

**Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners  
in selected preschools in Gauteng Province**

by

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## Dedication

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To my daughters  
Dessi and Janine  
and my fiancé Spencer.

Thank you for your patience and making this possible.

## Acknowledgements

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- ❖ My supervisor, Professor Kesh Mohangi. Thank you for your support, patience and understanding. You were my guiding light and inspiration throughout this journey.
- ❖ My daughter, Janine who quickly and expertly edited my work. I am proud of you.
- ❖ The principals of the research sites for granting me permission to conduct my research at your schools.
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- ❖ My fiancé, Spencer. I love you. You have borne the burden alongside me. Thank you for your patience, support and love.

## Declaration

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I, Susan Du Plessis (student number 08022887), hereby declare that all the resources consulted are in the reference list and that this study titled: *Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province* is my original work. This dissertation has not been previously submitted by me for any degree at another university.



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Susan Du Plessis

15 November 2016

## Abstract

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### **Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province**

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The topic of this study was to determine the factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province. The purpose of this study was to explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by teachers and mothers. The aim of the study was to establish what factors affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners. The primary research question asked what factors Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness. The secondary research questions asked how Grade R teachers address these factors in the classroom; who the people involved in the learners' reading readiness are; and how they contribute to reading readiness.

This study employed a multiple case study approach. Data was collected in six preschools in Johannesburg through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with five Grade R teachers and five mothers of Grade R learners. A focus group discussion with four Grade R teachers was also conducted. The main findings of the study were eight factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: the learner's individual developmental level; the learner's maturity; the learner's desire to learn to read; the learner's phonological awareness; the learner's need for play and kinaesthetics; the learner's parents' contributions; the learner's socioeconomic living conditions; and reading stories to the learner. The implication is that these findings may improve teaching practice and Grade R curriculum development.

## **Keywords**

- ❖ Reading readiness
- ❖ Grade R learners
- ❖ Phonological awareness
- ❖ Phonetic approach
- ❖ Whole language approach
- ❖ Multisensory approach

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

CAPS	Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement
CD	Compact disc
CVC	Consonant/Vowel/Consonant
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ELS	Essential Learning Standards
NALP	National Accelerated Literacy Program (Australia)
PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PRQ	Primary Research Question
RAN	Rapid automatic naming
SRQ	Secondary Research Question
ZPD	Zone of proximal development

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## Explanation of concepts

For the purposes of this study the following concepts are clarified:

**Alliteration:** same initial sound recognition (Anthony et al. 2007:119).

**Alphabetic principle:** letters and combinations of letters are the symbols used to represent the speech sounds of a language based on systematic and predictable relationships between written letters, symbols and spoken words (Anthony et al. 2007:120).

**Auditory discrimination:** the ability to understand and discriminate auditory cues to letters and words such as pitch, loudness, duration, and rhythmic patterns (Ali et al. 1980: 9).

**Auditory memory:** the ability to recall something that has been heard (Ali et al. 1980: 9).

**Auditory sequential memory:** is the ability to recall what was heard in the correct order that it was heard in, such as the days of the week

([www.learninginfo.com/auditorysequentialmemory.html](http://www.learninginfo.com/auditorysequentialmemory.html)).

**Binocular control:** two-eyed coordination necessary for reading (Ali et al. 1980:7).

**CAPS:** Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for Home Language Grade R (Department of Basic Education RSA 2012)

**Case study:** qualitative research that examines a case, over time in detail (McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 26).

**Directionality:** positions in space, such as above, below, to the left or right, in front of, behind and so forth (Ali et al. 1980: 8).

**Elision:** the omission of a sound (phoneme) in speech. For example, show the child four pictures such as pen, ball, car, and cup. Then state a stimulus word and ask the child to repeat the stimulus word, for example “pencil”. Then ask the child to point to the picture that illustrates the stimulus word without a particular sound: “point to the picture that is pencil without “cil” (Anthony et al. 2007:119).

**Emergent literacy:** the knowledge and skills that precede learning to read and write as taught formally in Grade 1 (CAPS training 2011)

**Epistemology:** the theory of knowledge, especially the critical study of its validity, methods, and scope (Collins 1994: 376); it is the theory of knowledge and the assumptions and beliefs that we have about the nature of knowledge; it is the theory of how one knows the nature of reality, or how one comes to know reality – it assumes a relationship between the inquirer and the known (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:55).

**Grade R:** is the reception year before grade 1, which caters to 5-6 year old children. The child in grade R is turning six that year ([www.unesdoc.unesco.org.html](http://www.unesdoc.unesco.org.html)).

**Interpretivism:** interpretive studies generally attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that people assign to them (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:59).

**Morphology:** the form and structure of words in a language (Collins 1994:739)

**Multisensory learning:** takes place when a teacher provides opportunities for a child to use all their senses together, seeing, hearing, touching (hands-on), saying (oral kinaesthetic), and sometimes taste and smell (Avington 2011: 40).

**Ocular motility:** eye movements need to visually examine the individual details of an object to include distinguishing light from dark, seeing fine detail, binocular fusion, convergence, and scanning (Ali et al. 1980: 7).

**Onset-rime:** onset is the initial sound that can be heard when words are sounded out; rime is the part of the word that is left after the onset is removed. When the two parts are separated, its call onset-rime segmentation ([www.ehow.com/Education/K-12/ElementarySchool](http://www.ehow.com/Education/K-12/ElementarySchool))

**Ontology:** the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being, or the set of entities presupposed by a theory (Collins 1994:794); it asks the question “what is truth/reality: it is the study of the nature and form of reality (that which is or can be known) and it is defined differently by different philosophers, various research methodologies and approaches to research (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:53).

**Orthographic knowledge:** of or relating to spelling (Collins 1994:803)

**Phonemics:** an aspect of language concerned with the classification and analysis of the phonemes of a language (Collins 1994:858).

**Phonetics:** the study of speech processes including the production, perception and analysis of speech sounds (Collins 1994:858).

**Phonics:** a method of teaching children to read by training them to associate letters with their phonetic values (Collins 1994:858).

**Phonological memory:** is used in tasks that involve processing sound information. It includes memory for words (repeat one word, then two words and so on), memory for nonwords (assesses child's memory for phonemes) and memory for sentences (repeat sentences of increasing length and complexity), (Anthony et al. 2007:114).

**Phonology:** the study of the sound system of a language – spoken (Collins 1994:858).

**Qualitative research design:** where an in-depth study is carried out to collect data from people in their natural settings (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:475).

**Quantitative research design:** presents statistical results using numbers (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:6)

**Rapid automatic naming:** is a measure of how well the child retrieves phonological codes from memory (Anthony et al. 2007:114).

**Self-efficacy:** A person's sense of being able to deal effectively with a particular task (Woolfolk 2010:350).

**Subject:** person (participant) from whom data are collected for the study (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:477).

**Tactile discrimination:** the ability to feel and understand the difference between different textures which is useful for those children who have difficulty associating letters with words (Ali et al. 1980: 10).

**Text discrimination:** the ability to distinguish printed letters and words from nonalphabetic characters and illustrations from a choice of four. For example, C, SMK, CAR would be correct; but 589, #, ^ would be incorrect (Anthony et al. 2007:121).

**Triarchic reciprocal causality:** an explanation of behaviour that emphasises the mutual effects of the individual and the environment on each other (Woolfolk 2010:349).

**Visual discrimination:** the ability to understand and discriminate between shapes, forms, colours and letters (Ali et al. 1980: 8).

**Visual memory:** the ability to recall something that has been seen such as letter and words (Ali et al. 1980: 7).

**Visual motor control:** up-down, front-back, near-far, high-low, left-right discriminations are first learned in the muscles, then the young child learns to translate these muscular cues of distance, directionality, size and shape into visual cues (Ali et al. 1980: 8).

**Visual motor integration:** measures a child's ability to make sense of visual information and then use it appropriately for a motor task such as writing, playing sports, using tools and utensils ([www.visuallearningforlife.com/visual-perceptual-area.html](http://www.visuallearningforlife.com/visual-perceptual-area.html)).

**Visual sequential memory:** in order to read, a child has to perceive the letters in sequence and remember what word is represented by that sequence of letters. The child who does not read well is frequently the one who cannot visualise events in sequence and remember the sequence, such as a dyslexic ([www.visuallearningforlife.com/visual-perceptual-area.html](http://www.visuallearningforlife.com/visual-perceptual-area.html)).

**Visual spatial awareness:** the awareness of letter formation – a common cause of reversals in letters is a lack of visual spatial awareness ([www.mrsprattclassroom.weebly.com/spatial-relations.html](http://www.mrsprattclassroom.weebly.com/spatial-relations.html)).

**Visual spatial memory:** the ability to remember the positions or location of objects such as letters in words ([psychologydictionary.org/spatial-memory](http://psychologydictionary.org/spatial-memory)).

**Word reading:** a child should be able to read two-, then three-, then four- letter monosyllabic words (Anthony et al. 2007:121).

## CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction and rationale

Why are so many learners<sup>1</sup> still battling to learn to read when so much research has been done on teaching young children how to read? Considering that the ability to read has a direct impact on their later employability as citizens of our country, early identification and intervention for preschoolers at risk for reading failure are topics of growing interest in South Africa (Bailet, Repper, Piasta & Murphy 2009:336).

Learners start Grade R with varying states of readiness for reading. In today's inclusive classrooms, learners with special needs learn in the same environment as their peers (Schiller & Willis 2008:54). Some grow up in homes where parents are illiterate or cannot afford to buy books (Davin & van Staden 2005: 94). While some learners may not be proficient in the language of instruction, others are already starting to read (Davin & van Staden 2005: 84). It is the Grade R teacher's responsibility to discover each individual learner's level of ability and teach from there. The foundations for literacy are established while learners are preliterate, and emphasise the current need to better understand how the various emergent literacy skills are interrelated and work together to facilitate literacy acquisition (Anthony, Williams, McDonald & Francis 2007:115).

Much research has been conducted investigating individual or combinations of preliterate skills in individuals or groups of learners, and how certain emergent literacy skills in preschoolers can predict later reading and writing problems (Anthony et al 2007; Bailet et al. 2009; Neumann & Neumann 2009; Schuele & Boudreau 2008). If future literacy problems could already be predicted in preschool, then it is surely possible for teachers to focus on

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<sup>1</sup> The terms learners and children are used interchangeably throughout the study.

teaching these particular skills in the classroom in order to reduce or eliminate some, if not all of these problems.

