’s concerns and aspirations. Parents without experience or little education may be unaware of any additional literacy activities to implement beyond the basic activities provided by the educators.

- **Praying**

About 90% of the parent respondents revealed that on Sundays they attend church services, 10% of parents shared that due to their own lack of neither belief they do not pray nor read the Bible. The majority of parents stated that prayer for families is the very foundation that keeps a family unit together. It was also mentioned by educators that before commencing classes they pray together with learners. Scripture is also read as a learning tool from grade R to grade three, Christianity values are instilled both at home and school.

Parent 6 shared that: *“We want our children to follow our moral values by all means, we pray together with them before bedtime. We are born again Christians.”*

Data from the interviews show that the majority of parents had at least one aspect in common and that was praying. These parents found out that they would like to change and help by engaging their children at home by improving their reading performance during Bible reading before prayers.

4.4.3 Parents’ and teachers’ views on teacher support in literacy development of their children

The majority of parents stated that they were not getting enough support from the educators to develop literacy for their children. Schools seem to involve parents when children are absent from school. Educators in turn blamed parents for not coming to school for guidance for literacy development, instead parents will come to school when they want to complain. One of the educators indicated that parents are not well vested in the new curriculum. They should ask children to count, recite mathematics’ tables, read something from the set work books and also do spelling tests. She indicated: *“even if a parent is illiterate they must ask children something for them”*. This grade three educator pointed out that there are learners who cannot count or write numbers in words, and indicated that this may be due to the parents’ inactive role. The educator strongly believes that it is the responsibility of the parents to give their children basic literacy skills.

The educators’ views are also confirmed by Glazer and Burke, (1994) that in the past parents were encouraged to facilitate oral language, reading instruction was to be left to the school. They explain that the teacher was the most valued influence on children’s road towards literacy. These thoughts gave no consideration to the ideas that reading, writing and speaking can take place both in and out of school situations.

All the educators that participated in the study revealed that parents do not come to school in terms asking for help and guidance for their children's work. Instead they mostly come to school when they want to complain. **Educator 3** shared the same view and revealed that parents don't visit school regularly. Some parents do not even honour invitations to school, the educator further explained. The school is willing to support parents on matters concerning school activities, generally as well as supporting them to develop literacy equally. As educators they do tell parents during parent meetings that they were allowed to come tell stories to children in the classroom, share ideas and experiences with them. Parents are empowered in the development of their children's literacy by giving them old magazines, newspapers more especially those who can't afford to buy them and advise them to tell traditional stories to their children.

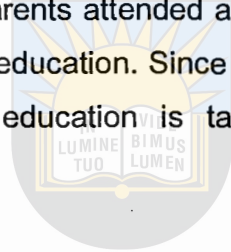
Educator 2 stated that being an educator for thirty two years for grade two, at the beginning of the year apart the general meeting of all parents, she sent messages to her learners' parents using her learner's diaries. Each parent will be told about how to help their children with literacy homework. Since she is also Head of Department she calls them twice a year due to her tight schedule. She highlighted that literacy is what they do everyday with their children citing activities such as playing with your children, talking to them in polite manner, watching television and shopping together develops literacy. Some parents seem to think that literacy is something different from what they are doing daily.

Educators therefore feel that it is their sole responsibility to monitor the behavior of learners. This is also the view of parents who do not support their children, as they believe that anything that has to do with literacy development is the role of educators. Educators however, think that parents should be called and be told that learners of grade R to 3 are still their children; they must continue supporting them even at intermediate level.

Educators indicated that if a learner sees his/her parent visiting the school time the behavior of a learner might positively change as he/she sees that the parent can easily

visit the school. **Parent 5** was also of the opinion that if parents visited the school regularly there would be a positive improvement in the behavior of learners. Educator's stressed that they will not give up on parents. The advice given by Browne (1996) is that if parents are to be invited to work with the pupils in school or after school, the school has to have a policy. The school and educators need to be clear about what the partnership is to achieve.

My observations and document analysis confirmed the information provided by educators on the issue of involving parents in their children's literacy development. The parents' minute book showed that parents attended at least two meetings called by the educator concerning their children's education. Since I started observing, at least three parents showed up to see how education is taking place and their children's performance.