There were numerous literary studies available to review for this topic. However, several of them were quantitative studies that conducted pretests on a variety of preschoolers, and then implemented a programme to improve literacy skills. Then they conducted posttests to determine whether or not participation in the programme had improved the literacy skills of the preschoolers. This was relevant as far as the effectiveness of intervention programmes was concerned, and to determine which literacy skills were important for reading ability (for example, Avington 2012; Bailet et al. 2009; Schuele & Boudreau 2008). Some of the literary studies tested learners' ability in certain aspects of reading skills, such as phonological awareness and discussed the results (for example, Anthony et al. 2007; Apel 2009). Some of the literary studies were conducted at preschools in rural areas to establish existing conditions for teaching literacy and determine interventions to improve the reading ability of Grade R learners (for example, de Witt 2007; Mohangi, Krog, Stephens & Nel 2016). However, from this wealth of theoretical information derived from the research, I wanted to know what was happening in the classrooms in urban and suburban schools from the perspectives of Grade R teachers. Has the information derived from this research filtered down to the teachers in Grade R classrooms? Teachers are the people who can effect change in the reading readiness of their learners, if change is necessary. I could not find a qualitative study that explored what teachers are practicing in Grade R classrooms. This gap in the research needed to be filled, because if the lack of skill in certain factors necessary for reading readiness predicts future reading failure, then teachers need to know this so that they can do something about it in the classroom to prevent such failure.

How did I become interested in this topic? I was confronted with the low literacy rates in our country. I believe that acquiring literacy starts in preschool, especially in Grade R. As a

Grade R teacher, I have always assumed that what I teach the learners in my classroom prepares them well for reading in Grade 1. My readings of global and local research have led me to believe that low literacy levels are a global problem.

Why do I believe this research study is worth doing? I believe that reading is the key to all further education from Grade 1 upwards. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by teachers and mothers. This research study is justified as the findings of the research could contribute to the body of literature in this field and possibly lead to improved teaching practice and curriculum development.

In this study I investigated what factors teachers use, or find important in their practice in the classroom to facilitate reading readiness. I also explored what it is that preschool teachers think affects the reading readiness of the learners in their class and observed how their classrooms encourage reading readiness.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The purpose of the study was to explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by teachers and mothers.

The research problem stems from a current challenge in South African education where learners start Grade 1 with varying abilities in emergent literacy skills. Research conducted by de Witt, Lessing, and Lenayi (2008:1) showed that only 35% of Grade R learners met the minimum criteria for early literacy development. This implies that many learners are at risk for reading competency in Grade 1 because they do not have the necessary skills. The preliminary literature study in this research study found that there are certain skills that can predict future reading ability (Anthony et al. 2007; Bailet et al. 2009; Neumann & Neumann

2009; Schuele & Boudreau 2008), and I wanted to find out to what extent Grade R teachers are teaching these skills.

### **1.3 Research questions**

This study was guided by the following primary research questions:

Primary research question:

- ❖ What factors do Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness?

Secondary research questions:

In order to fully explore the primary research question, the following secondary questions were addressed:

- ❖ How do Grade R teachers address these factors in the classroom?
- ❖ Who are the people involved in the learners' reading readiness?
- ❖ How do they contribute to reading readiness?

### **1.4 Aim and objectives of the study**

Aim:

- ❖ To establish what factors affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners.

Objectives:

- ❖ To determine teachers' and mothers' understanding of the factors that affect reading readiness,
- ❖ To explore how preschool teachers prepare learners for reading readiness in their classrooms,
- ❖ To determine which people are involved in the reading readiness of learners, and
- ❖ To explore how significant people contribute to reading readiness.

## **1.5 Assumptions of the study**

I approached the study with the following personal assumptions:

- ❖ The teachers and mothers would agree to participate in the study,
- ❖ They would be willing to be interviewed and recorded on a digital recording device,  
and
- ❖ They would agree to share their knowledge and experience of reading readiness.

## **1.6 Paradigmatic perspectives**

In this section, I briefly describe the paradigmatic perspectives adopted for this study.

### **1.6.1 Metatheoretical paradigm: Interpretivism**

A paradigmatic perspective is a world view that guides the researcher on how to carry out research by making certain assumptions (Maree & van der Westhuizen 2013:32). An interpretivist paradigm seeks to understand the subjective world as experienced and described by the participants of the study (Cohen et al. 2011:17). The interpretivist paradigm was relevant to this study because I explored participants' perspectives on the phenomenon of the reading readiness of Grade R learners. I analysed the data gathered from interviewing the participants and recorded the meanings they attributed to this phenomenon. I interpreted the meaning of words participants used to describe actions and events in their worlds. A detailed description is provided in Chapter 3.

### **1.6.2 Methodological paradigm: Qualitative enquiry**

I adopted a qualitative research approach to address the objectives of my study. The qualitative research approach attempts to discover truth by exploring how and why participants interact with each other (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:54). I employed a multiple case study for my methodological approach. A case study focuses on a single phenomenon in

depth by interviewing a limited sample of participants and closely examining a bounded system (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:315). The case study investigates a particular event in its context and the researcher defines the case and its boundaries (Punch & Oancea 2014:270). A multiple case study allows for breadth as well as depth of focus; it allows the researcher to replicate aspects of the methods used such as interview schedules and data analysis techniques (Rule & John 2011:21); and it allows for generalisations to be made if common findings are revealed (Punch & Oancea 2014:256). I studied the case in depth at multiple sites (schools, teachers and mothers). I held face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with participants and asked them open-ended questions to try and understand what they know about and how they experience the topic (Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark 2013: 259). I recorded the interviews, transcribed them and conducted the data analysis both during and subsequent to the research (Ivankova et al. 2013:259; McMillan & Schumacher 2006:315). I presented the results and linked my findings to the literature study and theoretical framework. A detailed description is provided in Chapter 3.

### **1.7 Theoretical framework**

In the theoretical framework that was used to analyse the data, I present theories and ideas that exist regarding my topic: Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province. Reading is not a subject, but rather a cognitive process by which the little black marks on a page are interpreted and analysed. Piaget's cognitive learning theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory and Bandura's social cognitive learning theory help explain the cognitive concepts formed by young learners. Concepts drawn from these three theorists are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

## 1.8 Brief overview of research methodology

A summary of the research methodology employed is provided in Table 1.1. A detailed description appears in Chapter 3.

Table 1.1: Summary of the research methodology

Research methodology	
Research design	Multiple case study
Selection of sites and participants	Purposeful sampling of sites <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ 6 preschools in Gauteng, South Africa</li></ul> Purposeful sampling of participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ 9 teachers from the research sites</li><li>❖ 5 mothers from the research sites</li></ul>
Data collection strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>❖ Individual interviews</li><li>❖ Focus group interviews</li><li>❖ Observations</li><li>❖ Research journal</li></ul>
Data documentation	Digital voice recordings, handwritten notes, photographs
Data analysis	Thematic content analysis
Strategies to ensure trustworthiness	Multi-methods, verbatim accounts, member checking, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability
Ethical considerations	Informed consent, voluntary participation, protection from harm, privacy, confidentiality, anonymity

## 1.9 Quality criteria

Throughout my study, I endeavoured to ensure that my research work was credible and trustworthy. The essential strategies I used to ensure trustworthiness are multi-methods, verbatim accounts, member checking (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:324), credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Maree & van der Westhuizen 2013:38; Schwandt 2007:299). In Chapter 3, I elaborate on the strategies I used to ensure rigour in the study.

## 1.10 Ethical considerations

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:333), qualitative research is quite personally intrusive, so the ethical guidelines that I followed included policies regarding informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and caring. This study involved

human participants directly, so there was a low risk of inconvenience for them to make the time to be interviewed. Ethical principles are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

### 1.11 Outline of the study

The layout of this study is outlined in Table 1.2

Table 1.2: Outline of the study

Chapter 1: Contextualising the study	Introduction to and overview of the study; research problem; research questions; purpose; concept definitions
Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework	Exploration of the literature on the research topic and theoretical framework for the study
Chapter 3: Research methodology and design	Paradigmatic perspectives; research design; sampling procedure; data collection strategies; data documentation; issues of trustworthiness; ethical considerations; researcher's role
Chapter 4: Research results	Presentation of results
Chapter 5: Discussion of findings	Discussion of research findings in relation to relevant literature and theoretical framework
Chapter 6: Summary, conclusions and recommendations	Summary of the study's results; conclusions; recommendations, including recommendations for further research.

### 1.12 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to introduce and contextualise the study by orientating the reader to the background and reasons why I chose factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province as the topic of this study. I stated the purpose of the study, its relevance to teaching practice and how it fills a gap in the research that others have carried out on this topic. I stated the research questions that I addressed and outlined the aim and objectives of the study. I briefly described the paradigmatic perspectives that I adopted and provided a tabular summary of the research methodology that I used. I also considered the quality criteria and ethical issues relating to this study. Lastly, I outlined the content of the chapters that follow. In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature related to the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 1, I introduced my study about the factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected preschools in Gauteng Province. In this chapter, I review and provide a synthesis of literature relevant to the study. I investigate established information and what the theorists say about reading readiness. In particular, the theoretical frameworks provided by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bandura seem to offer useful strategies for teaching children to read.

The value of the study lies in this statement:

*The ability to read is very important in today's world. A person who is unable to read cannot function properly in society. Our society values literacy because it forms the basis of one of the most important forms of communication in the modern world – the written or printed word (Davin & van Staden 2005:91).*

I agree with this statement, because much learning stems from reading, and schools and universities need to produce literate adults who can communicate with understanding and work reliably. Learning to read starts early when learners are still in preschool. However, there are still so many young learners who battle with this skill in South Africa. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS 2011) found that the average percent correct in the reading purposes and processes for Grade 4 learners in South Africa was only 36%. Furthermore, these learners participated in an easier prePIRLS evaluation because South Africa's results were so low in the 2006 study (Mullis, Martin, Foy & Drucker 2012:283). In the 2006 study, at Grade 4 level, only 17 to 18% of learners could be considered competent readers (PIRLS 2006).

The poor performance of South African schools in international tests showed that early intervention was needed to improve results and to reduce the inequalities in learners' performance (van der Berg 2015:77). The introduction and inclusion of Grade R in Foundation Phase learning outcomes was intended to deal with learning deficits faced by many learners. Although Grade R currently has a positive effect on learning outcomes, it tends to further increase the advantage of more affluent schools, rather than reducing inequalities (van der Berg 2015:77).

While Grade R is not compulsory at the moment, the Department of Education accepted a policy document that will make it compulsory for all learners by the year 2019 in South Africa (Nel, Krog, Mohangi, Muller & Stephens: 2016:104). In the PIRLS (2011) report, a statement about the South African education landscape says that “reading is the quintessential skill required... (w)ithout it, learners are doomed to struggle through school and drop out when they are unable to master it adequately” (Howie, van Staden, Tshele, Dowse & Zimmerman 2012:23). It is therefore imperative that Grade R teachers provide learners with a solid foundation for reading, so that we can improve the results of learners in later grades.