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4.4.4 Challenges to parental involvement in their children's literacy development

Even though parents acknowledged their importance in their children's literacy development, they also indicated some challenges they experienced in fulfilling this role. As a result of those challenges, they regarded their involvement to be poor. With regard to the poor involvement of parents for the development of literacy for their children, parents were asked to mention the challenges that prevented them from developing literacy for their children. They identified different views as follows:

Parents appear to have an attitude that it is the responsibility of the school to provide learning material and they sit and wait for the school to provide everything, without realizing that the child is the victim of the situation. This implies that there is a communication gap between teachers and parents which will have an effect on the literacy development of the children.

4.4.5 Communication between parents and educators

Another research question sought to find out how educators support parents in the literacy development of their children. During interviews educators mentioned that they support parents through letters, newsletters and personal contact. Parents mentioned that they would like the relationship with the educators to be friendly, the reason being that they want their children to be happy at school, and they too want to be available to educators when problems occur. Most of parent respondents indicated that the worst obstacle is related to single parenting and working mothers who have limited time to attend school activities.



4.5 Discussing analyzed data

In this section the researcher discusses the findings and relates them to the literature that was discussed in chapter two.

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4.5.1 Parents efforts to develop literacy for their children

The researcher observed that literacy practices are different in the area of Yanda J.P. School. For example, in some homes parents claimed that they do support the literacy development of their children through storytelling, reading aloud, writing and playing. This shows that parents involved in their children's literacy in different ways. To be discussed below is storytelling, reading aloud, writing and playing.

- **Reading aloud**

Most respondents viewed reading as a vehicle of learning in other subject areas. The fundamental skills in developing literacy are by learning to read and write. Whitehurst & Lonigan (2006) mentioned that learning to read is a key milestone for children living in a literate society. Reading aloud to children is of good use because children become readers and it is an important aspect in children's learning. According to Ndjoze-Ojo (2006) reading is a skill that is vital for the learning process, for good academic

performance, for research, to develop writing skills and decision making at all levels. Reading aloud to children has been called the single most important activity for building the knowledge required for success in reading and establishing closeness between the parent and the child (Armbruster, 2003:8).

Armbruster (2003:8) further argues that reading aloud with children who participate actively helps children to read new words, learn more about the world, learn about written language and see the connection between spoken and written words. The extent to which reading materials were available in the home as well as nature of family's reading activities is described (Van Steensel, 2006). Van Steensel (2006) emphasizes the need for literacy exposure to children as this provides them the opportunity to learn incidentally about literacy through observing their parents (or literate others) reading in various contexts.

Another finding regarding this topic is that reading aloud at home is being done either by parent or older siblings. One parent claimed that she read the interesting parts in the newspapers and made them understandable to her child. In addition another educator speculated that she usually tells her learners stories like Little Red Coat story which activates the minds of the learners.

- **Playing**

Research shows that literacy and play are compatible and that play in fact, can support the application of literacy skills. Play provides a meaningful setting, supportive peer interaction, and functional opportunities for using skills (Morrow, 1990). Hall & Robinson (2003:11-12) claim that if you want to study the relationship between play and literacy then you put children in a situation where they are able to demonstrate what they do when they play with literacy. This gives children contextualized play situations where they can demonstrate what they know about the 'what', 'why' of literacy. Robinson argues that play offers an opportunity to help children develop a wider understanding of literacy by allowing them the chance to explore literacy in contextualized situations.

Reading, writing, talking and listening can all be encouraged through play (Wurman & Civitas, 2002). Looking at findings of this study, play as a natural activity was evident from the information gained via the interviews where two parents stated that they had problem about play. The other parent mentioned that she was too old and the other parent claimed that she was busy at all times and therefore does not have time to play with her children. A positive factor was revealed by another parent that play can happen anytime, anywhere and it must be fun as it will help children to be confident and perform better at school. The educator collaborated that children play at school where they read, write, talk and mark scripts the way she does, they also ask each other questions. This is consistent with Galda and Pellegrini (1985: vii) who claimed that “the language used in play is similar to more formal, literate uses of language required of children in school”.

- **Writing**

The skills of reading and writing develop together as children grow in literacy (Kazembe, 2005). Children learn much about reading and writing by observing the reading and writing that occurs in their families. They begin to read and write as part of their home experiences (Heath & Taylor, 1983). This is in agreement with Baghban (1989) who argued that with little encouragement, children’s reading and writing development will proceed on parallel tracks. He further argues that even a young child who saw the adults in her life writing letters and grocery lists and telephone messages would want to experiment with writing.