In this chapter I explored what some of the current global and local trends are in learning to read, discovered what the literature found about how learners acquire reading skills, determined the emergent literacy skills that are important for reading readiness and explored how pre-literacy skills can predict later reading ability.

## **2.2 Global discussions about teaching reading**

Luther (2012) discusses the importance of teaching learners from impoverished homes in California to learn to read in order to improve their lives. Poverty negatively affects the school performance of young learners, especially when they are learning to read. This subsequently affects their later performance in high school, and learners who live in poverty

are more likely to drop out of high school (Luther 2012: 36). Luther claims that it is vital that the basic skills needed for reading are taught early in these learners' lives, despite the fact that they have little access to the right learning tools (Luther 2012:36).

Learners from low socioeconomic homes are less likely to have parents that can read to them, teachers that show respect for them, to recognise the letters of the alphabet and to write their name in kindergarten than non-poor learners (Children's Defense Fund in Luther 2012:36). Luther (2012:37) also recommends that teachers show respect for and have patience with poor learners when they battle to learn to read. Many of these learners have very limited experience in phonemic awareness skills when they start formal school. This makes it difficult for them to grasp concepts such as basic letter sounds and rhyming words (Luther 2012: 37).

Nevertheless, Luther (2012: 38) points out that with the right guidance, high expectations and extra input from caring teachers, young learners living in poverty have the potential to learn to read. These learners need good basic reading skills in order to stop the poverty cycle continuing from one generation to the next (Luther, 2012: 40).

Although Luther (2012) investigated the Californian situation, it seems likely that the strategies suggested may be applied to the South African situation, where illiteracy has a deep socio-economic impact on rural families, perpetuating cycles of poverty (DoE 2001:8). Learners who live in under-resourced areas also have poor literacy skills due to the lack of resources in their home and school environments (de Witt 2007:9). There are similarities between the Californian and Australian literacy trends.

Australia also has some similarities with the Californian and the South African literacy situations, such as the difference between wealthy and impoverished people, the importance of teaching, and the importance of communities (Topping, Nel & van Krayenoord 2006:301).

To address some of the problems in Australia, the report “Teaching Reading” contains many recommendations for the role of parents and standards for teaching (Topping et al. 2006:302).

These recommendations are similar to statements and policies made in the United Kingdom (English programmes of study – Key stages 1 and 2 revised 2014) and United States of America (The Common Core State Standards Initiative 2009) at that stage. At about the same time as the “Teaching Reading” report was released, the reconceptualised curricular framework Essential Learning was created in Australia. Essential Learning Standards (ELS) define what learners should know and be able to do at different stages of learning and provide guidelines for schools to plan their programmes and curricula (Topping et al. 2006:302). The Australian National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP) also influences the literacy education for indigenous students. These learners often live in rural and remote areas, and struggle with school attendance and academic achievement. The NALP promotes good teaching and engagement in the classroom by developing access to a range of discourses, a teaching sequence, inclusive teacher-student engagement, and the four reader roles: code breaker, meaning maker, text user and text analyst (Topping et al. 2006:302). By engaging and scaffolding young learners, they become fluent, capable and independent readers. The NALP contains strategies that could be applied in some measure to address literacy issues in South African rural and remote schools.

China also experiences literacy problems similar to those in South Africa. Researchers of both countries are currently working on a collaborative research project to explore the reading literacy and classroom practices of Grade R teachers in both countries (Nel et al. 2016:102). According to this research study, too much emphasis on cognition, poor quality reading resources, and outdated teaching methods are some of the problems faced in China (Nel et al. 2016:103), and the same may be said in South Africa. In both China and South Africa, teachers need to find ways to make teaching and learning more meaningful for

learners and focus more on the practical rather than the theoretical use of the curriculum in order to produce better readers (Nel et al. 2016:103).

In America, the joint position statement of the International Reading Association and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) discusses useful concepts on developmentally appropriate practices for young learners learning to read and write (NAEYC 1998:1). NAEYC's statement of position on reading readiness finds that learning to read is a "complex, multifaceted process that requires a wide variety of instructional approaches" (NAEYC 1998:8). NAEYC believes that learning to read is an interactive process where the learner actively constructs his own learning with the support of his teacher or parent. Literacy goals for learners should be challenging but achievable with the right amount of adult support, and teachers should accept that learners acquire literacy skills at their own, individual rate along a continuum of reading development (NAEYC 1998:8). Teachers need sufficient knowledge to find a variety of appropriate instructional strategies to support each individual child's needs and strengths. According to NAEYC, the majority of Grade R learners are likely to be at the Experimental Reading and Writing phase on the reading continuum where they develop basic concepts of print and begin to engage in and experiment with reading and writing (NAEYC 1998:16). NAEYC also finds that language, reading and writing are influenced by the learner's culture. Learners learn to read more easily if the ways of making and communicating meaning are similar at home and in school (NAEYC 1998:9). Where the language and culture of the home and school are different, the learners' home language and culture should be respected and developed while they acquire skills needed to participate in the shared culture of the school. Teachers also need to understand how learners learn a second language and how this process affects their reading readiness (NAEYC 1998:9).

Having explored global preoccupations with teaching reading, other local studies in teaching reading in South Africa will be discussed next.

### **2.3 Local discussions about teaching reading**

Similar to other countries globally, South Africa has many learners living in remote, rural areas and living in poverty. Schools in rural areas encounter problems such as isolation, little or no access to public transport, lack of school attendance and diverse learner backgrounds (Mohangi et al. 2016:71). One way to counteract the poverty, illiteracy, lack of libraries, and lack of reading culture in South Africa, is through peer tutoring (Topping et al. 2006:300). By using the paired reading technique, peer tutoring tries to improve reading skills. Learners from high schools in Tzaneen, for example, meet with primary school learners from farm schools during break time and read with them. Learners from Grades 1 to 3 read in their first language (Sepedi) which is also the language they are taught in. Older learners may choose books in English and other official languages. The Tzaneen Library collects donations of books that are appropriate for the farm learners' first experience of story books. Both tutors and learners enjoy the project because they are reading for pleasure and this has improved their self-confidence and reading skills (Topping et al. 2006:301).

Globally there is a drive to create policy documents and literacy programmes and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is the South African government's most recent strategy for turning previous low literacy results around. In CAPS, the focus is on literacy and numeracy and the emphasis is on early childhood development and universal access to Grade R education. CAPS forms part of government's "Action Plan to 2014" which is also a step towards its vision of the "Realisation of Schooling 2025" as determined by the Department of Basic Education. Goal 11 of the 27 goals of this Action Plan relates to improving the access of learners to quality early childhood development below Grade 1

(Department of Basic Education 2014:7). The CAPS document stipulates policy on curriculum and assessment in the schooling sector (CAPS 2011:3). It specifies the instructional time that should be spent on subjects, such as Home Language English (ten hours per week, or two hours per day for Grade R) and provides guidelines on the content, concepts and skills to be taught per term. The CAPS document bases language learning in Grade R on principles of integration and play-based learning in a setting that promotes emergent literacy through incidental learning rather than formal learning (CAPS 2011:20). The CAPS document says literacy is developed through a daily programme that is rich in language opportunities (CAPS 2011:21). The document further provides an overview of the reading skills to be taught in Grade R, namely:

- ❖ **Phonics**, for example, “(i)dentifies rhyming words in well-known rhymes and songs such as Humpty Dumpty” (CAPS 2011:24),
- ❖ **Emergent Reading Skills**, for example, “recognises and points out common objects in pictures” (CAPS 2011:26),
- ❖ **Shared Reading as a class with teacher**, for example, “(d)escribes characters in stories and gives opinions” (CAPS 2011:26), and
- ❖ **Independent Reading**, for example, “(r)eads picture books” (CAPS 2011:28)

The CAPS document provides suggestions for activities to promote emergent reading which could be introduced by teachers during the course of the Grade R daily programme per term. Lastly, there are recommendations for teachers to assess the progress of learners’ emergent literacy skills. The CAPS document is, in my opinion, a very practical hands-on document to facilitate the reading readiness of all Grade R learners in South Africa.

## 2.4 How learners acquire reading skills

Another useful document concerning reading readiness is Grove and Wetterberg's Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA). According to EGRA (2011:18), reading is acquired in phases and takes longer in some languages than others depending on the level of correspondence between the written language (graphemes) and the spoken language (phonemes). Phase 1 is concerned with basic skills such as letter-sound knowledge, word recognition and decoding of letters into sounds. Phases 2 and 3 are concerned with the printed text which reinforces and helps learners understand and absorb the intricacies of language such as spelling, rimes<sup>2</sup>, and morphographic<sup>3</sup> framework (Grove & Wetterberg 2011:18).

Learners need to acquire many complex skills and abilities in order to become successful readers (Ali, Hundley & Taylor 1980:6). English in particular is two or three times more difficult than languages that are more regularly constructed, such as Spanish (Grove & Wetterberg 2011:19). The amount of teaching time, availability of materials and whether learners are taught in their mother tongue all affect how easily learners learn to read (Grove & Wetterberg 2011:20). Learning to read is a gradual process that is also affected by the learner's home and school environments and his or her physical, perceptual, intellectual, language and emotional development (Davin & van Staden 2005:82). Learning to read is furthermore a complex process that includes language and literary competencies as well as the development of certain pre-reading skills.

The pre-reading skills that need to be mastered include binocular control, ocular motility, visual memory, visual discrimination, visual motor control, directionality, auditory memory, auditory discrimination, and tactile discrimination (Ali et al. 1980: 9) as well as phonological

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<sup>2</sup> Onset and rime are technical terms used to describe phonological units of a spoken syllable. A syllable can normally be divided into two parts: the onset, which consists of the initial consonant or consonant blend, and the rime which consists of the vowel and any final consonants.

<sup>3</sup> Morphographic – word meanings are expanded, modified and changed routinely by affixing single and multiple morphemes to the front or end of a root word.

and phonemic awareness (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:5). Building on these skills takes time and has tremendous individual variation in knowledge and skills relating to reading, and this is why it is known as emergent literacy (Gordon & Browne 2011: 439; Woolfolk 2010:56).

Emerging literacy emphasises the fact that the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, spelling and writing are closely related and form part of a total communication process (Davin & van Staden 2005:80; Gordon & Browne 2011: 439). For the purposes of this study I focus on reading, although in reality the beginnings of reading, writing and spelling cannot really be separated, as they each help to develop the other (Davin & van Staden 2005:81).

According to Johnson (1999:13), the term “reading readiness”, as opposed to emergent literacy, suggests that learners need to reach a certain level of physical and neurological maturation before they are ready to learn to read, as if this is all that determines their readiness. Johnson (1999:13) also says reading readiness implies that “conventional literacy skills should be taught in kindergarten” so learners are ready for the first-grade curriculum when they enter Grade 1. I agree with the findings because even though a learner acquires reading along a continuum of skills that gradually develop, or through emerging reading, I believe that there is a point reached when the learner moves from emergent reading to conventional reading. This is the stage that I call reading ready because the learner has reached the stage where he or she is ready or able to read. Therefore in this study the terms emergent literacy and reading readiness are synonymous.