From the research only a minority reportedly help their children with writing. The parents who supported literacy development through writing were unemployed, and both didn’t have tertiary level of education. Another parent declared that they as parents need to upgrade their level of education, be current about issues that are taking place in the outside world. She mentioned that this can be done by reading newspapers and watching of news on different channels on the television. Supported this issue was an educator who maintained that it does not help to develop literacy of the children without first developing the literacy of the parents. The question is, has the educators done anything to help parents in this issue of developing their literacy?

One of the areas in which writing is helpful in literacy development in the context of schooling is the type of writing that is done across the curriculum (Self, 1987). Most educators are supposed to give learners frequent opportunities to use writing in ways that will help children to learn. Writing also enhances learner's understanding of subject matter (Stephen & Browne, 2004). Educators are expected to help learners by engaging them in strategies that develop literacy. Some strategies have been found useful for improving children's reading comprehension when dealing with (Duffy, 2003). These strategies included prior knowledge activation, question generation during reading, making mental images during reading, summarization and analyzing story structure (Pearson & Dole, 1987).

Reading and writing helps learners to understand their shortcomings. It also assists educators and parents in assessing progress and determining areas wherein learners encounter challenges and how these can best be addressed (Glazer & Burke, 1994)

- **Talking**

Both parents and educators revealed that talking to children from a tender age helps children to develop literacy. Parents claimed that talking varied from social problems, general issues, and discipline to moral and cultural values. Hart and Risley (1985) found that the amount and kind of talking that parents use with their young children is highly predictive of valuable educational outcomes. Another parent mentioned that talking is a daily activity in their home though they mentioned that they are not aware that they are promoting literacy.

Literature also highlights the pivotal role played by talking in literacy development (Heath, 1989:350). The study revealed that when parents talk more to their children; the children are more likely to succeed in school. Lack of time was mentioned by 25% parents respondents that it was challenge because they did not have enough time to assist their children in their children's literacy. At her home, another parent stated: *"I talk about social problems such as alcohol and drug abuse as they are crucial issues*

amongst the youth, and if we don't talk to them, we don't know what will happen on them". Another parent responded that he is working nightshift; during the day when he is at home the children are at school, and he need to rest a lot to prepare for his job that is so demanding.

4.5.2 Communication between parents and educators

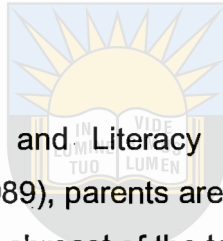
The development of children's literacy is a broad and complex task that involves many role players with overlapping responsibilities. The interviews with educators suggest that educators support parents through letters, newsletters and personal contacts. At the beginning of the year apart from general meetings **educator 1** revealed that parents are called for classroom meetings. These classroom meetings help to know each and every learner's background. The school supports parents in matters such as discipline, fundraising, etc than supporting parents to develop literacy for their children. This was mentioned by educators. They also mentioned that the school become concern when a learner is absent for a number of days. The parent will contact to check if the learner is fine.

In terms of homework not being done, the school contacts the parents to find out what the problem is, and then the school would intervene by helping that learner to do the homework after school. Parent 7 confirmed what was said by the school. About 20% of parents declared that they did not remember being called by the school in helping them to develop literacy for their children. These parents also mentioned letters from school would be given to their children reminding them about payment for activities done for fundraising.

Another challenge that was mentioned is that of school work being sent home without any clear explanation. Parent 7 said if she does not know how to help her child she will write a note to the class teacher explaining her problem. This parent is a single parent who left school at grade ten and who works full-time. It may be that she is either

unaware of the importance of homework or simply does not have time to help because she is single, working mother with a single income.

The involvement of parents in their children's literacy development is associated with higher achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school (Melhuish et al., 2001, 2004 and Rowe, 1991). Parental involvement has the greatest effect in the early years of children. Its importance to children's educational and literacy outcomes continues into teenage and even adult years (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003)

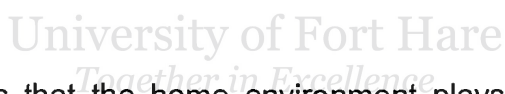


According to the Early Childhood and Literacy Development Committee of the International Reading Association (1989), parents are the key stakeholders in education process and should therefore be kept abreast of the total language program. In order for parents to assist in the development of their children's, it is necessary that educators provide them with ideas for activities to carry out at home. This improves co-ordination between parents and educators and simultaneously makes parents aware of the educator's expectations and the children's performance.

4.5.3 Home environment

Studies by Paratore & McCormack (2005) reveal that children who achieve high levels of reading have the benefit of parental support and involvement. Studies by Taylor & Pearson, (2002); Jordan, Snow and Porche, (2000)); as well as the older ones like Clark, (1976) Durkin, (1966) also confirm the above view. This view is further supported by Henderson (1988) who also found that learners learn more effectively and successfully when parents are involved in their children's education. The reading at home pre-supposes that parents have a great role to play in this regard. A clear role definition and its understanding on the part of parties is crucial for positive contribution to the child's reading activities.

While all of the parents are content with the amount of support they are providing their children, the parent interviews revealed that there are issues in the home environment that affect the amount of literacy interaction that is taking place in the home. The interviews revealed that parents with lower wage income have fewer materials and resources available for their children than parents of high income wage. For example parent 5 indicated that they had magazines, books and papers as well as pencils. These findings are reaffirmed by Finn (1989) who states that " Many households, especially low-income or minority homes, have few books in total and even fewer that are appropriate and interesting to children". In addition, the interviews revealed that all parents want to be teacher for their children; however, low income and unemployment parents spend fewer minutes reading to with their children than parents with high wage income. For example, parent 3 who is a security guard, works night shifts and during week-ends and therefore spends less time reading and interacting with his child because he is not always at home to do so.



Kajinga (2005:18) indicates that the home environment plays a crucial role in early literacy child literacy development. Similarly, Bloch (2002:11) argues that the environment in which literacy learning takes place needs to be one where children see regular reading and writing happening and where they get the opportunities to behave like readers and writers. This means that there is a need for e sufficient and appropriate material for reading and writing in children's homes.

4.5.4 Parent's level of education and their experiences

What creates problems for parents to develop literacy for their children is their educational background.

Parent 8 responded that: " *It is difficult to help my child with literacy, because of my education. That is why I always tell my child about the importance of reading and writing*". In addition **Parent 4** declared that: " *Parents when they are not educated, they can upgrade their level of education by attending evening classes*".

The educators highlighted that poor levels of education amongst parents is one of the contributing factors for literacy development of their children. It was also revealed that they tend to lack the skills and knowledge to help their children with literacy. **Educator 4** responded that:” *We need to develop the literacy of parents first because it sometimes difficult to expect them to help whereas they lack knowledge and skills about education*”.

Parents recommended that frequent parent meetings with classroom educators will be of importance as a way of motivating them to partake in the literacy development of their children. Also parents indicated that they should be involved in school activities.

A study conducted by the Scottish Government in 2008 identified the following challenges which are often encountered by parents:

- For many parents, lack of time may emerge from the hardships imposed by low income, poverty which limits their ability to make financial and mutual contributions. Most of learners stay with their biological parents, 70% of the parents are employed with different occupations and earning different salaries because of their educational qualification, work related problems might crop out due to the time they return from work. Another 30% of the parents left school at different grades and these parents are unemployed. All these parents are staying full time with their children. Parent 6 revealed that: *“Lack of time is a problem because in the morning when I come from work I’m tired and I want to sleep and the children have to go school. When they come back from school I am getting ready to go to school. I’m not educated I work as a security”*.

From this parent’s response, lack of time may hinder his involvement in developing literacy of his children. This parent expressed his concern that he does not have good education that will enable him with literacy development. Parent 8 added that: *“I usually tell my child about importance of reading and writing. I tell her when you cannot read or*

write it's not easy to get a better job and end being unemployed Life become difficult, you suffer and ending thinking of wrong things like stealing drug trafficking etc."

This argument substantiated by Lareu (1989), who argued that if parents have a higher level of education; it increases their competence for helping their children in school work as well as boosting their confidence knowing that they are capable of helping their children.

Cultural and socio-economic differences between parents and teachers coupled with limited educational attainment on the part of parents leave them feeling inadequately prepared to offer effective home-based activities. There is a need amongst the members of the school to motivate parents to further their studies. Parents can be motivated by being told the importance of parental involvement in education in general. According to Epstein (1991:15), parental involvement has been identified as parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community. Moreover, parental involvement implies that parents participate in one or more school teacher activities such as attending parent-teacher conferences, parent-teacher association meetings, volunteering at school, assisting children with homework, encouraging the child to better attainment.