It is evident that there is general consensus on the skills needed for reading. However, there are two opposing views of how learners learn to read: the whole language approach and the phonetic method (Davin & van Staden 2005:104), and I have discovered a third method through this literary reading: the multisensory approach (Avington 2012:6). I discuss the whole language approach first.

### 2.4.1 The whole language approach

The whole language approach advocates that learning to read is a natural process similar to learning language. It is an approach where learners enjoy reading real books which encourages them to read further (Joubert, Bester, Meyer & Evans 2013:114). Learners experiment with words and try to work out their meaning from the context of the passage and their existing knowledge (Woolfolk 2010:473). In the process of learning to read, the learner observes others reading and writing, experiments with reading and writing, and constructs his or her own written items for others to read back to them (Davin & van Staden 2005:92; Joubert et al. 2013:113). The integration of reading with listening and writing skills is also recommended in the whole language approach, as reading should not be an isolated process (Joubert et al. 2013:114).

A print-rich environment at home and school is necessary for the whole language approach so that learners are exposed to many good books and adults who read to them and to themselves (Woolfolk 2010:473). Teachers should set up a print-rich classroom to help young learners learn about and motivate them towards reading (Davin & van Staden 2005:101; Gordon & Browne 2011: 439). Environment print, or words which learners see often, helps learners relate the written words to the objects they represent and often results in them reading these words without even realising it (Davin & van Staden 2005:101).

Parental involvement is significant, too. In homes that promote literacy, there are plenty of books and parents read to their children for fun. The more families are involved in the school, the better their children's literacy is developed (Woolfolk 2010:57). Those learners whose parents read to them at home are usually the learners who find it easier to learn to read in school (Ali et al. 1980:12).

Being read to shows learners that writing comes in different forms, such as stories, poems and rhymes. They discover the little black marks on the page represent words and that print makes language permanent (Neuman 2014:1). Reading books to learners exposes them to new words, ideas and imaginings. They come to understand that stories have a beginning, middle and end and there is usually a problem that the characters have to solve. Stories can also help learners understand their world (Neuman 2014:2). Adults should teach learners the right way to hold a book, how to turn the pages of the story book, read the same book to them several times, ask learners questions relating to the story occasionally, allow them free access to books and encourage learners to make up stories for the adult to write down and read back to them (Ali et al. 1980:14; Gordon & Browne 2011:439; Johnson 1999:13; Neuman 2014:2). The value of reading to learners is that it encourages them to love books and to want to learn to read themselves. Therefore, both parents and teachers should take on the responsibility of reading to learners (Ali et al. 1980:14).

The advantages of the whole language approach are that skills are taught as the learner needs them to decipher meaning, learners learn to read at their own rate in their own way, and meaning is more important than decoding words. The disadvantages are that sight vocabulary is necessary for this method, some learners find it hard to remember words, and learners struggle to spell later in school (Davin & van Staden 2005:105).

#### **2.4.2 The phonetic method**

In contrast to the whole language approach, the phonetic method advocates that the ability to recognise sounds and words is necessary for learning to read (Woolfolk 2010:473). Knowing words helps learners make sense of the context. The phonetic method recognises the importance of teaching learners alphabetic coding and awareness of letter sounds for learning to read (Woolfolk 2010:474). Phonetic rules help learners to learn to read independently and to spell easily (Davin & van Staden 2005:105).

An important branch of the phonetic method is phonological awareness. There is a critical and causal role of phonological awareness in preschool learners' early literacy development and in learning to read (Anthony et al. 2007:119; Bailet et al. 2009:337; Schuele & Boudreau 2008:5). Phonological awareness encompasses a variety of skills. Some of these skills are what Schuele and Boudreau (2008:6) call a "simple, shallow-level" of phonological awareness, such as attending, syllabification, rhyming, and same beginning sound matching, or alliteration. These skills should be mastered by midyear of Grade R. Other skills are a more "complex, deep-level" (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:7) of phonological awareness, such as segmenting, blending and phonemic awareness, which aids early word decoding towards the end of Grade R or early Grade 1. Although phonological awareness is necessary for successful decoding, it is not enough on its own. Alphabetic script makes little sense to a learner who does not appreciate that words are composed of sounds. Once phonological awareness is established, appreciation of the representation of speech sounds in print must be acquired.

Phonological awareness is not the same as phonics. With phonological awareness, a learner can analyse the sounds of oral language as distinct from their meaning. So the learner only works with the sounds in spoken words. In phonics, however, the learner works with printed words, or letters that represent the sounds of oral language (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:6). Phonics links the auditory and the visual, and sounds are learnt one step at a time (Joubert et al. 2013:109). For example a typical consonant/vowel/consonant (cvc) word is taught, such as /c/ /a/ /t/, with a picture of a cat shown for clarity. The learner sounds the letters out loud to "read" the word (Joubert et al. 2013:109).

Understanding of phonics comes from the learner's ability to link sounds to written letters (alphabetic principle), and decoding writing and proficiency in phonics are dependent on phonological awareness (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:6). The learner does not necessarily need

to understand sound-letter correspondences in order to be proficient in phonological awareness, because there are other aspects such as rhyming and syllabification that promote phonological awareness. However, knowledge of the alphabetic principle does help to improve phonological awareness (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:6).

Phonological awareness can also be improved through teaching and intervention, and improvement in phonological awareness leads to improvement in word decoding (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:3). Improvement in word decoding leads to recognising words quickly and accurately, which leads to thinking not only about sounding words but thinking about their meaning. Skilled word decoding leads to fluent reading in the true sense of the word. Other skills that also lead to phonological awareness include elision, text discrimination and word reading (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:9).

Another linguistic factor that falls under the umbrella of the phonetic method and that has also received a lot of attention in the research literature is phonemic awareness and its importance for early reading and spelling development. Phonemic awareness is an awareness that words are made up of individual sounds. For example, Apel (2009:42) argues that the ability to quickly recognise and recall the visual representation of a word occurs secondary to the development of phonemic awareness. Learners begin to notice sounds in words such as their names. However, because learners start school at varying levels of phonemic awareness teachers should be aware of this and start teaching phonemic awareness in Grade R (Joubert et al. 2013:244). To develop phonemic awareness, a teacher might play deleted phoneme games, or challenge the learner to find the odd word out in a group of four words. Other linguistic elements include rhyming skills, rapid automatic naming, visual perceptual skills, and listening skills.

Research has found that there is a significant, positive correlation between various rhyming skills in preschoolers and late reading and spelling performance (Bailet et al. 2009:337; Neumann & Neumann 2009:259; Schiller & Willis 2008:54). Activities that focus on letter names and letter sounds, syllable counting and segmentation, rhyming, alliteration and onset-rime all help the learner to master rhyming more quickly. Using chants, and rhymes sung with physical actions and telling stories that contain words that rhyme or show alliteration all help the rhythmic patterns “stick in the brain” (Schiller & Willis 2008:54).

Rapid automatic naming (RAN) is a measure of how well the learner retrieves phonological codes from memory. There is strong evidence of the validity and importance of RAN in the reading development of preschoolers as their RAN abilities were related to important emergent literacy skills such as letter knowledge and text discrimination (Anthony et al. 2007:134). RAN also appears to improve word recall and fluency of reading (Avington 2012:16).

Learners remember what they read and see by processing information through their short-term memory. From the short-term memory it is filtered out to the long-term memory (Woolfolk 2010:240). Learners with poor visual memory often find it difficult to copy from the board. They may struggle to remember what a letter or word looks like, fail to recognise the same word on another page, or battle with comprehension later. Skills such as short-term memory, visual perception, attention to visual detail, visual motor integration and visual spatial awareness can be improved through a variety of developmentally appropriate games and activities in the classroom (Avington 2012:17). Visual spatial memory is necessary for remembering sequences of letters. Visual sequential memory is important for reading and spelling later on because reversals could completely change the meaning. Letter omissions, additions, or transpositions within words are common for learners who struggle with this skill. Recognising and remembering patterns could also be problematic (Avington 2012:19).

Learners need to be able to listen attentively and with understanding in order to promote learning in the classroom. They also need to focus on important sounds and disregard background noise (Avington 2012:16). Madaule (1949:105), in his study on listening skills found that training the preschool learner's listening requires a strong emphasis on activities such as listening to music, singing, playing a musical instrument, talking, reciting, and acting. These are activities which combine the use of sound with body movements.

Auditory sequential memory requires the learner to listen and comprehend what he or she has heard. Auditory sequential memory skills are important for spelling and for recalling events in the right order (Avington 2012:16).

The advantages of the phonetic method for helping learners to acquire reading skills are that it is fully comprehensive and structured. There are many fun ways of developing these skills in the classroom in games and creative activities. However, the disadvantages are that in this method the books tend to be boring and not well written, all the learners must be on the same level and they are all taught the same way. Furthermore, more emphasis is placed on decoding rather than meaning which might lead to poor comprehension (Davin & van Staden 2005:105).

The best option is perhaps a balanced approach where a combination of both the whole language approach and the phonetic method is used. Start with the whole language approach in Grade R and once learners can work out the rules of reading then use the phonetic method to promote independent reading skills (Davin & van Staden 2005:105; Gordon & Browne 2011:442; Joubert et al. 2013:114; Woolfolk 2010:474).

However, through this literacy review, I have discovered a third approach: a multisensory approach. I think the multisensory approach is valuable because it uses the learner's five

senses to develop early literacy skills; it is active, interactive and makes learning significant (Avington 2012:10).

### **2.4.3 The multisensory approach**

It is important to remember that the best way for preschoolers to achieve reading readiness is through play, rather than formal teaching of reading (Davin & van Staden 2005:107). One of the best methods for teaching reading readiness in a relaxed way is to use the fun activities involved in a multisensory approach. According to Avington (2012:40), a multisensory approach aids reading readiness by integrating all the sensory pathways together. The more senses used in learning, the more likely the brain will receive and remember the information. Learners use multiple senses to match new information to what they already know (Schiller & Willis 2008:54). The multisensory approach is simultaneously visual, auditory and tactile to improve memory and learning. Links are consistently being made between the visual, auditory, oral kinaesthetic, kinaesthetic and tactile pathways in learning to read (Avington 2012:40). The key is to engage as many senses as possible in preschool activities. Then, the chances of hitting the right pathway to suit each learner's style of learning are increased.