Literature shows that the more educated the parents, the greater their involvement in children's education. Kohl et al. (2000) support this view. From the interviews it became apparent that parents who received assistance from their parents during their childhood tend to do the same for their children. Furthermore, parents with more education seem to help their children in many ways with learning. This supports Lareau's (1989) findings that if parents have a higher level of education, it increases their competences for helping their children in school work as well as boosting their confidence that they are capable of helping their children.

Educators confirmed that children with better educated parents do perform better at school than the children of parents with low level of education. For instance parent 1

and parent 5 are the two better educated parents' children have access of computer apart from the television and radio. Story books are also available in their homes because when a parent goes to town he/she brings story books that are in the level of his/her child.

There are parents with low levels of education. These parents seem not to be in position to motivate their children in literacy development. When parents are not capable of helping their children with literacy homework and do not have adequate literacy skills they tend to lose confidence. In another study by Kaperu (2004) parents have different understanding of what their role in the education of their children should be. These findings are similar to the study conducted by Hannon and James (1990) who interviewed forty parents from varied social backgrounds in an area of Sheffield about their children's experiences with literacy at home.

The interviews showed that parents were worried about helping their children with reading and writing activities because they did not want to teach them incorrectly (Hannon & James, 1990:265). The study further showed that most parents are interested in supporting their children's literacy development but do need more help with the "how to".

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the results, findings and discussion of the involvement of parents in their children's education. The data sets collected by means of using interviews, document analysis and observations. In this study, it was found that the parents were involved in assisting their children's literacy development using different resources. They reportedly were using resources available to them such as newspaper, magazines, Bible, computer, storybooks, radio and television. However, the majority of parents stated that they were not getting enough support from the educators to develop literacy for their children.

Chapter Five concludes this study with the summary, limitations of the research, final conclusions and recommendations for further research.



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5 CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapter and how they relate to the literature review with reference to the factors that affect parental involvement to develop literacy for their children at primary level. Since the factors were identified in Chapter 4, possible solutions to address such challenges and recommendations are going to be highlighted. Also the suggestions for future research and discussions of the potential value of the study are put forward.

In chapter one it is indicated that in the South African School Act the aim of partnership amongst stakeholders is for all to accept responsibilities. Partnerships that strive to boost student achievement may be supported with funds set aside for curricular and instructional reform (Epstein, 1992) hence the research was undertaken to establish parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's' literacy development.

5.2 Overview of the key findings

This section discusses the main findings of the study as presented in the previous chapter.

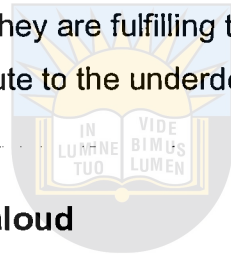
5.2.1 Parent's educational background

During interviews with parents and educators, it appeared that parents are not fully involved in literacy development. This might be that 30% of parents are well educated with tertiary qualifications, and 70% menial education. The findings of the study showed

that the low educational levels of parents is a major concern as it inhibits parents from helping their children with home work

5.2.2 Parent's lack of understanding of their roles

From the findings of the study, it has been revealed that parents understand their roles in terms of literacy development of their children. Educators blamed parents for not providing enough support, though there is no clear evidence about the school making any efforts to inform them about their roles in the literacy development of their children. Contrary to this parents believe that they are fulfilling their roles, but lack of parent, child and teacher interaction might contribute to the underdevelopment children's literacy.



5.2.3 Story telling and reading aloud

It also emerged from the study that stories that are being told by parents to their children are drawn from newspapers, to make them to be aware of crime that is taking place. These are real stories that are sometimes aired on the televisions and on radios as well. It emerged from the study that issues on child abuse were raised as well as improving listening and retelling skills. The study has further revealed that storytelling is a form of entertainment and way of passing knowledge. It was disclosed that children not only learn family history but also the behaviour.

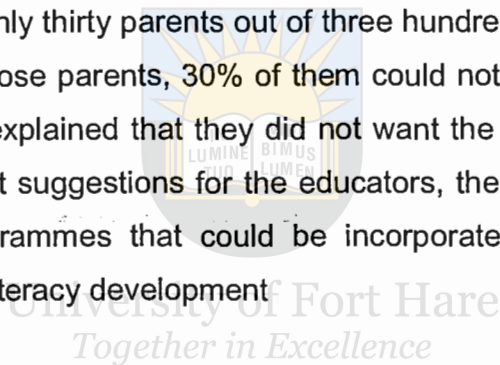
The study further indicated that children get access to information about the world through reading aloud and that reading develops close relationship between the child and the parent. Another finding is that parents teach children vocabulary directly and indirectly and stimulate the children's imagination through storytelling.

5.2.4 Home and school relations

It emerged from the study that the school does not build on what the parents already know such as telling stories and talking to their children. The literature on chapter two

confirms that home environment influences young children's literacy development as families provide children with various literacy enriched environments and activities. These literacy environments stimulate the children's awareness of the printed word. Therefore, many teachers may try to create a classroom environment similar to that, which the children are used to at home, a place where they can lie down or sit comfortably and enjoy reading their favourite books (Saracho, 2002).

Yanda Junior Primary School did try to engage parents in helping their children with literacy and to suggest strategies they could use with their children at home. However, the Principal recalled that only thirty parents out of three hundred and thirty nine turn up to the meeting. Amongst those parents, 30% of them could not read themselves and it is said that these parents explained that they did not want the same for their children. While parents had no direct suggestions for the educators, the research suggests that there are number of programmes that could be incorporated to make parents be involved in their children's literacy development



5.2.5 Literacy resources

Watching television and listening to the radio was a theme that emerged in relation with homework. All parents viewed television as a distraction when children are doing homework. Findings also showed that most children watched TV for more than three hours a day. While the amount of time children spent on TV tells us little about the quality of the watching, meaning it is not known whether would be passive viewing or active. Furthermore, reports from the parents indicated that their children preferred watching TV to engaging in any form of literacy.

5.2.6 Parents' role in literacy development

In chapter two, development of literacy has been defined as supporting all children growth, with thoughtful instruction to become reflective and motivated reader (McGee & Richgels, 2000). From the interviews parents together with educators declared literacy

development as promoting reading and writing. A rich home literacy environment helps children develop into successful readers and writers (Morrow, 1995). It is recommended that parents provide activities for their children that help reinforce and enhance their literacy skills. Parents who work with their child on a daily basis are helping to create successful readers (Evans et al., 2000). Many parents may not realize that they have the skills or lack the skills that are needed to help their children succeed. As a result, educators must become knowledgeable on the skills parents possess in order to set up a literacy network in the classroom that would be helpful for all parents.

Another suggestion is for parents to have consistent communication with the educators. Consistent communication would allow teachers to learn more about the environment and practices of parents and allow them to create strong literacy networks in the classroom. In addition, ongoing communication between home and school will help to establish a supportive relationship where parents will feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing information.



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5.2.7 Recommendations

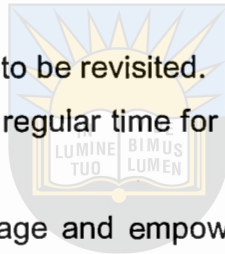
The South African School Act of 1996 promotes parental involvement in schools and educators found it difficult to provide quality education schools. Educators need to plan and prepare parental involvement activities in the schools so that learners may fully benefit in terms of literacy development through parental involvement. Studies reviewed in the literature indicate that schools need to develop programmes and determine how parents can support their children's education at home. It is necessary to find ways to encourage parents to be engaged in meaningful literacy programmes.

Studies pointed to the need to involve parents in areas such as planning, decision making and other activities (Epstein, et al, 1997). From the findings of this study one may conclude that much still has to be done to empower, encourage and educate the parents in order for them to be able to develop the literacy of their children.

Furthermore, schools do establish good programmes of parental involvement, but often fail to improve and sustain them.

The following suggestions have been found relevant to this study. They are as follows:

- Parents could be invited to tell stories, share ideas on cultural issues, read simple storybooks and sing songs at school. This would promote trust and ownership of teaching and learning.
- School libraries should be established to promote a culture of reading, love for books and to develop the literacy skills of the parent, educators and children.
- Literacy programmes need to be revisited.
- Parents should establish a regular time for literacy homework and encourage their children to read.
- Educators need to encourage and empower parents to develop literacy for their children.



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5.3 Value of the study

My research questions were focusing on parents and educators to explore the extent to which parents are involved in the literacy development of their children. This has been my concern ever since I became an educator in King William's Town. Parent seems to send their children to school to be disciplined by the educators. When we had staff gatherings at school my colleagues complained about lack of involvement of parents in their children's literacy development. It is against this background that I decided to investigate on the factors that prevent parental involvement in the literacy development of their children.