Neumann et al. (2009:313) describe a multisensory approach that incorporates the tracing of letters with whole body movements, and common household objects to guide the learner's learning of letter names, sounds, and shapes. It promotes development of print awareness, alphabet knowledge, and emergent writing skills, and increases print motivation in the learner (Neumann et al. in Neumann & Neumann 2007:258), because in addition to the tactile tracing of letters, the child's visual, auditory, kinaesthetic and gustatory senses are engaged. Such a multisensory approach can lead a learner to process and retain language knowledge more efficiently (Moats and Farrell in Neumann et al. 2009:315) and also increase motivation and interest and could thus facilitate reading readiness in preschool educational environments (Neumann et al.2009:318).

The CAPS document (2011:20) recommends that language learning should be based on principles of integration and informal, play-based learning rather than formal learning. The multisensory approach supports fun, informal learning while at the same time teaching necessary pre-reading skills.

The advantages of the multisensory approach are that learning takes place through play; it is effective and efficient; it is easy, interesting and fun for learners; it appeals to each learner's individual style of learning and it provides many opportunities for teachers to be creative in their teaching.

To conclude this section on how learners acquire reading skills, I would suggest a combination of all three approaches: the whole language approach, the phonetic method and the multisensory approach. By utilising, blending and combining all three approaches, I believe a teacher would have the best, comprehensive method of helping young learners achieve reading readiness. Pre-literacy skills such as those mentioned in 2.4.2 (the phonetic method) can also predict learners' later reading ability.

## **2.5 Pre-literacy skills as a prediction of later reading ability**

Many research studies have found that emergent literacy skills are a useful prediction of later reading and writing ability (Anthony et al 2007; Bailet et al. 2009; Neumann & Neumann 2009; Schuele & Boudreau 2008). These studies support targeting emergent literacy skills in preschool to improve subsequent reading development. One of the most important skills for predicting future reading and writing ability is phonological awareness (Anthony et al 2007:114; Bailet et al. 2009:337; Neumann & Neumann 2009:257; Schuele & Boudreau 2008:7). Phonological awareness includes skills such as knowledge of alliteration, blending and segmenting of words. Most of the learners with poor phonological awareness have problems learning to read later (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:3). Therefore, the phonological

awareness of young learners is necessary for acquiring literacy (Anthony et al. 2007:134). Because it is possible to identify learners who have not yet mastered phonological awareness by mid to late Grade R (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:7), those would be the learners who are most at risk for not being ready to read in Grade 1. By identifying such learners early enough, intervention can be initiated to help prevent problems with reading at a later stage. As with phonological awareness, a good phonological memory and recall for words and sentences heard are also reliable predictors of reading achievement (Anthony et al. 2007:114).

Another useful predictor of later reading ability is alphabet knowledge (Apel 2009:42; Bailet et al. 2009:337; Neumann & Neumann 2009:257). Alphabet knowledge or the knowledge of letter names and letter sounds also strongly predicts and is most probably causally related to later reading success, particularly for learners who are at increased risk for dyslexia. Learners' ability to learn letter-sound correspondence seems to directly correspond with their knowledge of letter names, which may help them understand the alphabetic principle (Bailet et al. 2009:337). The alphabetic principle is the learner's ability to link sounds to written letters (Joubert et al. 2013:255). Factors that appear to explain learners' successful early word-level reading and spelling include knowledge of the alphabetic principle (Apel 2009:44).

Research has also shown that the ability to rapidly and automatically name (RAN) objects, numbers, shapes and colours and so forth can also predict preschoolers' letter knowledge and later reading ability (Anthony et al. 2007:114; Apel 2009:42). Avington (2012:16) found that the ability to name objects rapidly was a good indicator of later reading skill. Learners, who say "um", "thingy" and so forth because they cannot think of the right word in time, may have similar difficulty remembering a word when reading and thus become halting readers. In order to be able to read fluently, learners need to be able to recall words rapidly from their memory and match them with the corresponding words on the page (Avington 2012:16).

There are numerous games and activities to give learners the opportunity to practice this skill, such as lining up a series of different shapes, objects collected for rhyming and alliterative games, or items from the theme table for the learner to point to and name (Avington 2012:31). Research has furthermore shown that other skills that may predict future reading ability include handwriting (Lust & Donica 2011:561), syllabification (Bailet et al. 2009:342), and print awareness, which includes motivation to explore print and awareness of print concepts (Apel 2009:43; Neumann & Neumann 2009:257). Language ability and orthographic knowledge are also known to be predictors of skill in literacy later on (Anthony et al. 2007:131).

To conclude this section, this literature study shows that there are many skills that are learned in preschool, especially in Grade R that may be useful for predicting whether or not some learners will be at risk for reading later. These skills include phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, rapid automatic naming, syllabification, print awareness, language ability, orthographic knowledge and rhyming. Teachers therefore need the sensitivity and the skills to be able to identify those learners who may be at risk for reading and to use suitable intervention and teaching methods in the classroom to try and reduce the risk. Another important component of learning to read is how second language acquisition works. Many learners learn to read in a language other than their home language.

## **2.6 Acquisition of English as a second language**

The decision to choose English as the language of learning is being made by parents in many schools in the country, possibly to the detriment of mother tongue development. However, adequate mother tongue development and literacy are needed before the introduction of an additional language (Lemmer 2010:226). Grade R teachers need to know how language is acquired, how a second language is acquired and how to adapt their classroom practice to

adjust to the needs of those learners who are learning to read in a second language (Lemmer 2010:235). For example, there should be plenty of books available in the learner's home language as well as in English (Gordon & Browne 2008:435). It is debatable whether it is better to teach English Language learners (ELL) to read first in their home language or start teaching them to learn to read in English (Woolfolk 2010:177). Out of all language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing, reading is the skill that transfers most readily to the second language (Woolfolk 2010:176).

Cummins' "interdependence hypothesis" (in Lemmer 2010:238) suggests that there is a relationship between a learner's first and second languages. The better the learner's skill in the first or home language (L1), the more easily he will be able to learn the second language (L2) (Gordon & Browne 2008:426). According to Cummins (in Lemmer 2010:239), a learner acquires a basic pool of knowledge and concepts which he can utilise in the L2 that he learns. It is only the way that he reads, writes or speaks about this core knowledge (which does not change) that he will adapt according to the grammatical rules and vocabulary of the L2 that he is using. For example, once the learner has learned the concept of basic shapes, this knowledge remains constant, and the learner only has to learn the vocabulary for describing shapes in the L2 (Lemmer 2010:239).

Similarly, a learner learning to read in another language already has the basic knowledge of how to hold a book, turn the pages, and find the author's and illustrator's names, so it is a quicker process to read in the L2 (Lemmer 2010:239). Therefore, a learner first needs the opportunity to acquire a basic education in his L1 in order to be able to draw from this knowledge when using the L2. Moreover, if the learner is not given the chance to firmly establish and maintain his L1, then there is a risk of him losing competence in the L1 when learning the L2 (Lemmer 2010:239). In South Africa, where there are 11 official languages, it

seems preferable to allow the learner to maintain his home language learning as well as learning in English.

## **2.7 Summary of the literary review**

This literary review started with an exploration into some of the global preoccupations with teaching reading to young learners. Californians, for example, are concerned about teaching reading skills to learners living in poverty, giving them the necessary tools to learn how to read, and teachers respecting poor learners. In Australia, new reading strategies, such as “Teaching Reading” and a new curriculum, learning standards and National Accelerated Literacy Program which was created to help learners in remote, rural areas were introduced. At the same time similar policies were being introduced in the United Kingdom and United States of America. The current (2016) research partnership between China and South Africa highlights the similarities between the two countries as far as Grade R literacy problems are concerned. Some of the local, South African preoccupations with reading were the same as their international counterparts. For example, we too have to teach learners living in poverty in remote, rural areas how to read. In South Africa, peer tutoring helps to give poor learners access to appropriate learning tools, such as good reading books. Government has also introduced a curriculum (CAPS) with meaningful strategies to improve literacy from Grade R upwards. Next, I reviewed literature to understand how learners acquire reading skills.

It is clear that young learners acquire reading skills in phases and that English is a complex language in which to learn to read, so learners need to develop many complex skills to become successful readers. Some of the factors affecting the acquisition of reading skills are home and school environments, and the learner’s physical, perceptual, intellectual, language and emotional development. There are two opposing views of how learners acquire reading skills: the whole language approach and the phonetic method. The whole language approach

treats reading as a natural process through learners experimenting with reading and writing, storytelling, book handling, print rich environments, parental and teacher involvement. In contrast, the phonetic method is a skills-based, structured method of teaching separate skills which combine to enable a learner to read. I also uncovered a third approach, a multi-sensory method which is hands-on and especially appropriate for early childhood development, as it is fun and creative. There is no one-size-fits-all remedy for preschool reading readiness, and it seems that the best option might be to use a combination of all three methods described.

The literature study clearly showed how emergent literacy skills could predict a learner's future reading and writing ability. I realised how important it is for teachers to understand how emergent literacy skills could indicate future reading problems, be knowledgeable enough to identify timeously those learners who are struggling, and be able to implement a teaching strategy to improve such learners' ability. There are many ways to introduce fun games and activities that can easily be implemented in the classroom using everyday materials at little or no expense to help learners develop emergent literacy skills.

Lastly, I explored how learners acquire English as a second language and how learning English as a second language may affect learning to read in English. In the next section I present a theoretical framework within which to anchor the findings of this study.

## **2.8 Theoretical framework**

### **2.8.1 Introduction**

Reading is a thinking process, so emergent literacy, or reading readiness should be considered in the context of learners' developing cognitive skills. The theories of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bandura are relevant to the discussion of emergent literacy because they help explain the cognitive concepts formed by young learners. This study was conceptualised in terms of and based on the following theoretical frameworks:

Theories of teaching and learning:

- ❖ Cognitive learning theory (Piaget in Gordon & Browne 2011:116)
- ❖ Sociocultural learning theory (Vygotsky in Woolfolk 2010:42)
- ❖ Social cognitive learning theory (Bandura in Woolfolk 2010:349)

### **2.8.2 Piaget's cognitive theory of learning**

Jean Jacques Piaget's research has given us an exciting, thorough and complex theory of intelligence and learner development (Gordon & Browne 2011:116). His cognitive theory of thinking and learning is an interactive one, as the learner is actively involved in the learning process on an ongoing basis (Gordon & Browne 2011:117). Piaget also maintained that learning is constructed as learners tend to organise their lives and adapt to the world around them (Woolfolk 2010: 49). Constructed learning is known as a constructivist theory which developed from Piaget's theory of cognitive development. The learner is viewed as having the ability to construct knowledge (Ali et al. 1980:10) by developing and revising his own knowledge (Gordon & Browne 2011:117). Emergent literacy, therefore, is partly discovered because learners construct their own ideas about literacy while participating in literacy activities such as reading (Johnson 1999:5). According to constructivist theory, knowledge does not exist in the environment or within the learner, as it is constructed as the learner interacts with his environment (Ali et al. 1980:10). In order for learners to interact with, or get involved in, literary experiences, the adults in their life need to provide a stimulating, print-rich environment both at home and at school. Parents and teachers also need to be available to learners to model reading experiences, interact with them, provide relevant experiences for them and answer their questions (Ali et al. 1980:10).