5.4 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework in this study has been explained in chapter two. However, some findings had come out during the study that contradict and or confirm literature reviewed by the researcher. These are discussed below.

5.4.1 Role theory

Haward (1992) explains a role as an expected pattern or set of behaviors associated with a particular position or status. In the role theory the focus is primarily on roles in the family and work domains, considered to be the two most central institutions in people's lives. Haward (1992) further explains that role become personalized for individuals. For example, not all parents are subject to identical expectations and they all do not enact the parental role in the same way to develop literacy for their children. Hoover-Dempsey (2004) further explains that roles are also characterized by their focus on goals held by the group and its individual members. These goals include socialization of the child, instilling of appropriate behavior, learning specific subject matter, development of children's unique talents and interests.

They further argue that roles are characterized by goals which include socialization of a child and development of children's talents. Parents play amatory role in the socialization of children and they know these roles and play them effectively and efficiently (ibid). As explained above by Haward (1992) that a role is an expected pattern or setoff behaviors associated with a particular position or status, this study revealed a pattern of role responsibility and role delegation among parents. This means that some parents accepted fully that they have responsibility to support their children's literacy. Educators as well need to provide guidance to help parents understand their roles and practices the skills for appropriate social interaction with their children (Baker, 2003).

Patore (2002) argues that the schools need to reach out to parents in supportive way so that parents can provide appropriate social opportunities for their children to develop. However, schools need to focus on listening and understanding parents provide solutions that fit their needs. Teachers need to understand the multiple literacy environments from which learners come so they can make a better home-school connection (Edward, 1995). For instance, literacy may be different in homes than maintain their native language or in their homes where parents have little educational experience (Nieto, 1996).

5.5 Limitation of the study

Eight parents and four educators were involved in the study; it is such a small scale research project in the King William's Town district. The findings of the study provide a greater insight into parental involvement in literacy development in urban school and this finding may to some extent be applicable to other schools.

5.6 Promoting Reading in the Community

One recurring challenge that parents highlighted is lack of a reading culture in the community. The lack of reading ability and skills among the parents educated and uneducated is a limiting factor in the acquisition of appropriate literacy materials. This is due to the lack of an environment that is rich in literacy materials such as books, magazines, newspapers, writing materials, educational toys and games. Many studies in literacy development of young children suggests that both before school and out of school children construct understanding and knowledge about different ways that people use and produce writing in their lives (Bloch, 2002). Schools through the government need to embark upon a programme which involves children as well as storytelling, writing and playing. These types of activities would lead to materials development for future purposes in the communities.

5.7 Reflecting on the Research Process

During the research process there are some things that I have learnt during these two years. Research knowledge has been built as well as skills and attitude. It is not an easy process to understand the logical steps of the research. Research process has been challenging and demanding. Lot of sacrifice has been needed in order to reach deadlines. Another challenge has been exposure through discussions with colleagues.

5.8 Directions to the Future Research

Possible future research that can contribute to a broader picture of literacy development could include the investigation into factors that affect parents to develop literacy of their children. This would allow the researcher to compare parenting education that connects parent and child literacy development. It will enable parents and children to enhance and support each other's literacy development. Powell (2004) stated that both parental beliefs and behaviour may either support or limit the development of children's language and literacy competence. He describes the characteristics of parental behaviours that support children's language and literacy development in four relevant dimensions. These four dimensions are (a) family verbal environment, (b) supports for literacy, (c) expectations of child's learning and development, and (d) active engagement of parental role. Family verbal environment, the quality of adult-child verbal exchanges is tied to children's school performance. Support for literacy may include the availability of reading and writing materials at home, parents' reading habits, parents' use of literacy for problem solving, parents' enthusiasm about literacy activities, and parents' self-efficacy as a teacher of their children.

5.9 Conclusion

As there are many social factors that relate to children's reading acquisition parents need to play a leading role in their literacy development process. Because some family practices are more developmentally linked with school practices than others, families' engagement in specific activities may enhance the development of aspects of

conventional literacy (Heath, 1983). When educating parents about literacy development of their children, it is imperative that educators understand the beliefs and practices that parents are likely to bring to school that might shape their social and cultural environment. If educators do not make an effort to support parents in children's literacy development they may find the task too heavy for them alone. (Janes & Kermani, 2001).