Two important basic tendencies of Piaget's theory for teaching are organisation and adaptation. Organisation is an ongoing process of arranging information and experience into

mental categories in order to understand and interact with the world (Woolfolk 2010:32). Piaget called these mental categories schemes. Schemes are the building blocks of thinking and learning. For example a learner may recognise a letter (small scheme), then a letter and its sound (new, more advanced scheme), then a series of letters to make a word and so forth. Adaptation, where the learner adjusts to the environment, is explained in Piaget's notion of equilibrium versus disequilibrium, which is a mental process of thinking or cognition. As a learner experiences the world, he takes in new information and either fits it into what he already knows, an existing scheme (assimilation), or changes his knowledge or existing scheme to create a new place for it (accommodation) in order to achieve a sense of mental balance (equilibrium) (Gordon & Browne 2011:117; Woolfolk 2010:33). Teachers aim to keep learners in just the right state of disequilibrium so that they are neither bored because the work is too easy, nor discouraged because the work is too challenging. This means that teachers must not only know their learners and what level of literacy they are on at any stage, but they must also have the knowledge and experience to challenge each learner to achieve his individual next level of learning without making it too difficult for him (Woolfolk 2010:49).

Piaget (Gordon & Browne 2011:117) identified four stages of cognitive development which show that thinking and learning develop in a defined, general pattern as learners adapt to the environment:

- ❖ Sensorimotor stage                    0-2 years
- ❖ Preoperational stage                2-6 years
- ❖ Concrete operational stage        6-12 years
- ❖ Formal operational stage         12 years - adulthood

Each learner will go through these stages in this order, but at his own individual rate according to his experiences. A typical Grade R learner aged six years would be in the preoperational stage. The ability to form and use symbols, such as using the word *cat* or a

picture of a cat is a major achievement of the preoperational period and leads to the mental operations of the next concrete operational stage (Woolfolk 2010:34) and the more formal teaching environment of Grade 1. If a teacher knows the stages and levels of thinking of the learners in her class she can guide them towards new and challenging opportunities for thinking and learning (Gordon & Browne 2011:121). Piaget's theories encourage teachers to consider how learners learn a skill, such as learning to read, and how best to facilitate the learning process (Gordon & Browne 2011:117). All adults should be aware that learners can reason and think if they have the right sort of resources available for their cognitive stage of development. To apply Piaget's cognitive theory when working with learners, teachers should know that young learners think differently from adults. Grade R learners:

- ❖ need many materials to explore and describe,
- ❖ think in a concrete manner and cannot always think out things in their heads,
- ❖ make decisions based on what they see, rather than on what is logical to adults, and
- ❖ need challenging questions and time to make their own decisions and come to their own conclusions (Gordon & Browne 2011:122).

Parents and teachers need to provide concrete objects and materials for learners to investigate and discover. Learners need time to play and explore their own world. Adults can facilitate thinking and learning for learners by allowing them to find their own solutions to problems rather than telling them. Teachers and parents can encourage critical thinking by asking pertinent questions to encourage learners to reflect on why they think or act a certain way (Gordon & Browne 2011:121).

Another influential theorist in cognitive development is Vygotsky. His theory ties cognitive development to culture and societal influences.

### 2.8.3 Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory focuses on the learner and includes notions of culture and values in learner development, especially in the areas of language and self-identity (Gordon & Browne 2011:122). Vygotsky emphasises that learners are influenced by their culture, which includes their family, community and socio-economic status. In contrast to Piaget he found that a learner's learning is influenced by the values embedded in their social culture. There are three ways that adults pass culture to learners:

- ❖ Imitative learning,
- ❖ Instructed learning (as at school), and
- ❖ Collaborative learning (working together as in guided help or play).

(Gordon & Browne 2011:123)

Similar to Piaget, Vygotsky advocated play as a useful learning tool because the interaction between learners builds language and development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development advocates that what we have learned can be traced back to our interactions with others (Woolfolk 2010: 42). Accordingly, a learner's emergent literacy is based on adults modelling and supporting literacy activities at home and at school, which encourage learners to adapt their own learning to social norms (Johnson 1999:5). By interacting with language in the form of stories, poems and rhymes, many learners acquire phonological awareness on their own, although some learners will still need to be taught these skills (Johnson 1999:5). Concepts such as reading are first co-constructed during shared activities between the learners and an adult, and then the process is internalised by the learner and becomes part of his or her cognitive development (Woolfolk 2010:43).

Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) is similar in some ways to Piaget's theory of equilibrium. As part of a learner's learning, some things are just beyond his or her

capability at that point in time. The ZPD is the gap between the actual developmental level that the learner is already on and the next level of potential development that the learner could achieve with assistance from a parent or teacher (Oguz 2007:11). Teachers must be aware of what the learner already knows so that they do not teach it, which would be boring. They should rather teach what the learner could understand with guidance, which is interesting and challenging. If a teacher knows a learner's ZPD for a skill such as letter/sound relationships, then the teacher may predict how that learner will soon be able to use that skill independently (Oguz 2007:11). On the other hand teachers should not teach what the learner is not yet ready or able to learn, as this would be too difficult and therefore discouraging (Woolfolk 2010:47). In this manner, parents and teachers play a vital role in the learner's reading acquisition. Older learners who are more experienced or competent can also help a younger learner to learn to read. Vygotsky called assistance such as this from parents, teachers and other learners scaffolding because it is a useful structure that supports the learner in learning just as scaffolding surrounds a building for others to work on (Oguz 2007:11). Other people provide hints, clues, advice and structure to help a learner master a skill or concept such as developing language and the tools for learning to read (Gordon & Browne 2011:123). As the learner becomes more proficient, the teacher may slowly withdraw the scaffolding so that he may practice the skill independently (Oguz 2007:11).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has five suggestions for teaching the learner in the classroom:

- ❖ The whole family and culture must be included in the learner's learning,
- ❖ Positive teacher/learner relationships are necessary to promote learning,
- ❖ Know the psychological and cultural habits and customs of the learner's society,
- ❖ Know the value of play for learning, and
- ❖ Plan for assisted and cooperative learning to appeal to learners' individual differences.

(Gordon & Browne 2011:124).

The last theorist discussed in this section is Albert Bandura. Bandura refined behavioural theories to emphasise learning through observation of others which became a social learning theory. However, he found the reinforcement and punishment of behaviour in social learning theory too limited for his needs, so he expanded his theory to include cognitive factors and reformed his thinking into social cognitive theory (Woolfolk 2010:349).

#### **2.8.4 Bandura's social cognitive theory**

Bandura's social cognitive theory finds that learners learn by observing what parents and teachers model and the results of what they do (social). However, learners also think, believe, expect, anticipate, self-regulate, compare and judge (cognitive). So social cognitive theory applied to the acquisition of reading skills shows us that learners need to observe and experience adults enjoying reading good quality books in a print-rich environment, so that they are motivated to imitate their behaviour and gain pleasure and knowledge from the experience too (Woolfolk 2010:349).

According to Bandura, there are three factors involved in learning where the environment and the individual mutually affect each other to achieve a desired result. He called this system a triarchic reciprocal causality where three forces –environmental, personal, and behavioural – are constantly interacting with each other influencing and being influenced by each other. The print-rich home or classroom (environmental), for example, motivates the learner to want to learn to read (personal), so he feels capable of achieving this (behavioural) in reciprocal causality (Woolfolk 2010:349).

A second topic that Bandura believed in is the notion of self-efficacy and agency. Self-efficacy is a person's sense of being able to deal effectively with a particular task (Woolfolk 2010:350). It is also the feelings or thoughts about how competent a learner perceives himself

to be (Gordon & Browne 2011:560). For example, if you think you can learn to read, you can. Self-efficacy relates to the learner's own learning and motivation in a specific task in his life without having to compare it to someone else's ability or listen to someone else's opinion of it. Agency refers to the learner's ability to coordinate his learning skills, motivation and emotions to reach a goal (Woolfolk 2010:350). There are four sources of self-efficacy expectations that Bandura identified:

- ❖ Mastery experiences – the learner's own direct experiences; success breeds success,
- ❖ Physiological and emotional arousal – if the learner is anxious facing a task, it lowers efficacy; if the learner is confident when attempting the task, it raises efficacy,
- ❖ Vicarious experiences – when a teacher or parent models achievement, if the learner identifies with the role model his self-efficacy will be improved, and
- ❖ Social persuasion – if the learner receives words of encouragement or positive feedback on performance, self-efficacy will be increased.

(Woolfolk 2010:351).

The third concept that Bandura found important in social cognitive theory is modelling, or learning from others. Modelling can also be a source of self-efficacy as seen in the vicarious experiences mentioned above. The individuality and maturity of the learner observing makes a difference in learning. As he develops, the learner can pay attention for longer periods, has a better memory for storing information and has a desire to learn (Woolfolk 2010:351). When observing the behaviour of others, if the learner respects the role model he will imitate him. Therefore, parents, teachers, older siblings and heroes usually make good models. Through imitating others who are similar to him, the learner learns what behaviour is socially acceptable for people like him (Woolfolk 2010:352). The five outcomes of Bandura's social cognitive theory of observational learning for teaching the learner in the classroom are:

- ❖ Directing attention – if one learner starts looking at books, then others may want to join in too,
- ❖ Encouraging existing behaviours – learners look for cues from others to do the right thing,
- ❖ Changing inhibitions – if one learner is rewarded for bringing an item for the letter of the week table, other learners are encouraged to bring something the next day,
- ❖ Teaching new behaviours – the teacher might model pointing to words as she reads to model the kind of behaviour she wants learners to copy, and
- ❖ Arousing emotions – if the teacher shouts at a learner because he cannot match sounds to letters, it might make other learners anxious to attempt the task for fear of receiving the same treatment.

(Woolfolk 2010:353).

Bandura provides teachers with some useful insights into how to teach learners in the classroom. Parents can also learn a lot from his social cognitive theory and the importance of how they model behaviour to their children.

#### **2.8.5 Factors that affect reading readiness in relation to the position statement of NAEYC**

According to NAEYC (1998:2), the factors that affect reading readiness are learners' diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities nowadays; learners' exposure to reading experiences throughout their early childhood years; outdated teaching practices and views of literacy development; and a lack of current policies and resources to ensure that preschool teachers are qualified to support learners' literacy development. NAEYC's factors provide a useful tool for understanding what constitutes reading readiness.