Involving parents in literacy activities provides beneficial experience for them and their children. Educators need to design programmes that offer assistance to parents who find it difficult to help in the literacy development of their children. Furthermore, educators cannot allow differences in children's knowledge that they bring to school serve as an excuse not to teach reading effectively (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Educators may find that some learners may need extra support than others in their literacy development. Lack of supporting reading materials in some homes has been noted in some homes and parents are encouraged to source even the cheapest material that can support literacy development.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview questions for educators

Personal information

Name of educator:

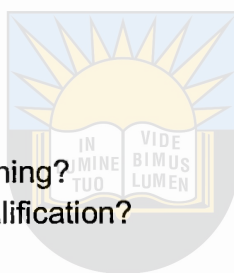
Gender:

Age:

Home language:

Number of years in teaching:

Qualifications:



For how long have you been teaching?

What is your highest teaching qualification?

Research questions

What do you feel is the most effective way to communicate with parents to develop literacy for their children?

What role do you as a teacher play with regard to parental involvement in the development of children's literacy?

How often do you as a teacher meet with parents each year?

How can parents help their children with the development of literacy at home?

How does your school recognise parents as partners in education?

What are parents' attitudes towards their children's work?

Do parents attend school meetings?

Why parents do not attend meetings?

What kind of homework do you give your learners?

Do you have any awareness campaign that empowers parents in the development of their children's literacy?

Appendix B: Interview questions for parents

Personal information

Name:

Age:

Sex:

Marital status:

Employment status:

Home language:

Research questions

How long have you live in this house?

How many people stay in his in this house?

What is the highest standard you passed?

What language is mostly spoken at home?

What kind of things do you like to read?

Do you have any books, newspapers and magazines in your home?

Do you like telling stories to your children, and which stories you like to tell?

Do you spend time talking to your children? What kind of things you talk about?

Does your child like to read, and what does he/she like to read?

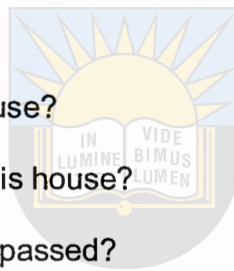
Do you help your child with school work?

Do you play, and what kind of games you play?

Do you experience any problem in helping your child to read or write?

Is there a public or community library nearby where your child can borrow books?

How often do you attend school activities such as meetings and educational programs?



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Appendix C: Letter to the school

Ngqika Junior Primary School
P.O. Box 23
Zwelitsha
5608

Mzali obekekileyo



Ndicela ukukubandakanya kwizifundo zam endizenza nesebe leDyunivesiti yase Fort Hare. Ezi zifundo zimalunga nabazali babantwana ukusuka kwibanga lika R ukuya kwibanga lesithathu. (Grade R-3)

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Singadibana kuwe endlini ngexesha elihle kuwe.

Enkosi

Miss Someketa

Appendix D: Consent form

ISIVUMELANO SOKUTHATHA INXAXHEBA

Ndiyavuma ukuthatha inxaxheba kulo msebenzi wakho. Yonke into icacisiwe nendlela ezakuthatha impendulo zam icacisiwe, inkqubo namagama am akuba sekhusini, ndizithandele ukuthatha inxaxheba khange ndinyanzeliswe.

Igama.....Umhla.....

Ukutyikitya.....



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Appendix E: Letter from the principal

17 September 2010

P.O. Box 23

Zwelitsha

5608

Attention: Ayanda Someketa

Dear Madam



RE: PERMISSION TO VISIT SCHOOL FOR THE RESEARCH

I acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated 10 September 2010 in respect of the above. Kindly be informed that permission is granted to visit our school for your research.

.....

Principal

Appendix F: Parental involvement policy of Yanda J.P. School

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT POLICY OF YANDA J.P.SCHOOL

The parent involvement policy explains how the school supports the important role of parents in the education of their children. Parental involvement policy to be handed out on the first general meeting of parents at the beginning of the year. Yanda J.P.School agrees to implement the following statutory requirements:

- What the staff will do to support parental involvement
- Parents' rights and responsibilities
- How school staff communicate with parents

General goals for parental involvement

- The school to have plan for providing ongoing information to parents about how children are educated
- Teachers to hold annual parent-teacher conference once in a year
- Parents to be encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education
- Coordinating the parental involvement activities and other programs in the school
- Giving parents up-to-date information about their children in an easy way
- The policy must describe the school's plan for developing a school profile, like a report card of the school
- Parents to be encouraged to take initiative in calling their children's teachers when they are concerned about the problem