## **2.9 Summary of the theoretical frameworks**

Firstly, I explored Piaget's theory of cognitive learning where the learner is actively involved in the learning process. Concepts such as learners constructing knowledge through their interaction with the environment, organisation, adaptation and schemes all provide valuable ideas for teaching learners. Piaget's four stages of cognitive development explain the learner's thinking as he transitions from one stage to the next. Secondly, I investigated Vygotsky's sociocultural theory with its emphasis on the cultural influence that the family and community have on learning which included imitative, instructed and collaborative learning. His theory also discusses the interactivity between learners, between learners and language and between learners and adults for learning. Vygotsky's zone of proximal learning indicates how important it is for teachers to plan activities to stretch the learner towards the next learning level without frustrating him. The notion of scaffolding shows teachers how to support learners in learning and his sociocultural theory provides useful suggestions for teaching in the classroom. Lastly, I looked at Bandura's social cognitive theory which explains that learners learn by observing and imitating others. His system of triarchic reciprocal causality, concepts of self-efficacy and agency, and his belief in modelling or learning from others provide us with important perceptions about how learners learn. The five outcomes of Bandura's social cognitive theory of observational learning are valuable tools for teaching in the classroom.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I positioned the current study within existing literature. This literature study confirms the need for exploration into the factors that affect reading readiness. I also presented three theoretical underpinnings which offer a lens through which to understand and make sense of the data. In the next chapter, I discuss the paradigmatic perspectives, research design, and methodology that framed this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I discussed the literature review and the theoretical framework that guided this study. In this chapter, I discuss my methodological choices. I describe the selected paradigmatic perspectives and the research design. I then provide a detailed account of the methodology, including sample selection, data collection strategies and data analysis procedures. Thereafter, I discuss the issues of trustworthiness and ethical guidelines that I adhered to within this study. Lastly, I reflect on my role as researcher.

### **3.2 Paradigmatic perspectives**

A paradigm is a set of assumptions or beliefs about basic aspects of reality which form a particular world-view, and it is the lens through which reality is interpreted (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:47; Punch & Oancea 2014:85). The paradigm is based on the nature of truth (ontology), how we determine the truth (epistemological assumptions) and what conceptualisations (qualitative research designs) are suitable (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:70). According to Nieuwenhuis (2013b:50), one can distinguish between two umbrella paradigms in research: quantitative and qualitative. A third paradigm, based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches, is known as the mixed methods approach (Ivankova, Creswell & Plano Clark 2013:257). I adopted a qualitative paradigm.

#### **3.2.1 Methodological paradigm: Qualitative enquiry**

The quantitative research paradigm tends to follow a positivist approach which stems from a traditional world-view where the scientific method is used to find truth (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:50). Positivist researchers believe there are natural, physical laws and rules that determine human behaviour and that these physical laws need to be discovered or constructed

(Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011:31; Nieuwenhuis 2013b:53). According to this scientific method only objective, measurable, predictable, controllable and observable facts can be the basis for science (Cohen et al. 2011:31; Jansen 2013:21).

On the other hand, the qualitative research paradigm tends to follow an interpretivist or constructivist approach which stems from an emergent world view. As one finds the scientific method may not provide the answers to the questions about what truth is (ontology) and how to discover this truth, (epistemology), so an alternative paradigm has formed (Nieuwenhuis 2013b: 50). Jansen (2013:21) suggests interpretivism places importance on the meaning that individuals assign to their experiences; interpretation of human behaviour is necessary because the facts do not speak for themselves; no distinction is made between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied; and the social context of the participants is crucial in understanding human behaviour. Jansen (2013:21) concludes that truth is relevant and subject to these elements.

The qualitative research approach discovers truth by focusing on people and how and why they interact with each other (Nieuwenhuis 2013b:54). I interacted with teachers of Grade R learners at the schools where they teach and mothers of Grade R learners at the schools attended by their respective children. As part of my qualitative research study, I held interviews and asked general, open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their opinions and experiences about reading readiness (Ivankova et al. 2013: 259). I took notes during the interviews, transcribed the data gathered and used this data to describe and analyse what participants think and perceive about the phenomenon (Ivankova et al. 2013: 259; McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 315). I then interpreted the data.

I found the qualitative research method was more appropriate than the quantitative research method for this study based on the views of McMillan and Schumacher (2006:13):

- ❖ The assumptions about the world were multiple realities such as interviews of teachers and mothers about a social situation rather than a single reality which was measured by an instrument.
- ❖ The research purpose was to understand a social situation from participants' perspectives, rather than to establish relationships between measured variables.
- ❖ The research process and methods were flexible, changing strategies with a design that emerged as data were collected, rather than procedures that were established before the study began.
- ❖ The study was a case study rather than, for example, an experimental design to reduce error and bias.
- ❖ The researcher was immersed in the social situation rather than detached and using an instrument.
- ❖ The importance of context in the study was aimed at detailed context-bound summary statements, rather than universal context-free generalisations.

Based on the above criteria I selected an interpretivist qualitative paradigm for this study. I achieved this by analysing and describing participants' individual and collective beliefs, thoughts, perceptions and experiences.

### **3.2.2 An interpretivist epistemology**

The ontological assumption in this study is that social reality is constructed when individuals and groups assign meaning to events, people, and objects to make sense of their world (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:315). People organise these constructions into perceptions, beliefs and points of view which guide their behaviour and way of thinking (Maree & van der Westhuizen 2013:31; McMillan & Schumacher 2006:315). Ontological assumptions lead to epistemological assumptions about how we acquire knowledge. In this study I set out to understand the phenomenon of reading readiness from the participants' perspectives. I then

analysed the data gathered from interviewing the participants and recorded the meanings they attributed to this phenomenon.

The view of knowledge and how we know the world in this study is interpretive. Socially constructed behaviour needs to be interpreted because the facts do not speak for themselves. Interpretivism also highlights the meaning that people give to their experiences (Jansen 2013:21). My study followed an interpretivist paradigm with a qualitative approach to explore and understand how teachers teach learners to be ready to read in their classrooms as part of a daily programme, how mothers prepare their children for learning to read at home, and how they explain these events to me in their interview.

### **3.3 Research methodology**

In this section, I discuss the research methodology selected. I also discuss my selection of the sites and participants, as well as the data collection strategies I employed to answer the research questions. Table 3.1 describes the research process followed.

#### **3.3.1 Research design and approach**

The research design is a strategy which follows from the underlying research paradigm. The paradigmatic basis for this study is interpretivist with a qualitative approach. The research design forms the general plan, strategy, aim and purposes of the research, and describes the conditions, procedures and methods for selecting participants as well as for collecting and analysing data (Cohen et al. 2011:118; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:70). For this study, I utilised a multiple case study research design.

Table 3.1: Research process

Research methodology	
Purpose of this study	To explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by Grade R teachers and mothers in selected preschools in Gauteng Province.
Research design	Multiple case study
Research questions	<p><b>Primary research question:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ What factors do Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness?</li> </ul> <p><b>Secondary research questions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ How do Grade R teachers address these factors in the classroom?</li> <li>❖ Who are the people involved in the learners' reading readiness?</li> <li>❖ How do they contribute to reading readiness?</li> </ul>
Research sites and participants	<p><b>Research sites:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 6 preschools in Gauteng, South Africa</li> </ul> <p><b>Participants:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ 9 teachers from the research sites</li> <li>❖ 5 mothers from the research sites</li> </ul>
Data collection strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Individual interviews</li> <li>❖ Focus group interview</li> <li>❖ Observations</li> <li>❖ Research journal</li> </ul>
Data documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Digital voice recordings</li> <li>❖ Handwritten notes</li> <li>❖ Photographs</li> </ul>
Data analysis and interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Transcriptions of interviews</li> <li>❖ Thematic content analysis</li> <li>❖ Coding and categorisation</li> </ul>
Trustworthiness criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Multi-methods</li> <li>❖ Verbatim accounts</li> <li>❖ Member checking</li> <li>❖ Credibility</li> <li>❖ Transferability</li> <li>❖ Dependability</li> <li>❖ Confirmability</li> </ul>
Ethical considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Informed consent and voluntary participation</li> <li>❖ Protection from harm</li> <li>❖ Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity</li> </ul>

### 3.3.2 The multiple case study design

There are several interactive, face-to-face research approaches to choose from, such as ethnographic, case study, grounded theory (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:71; Punch & Oancea 2014:256), phenomenological, critical studies (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:315), conceptual studies and historical research (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:71).

I chose the case study design for my study because it is intensive. A case study enables the researcher to focus on a single phenomenon in depth by examining a limited sample of participants; it examines a bounded system in detail; it is a systematic and detailed investigation of a particular event in its context; the researcher defines the case and its limits; and it usually uses qualitative data and methods of analysis (McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 26; Rule & John 2011:10).

It is critical to define precisely what the case is, and what the case is of in a study (Punch & Oancea 2014:2706). The case in this study is reading readiness and the focus within the study is Grade R learners. Therefore this study is a case of the reading readiness of Grade R learners. In a case study approach, the researcher needs to decide exactly what will constitute the case as a bounded system (Rule & John 2011:19) and to describe the boundaries clearly (Punch & Oancea 2014:270). To delimit the case as a bounded system the researcher may consider aspects such as the unit of analysis, and spatial, temporal and thematic forms of delimitation (Rule & John 2011:20). In this study the boundaries of the case are reading readiness as the unit of analysis, the temporal focus is on the present situation of Grade R learners, the spatial setting is preschools within the geographical area of Gauteng Province, and the issue to be investigated within the case is factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners.

Once the boundedness of the case has been addressed, the case study researcher decides whether to choose one or several cases to study in depth (Punch & Oancea 2014:269; Rule & John: 2011:21). There are two types of case study distinguished by Rule & John (2011:20), single-case and multiple cases. In a single case study, the case is generally an exceptional example that can be studied in depth, it is readily accessible and the researcher has inside knowledge as a participant. The disadvantages of the single-case study are that there is no other case to compare the findings to and the researcher could be biased because of her insider knowledge (Rule & John 2011:21). For these reasons the single-case study did not suit the purposes of this study, so I considered the multiple cases approach.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:26), a multiple case study describes the significance of a lived experience, such as the daily teaching of a subject by teachers. Some of the advantages of the multiple case study approach (as opposed to a single case study) are that different cases can be chosen to represent the type of case better and it allows for breadth and depth of focus (Punch & Oancea 2014:256). Furthermore, in a multiple case study the same methods and data collection and analysis instruments can be used each time; and it might be possible to make generalisations if the multiple case studies reveal common findings (Punch & Oancea 2014:256). The case study design focuses on one phenomenon irrespective of the number of sites or participants for the study (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:316). I decided to study the case in depth at multiple sites (schools) in order to gain a better representation of the cases and to increase the breadth and depth of focus on Grade R learners. I was able to use the same methods and data collection strategies at each site. Therefore my multiple case study design refers to the experiences and perspectives of teachers and mothers on the single phenomenon, but as reflected upon in multiple cases (multiple sites – schools, teachers and mothers) to allow the reader to understand ideas more clearly (Cohen et al. 2011: 289).

However, some of the disadvantages of the multiple case study design are the temptation to look for similarities and ignore differences; the individual context of each case might be disregarded when looking for common generalities; it might be difficult to replicate the same methods in different cases; and the findings might not be truly representative of all cases of the population (Rule & John 2011:22). I overcame these difficulties by honestly reporting what the interviewees said in the interviews even if it did not conform to my general findings and by citing verbatim some of the statements interviewees made in order to maintain the individual context of each case. Furthermore, I ensured that the findings were reliable and valid by using multi-method data collection strategies for triangulation, so that they were as representative as possible of all cases of the population. I was able to replicate the same methods in different cases.

To plan a case study design, a general research question is posed to guide the case in a particular direction and the contribution of the study is considered, whether it will contribute to theory, practice, policy or to social issues and action (McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 317). I intended my research to contribute to the field of teaching practice and to other education research on the topic. Grade R teachers and those individuals participating in the study should also benefit from this study. Therefore, the primary research question asked in this study was:

What factors do Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness?

The multiple case study design was appropriate for this study because it supports interaction and helped me gain a deeper understanding, insight and knowledge of the educational issue (reading readiness) under investigation. There are various types of cases in a multiple case study design, such as typical cases, diverse cases, deviant cases and influential cases (Rule & John 2011:22). I selected cases, or sites, that were typical because they were all private

preschools within the geographical location of Johannesburg, Gauteng offering Grade R. However, each site had unique characteristics that are discussed more fully in the discussion on the sampling procedure which follows.

To summarise this section, this study followed a qualitative and interpretive multiple case study design. I started by purposefully selecting five schools, then five Grade R teachers and five mothers, one from each preschool as sites and participants respectively. I purposefully selected a sixth preschool and another four Grade R teachers as focus group participants. The sampling procedure is discussed in detail in the next section.

### **3.4 Sampling procedure**

Sampling refers to the process used to select specific participants from the population for study (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:79), because it is not possible to conduct research on everyone (Punch & Oancea 2014:346). Qualitative research, especially educational research, is usually based on nonprobability and purposeful sampling (Creswell 2013:206; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:79). Nonprobability, as opposed to random sampling, is a sampling procedure in which the probability of selecting participants from the population is not known (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:474). Nonprobability sampling is relatively simple and inexpensive to organise (Cohen et al. 2011:155; Maree & Pietersen 2013:177). Two types of nonprobability sampling are purposeful (or purposive) sampling and convenience sampling.

Purposeful sampling is a type of sampling that allows the researcher to choose participants who are richly knowledgeable and who can provide insight or different insights into the topic of study (Creswell 2013:206; Rule & John 2011:21). The sampling is done with a specific topic (such as reading readiness in Grade R learners) in mind where only certain participants who have the necessary skills and meet the requirements are selected (Maree & Pietersen 2013: 178). In a case study, the researcher is less concerned with the representiveness of the

sample and more interested in the detailed and reliable account of the case (Cohen et al. 2011:155; Punch & Oancea 2014:349; Rule & John 2011:64), so purposeful sampling suited the purposes of my study.

Convenience sampling is often used in case studies where the researcher selects participants who are conveniently nearby (Punch & Oancea 2014:347), readily available and easily accessible for when they are needed. The sample is cost effective and relatively quick. It only represents itself and does not make generalisations about the whole population (Cohen et al. 2011: 156; Maree & Pietersen 2013:177). I also used convenience sampling in my study because all of the sites were located within the geographical area of Johannesburg, Gauteng and I arranged my interviews with participants at times that suited us both, usually straight after school and at the preschools where they teach.

The term “participants” in this study refers to the group of individuals from which the sample was taken (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:475). The selection criteria for the teacher participants for this study required that they:

- ❖ were employed Grade R teachers in Johannesburg, Gauteng,
- ❖ had a recognised qualification to teach Grade R, such as a Bachelor of Education (Foundation Phase), and
- ❖ had at least two years’ experience in teaching Grade R.

The selection criteria for the mother participants required that they:

- ❖ had a child in Grade R during the year of study (2015) at one of the preschools in my sample.

The selection criteria for the teacher participants for the focus group interview for this study required that they:

- ❖ were employed Grade R teachers at School 6,
- ❖ had a recognised qualification to teach Grade R, such as a Bachelor of Education (Foundation Phase), and
- ❖ had at least two years' experience in teaching Grade R.

As it was impossible to interview every teacher and mother in the population, data for this study were gathered from nine teachers and five mothers, in six preschools in Johannesburg.

The selection criteria for the pre-primary schools required that they:

- ❖ were registered with an appropriate authority, such as the Independent Schools Association of South Africa (ISASA),
- ❖ were situated within the geographical area of Johannesburg, Gauteng, and
- ❖ offered Grade R in the preschool rather than in the primary school.

I used a purposeful sampling procedure in order to select Grade R teachers who could provide rich and in-depth information because of their knowledge, training and experience in teaching Grade R learners; and mothers who experienced and knew how their children were learning in Grade R. I deliberately chose mothers, rather than fathers, to participate in this study because in my experience, they are often the parents who spend more quiet time with young learners, generally attend parent/teacher interviews and meetings and remember milestones such as when their child started reading (Bornstein 1998:1). The participants also had to be located geographically in the Johannesburg area, easily accessible and readily available for the study (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:125). I asked the principal at each site to choose the most qualified and experienced Grade R teacher on the staff who might be willing and available to be interviewed. I also asked the principals to each choose a mother of a learner in a Grade R class at their respective schools who would be likely to give her insight into and thoughts on how her child learned to read. The principals knew their staff and the

parents at their school so they appeared to be the most reliable people to help me invite the most suitable participants. Details of the participants are provided in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 Description of participants

Participant	Interview site	Role in education	Gender	Participated in
Teacher 1	School 1	Grade R teacher	Female	Interview
Teacher 2	School 2	Grade R teacher	Female	Interview
Teacher 3	School 3	Grade R teacher	Female	Interview
Teacher 4	School 4	Grade R teacher	Female	Interview
Teacher 5	School 5	Grade R teacher	Female	Interview
Teacher 6	School 6	Principal and Grade R teacher	Female	Focus group
Teacher 7	School 6	Grade R teacher	Female	Focus group
Teacher 8	School 6	Grade R teacher	Female	Focus group
Teacher 9	School 6	Grade R teacher	Female	Focus group
Mother 1	School 1	Mother of Grade R learner	Female	Interview
Mother 2	School 2	Mother of Grade R learner	Female	Interview
Mother 3	School 3	Mother of Grade R learner	Female	Interview
Mother 4	School 4	Mother of Grade R learner	Female	Interview
Mother 5	School 5	Mother of Grade R learner	Female	Interview

The advantage of a purposeful sampling procedure is to select people who are knowledgeable and informative and who can therefore best help the researcher understand the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell 2013:208). Purposeful sampling enabled me to gain insight into the topic by studying a few participants' experiences in an in-depth manner (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:319).

The sample was convenient because in order to gain different perspectives, I selected six preschools at sites which were within the geographical location of Johannesburg, making them practical and convenient for me to access. The sample was also purposeful because I chose six different types of preschool to increase the representativeness of the study. Fewer than six preschools would not give me sufficient information for data analysis and more than six schools would be impractical as far as time and cost were concerned (Maree & Pietersen 2011:178). Furthermore, the participants were homogeneous because they were all Grade R teachers or parents of a learner in Grade R, so a small sample at a few sites was sufficient

(Maree & Pietersen 2011:178). I therefore conducted sampling twice; once for the schools and then again for the teachers and mothers. A description of each preschool follows.

#### **3.4.1 School 1: A private Christian preschool**

The first school (School 1) I selected is a private Christian school situated on the grounds of a Baptist Church. The language of teaching at School 1 is English. The majority of the learners at the school do not come from the local neighbourhood, however. They come from the nearby township which has a population of 31,716<sup>4</sup> Black Africans who speak Northern Sotho (16.7%), Zulu (14.4%), Venda (13.2%) and other languages (44.5%). It is not clear what the other languages might be. It is likely that the languages of the nearby township are representative of the languages spoken by the learners in the school. The housing in the township consists of informal dwellings without electricity.

School 1 aims to meet the needs of and improve learning opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged Black African learners living in the nearby township. The school has 270 learners enrolled in Grades RR to 7 in classes of 20 to 30 learners. I chose this school because it is under-resourced, but has sufficient financial support in the form of a government subsidy and monetary and other donations from the church and church members to significantly improve the lives of these learners.

Pedagogically, the school follows a CAPS method of teaching with a low emphasis on learner-centred play activities and more emphasis on teacher-guided, structured academic activities. In the Grade R classroom there is a dress-up corner for imaginary play and two blocks of time are allocated to play amounting to an hour and a half of outdoor free play. However, the learners also learn letters and sounds, how to distinguish shapes and colour, tell the time and so forth. As far as reading readiness is concerned, they follow the Letterland

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<sup>4</sup> All demographical information was taken from Wikipedia 2011.

programme. Letterland is a phonics-based approach to teaching reading to young learners. The Letterland characters transform plain black letter shapes into learner-friendly pictograms and they all live in an imaginary place called Letterland. Simple stories about the Letterland characters explain letter sounds and shapes, enabling learners to progress to word building and reading. Actions for the alphabet are linked to each character, forging a strong connection between the action, letter shape and sound (Wendon, de Rosa & Holt 2014:2).

### **3.4.2 School 2: A private Methodist preschool**

School 2 is a private Methodist preschool located in an informal township in Johannesburg, where 76% of the population lives in informal housing. The population (138,000) is 98% Black African, and the main first languages spoken in the area are Northern Sotho (22.8%) and Zulu 19.9%. The language of teaching is mainly English.

School 2 is run as a joint initiative between the Methodist Church and the local community. The school has 560 Black African learners from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Grades RR to 4. All the learners receive breakfast in the form of cereal or porridge on alternate days, a fruit at tea time and a hot meal for lunch, daily. The parents pay approximately 60% of the monthly school fee and this is supplemented by pledge donors who contribute towards the remainder of the running costs of the school. The balance is made up through fundraising, new donors and once-off donations from corporate entities.

The teachers are qualified, trained and experienced to ensure an excellent standard of education. Pedagogically, the school follows the CAPS teaching approach blended with a faith-based early childhood programme. The CAPS approach focuses on the social and emotional development of the learners and the curriculum promotes language, creativity, cognition and physical movement (Gordon & Browne 2011:47). The faith-based early

childhood programme promotes Methodist religious beliefs within the context of the traditional programme and curriculum (Gordon & Browne 2011:55). School 2 also follows the Letterland method of teaching phonics. I selected this school because it is run by a team made up of members of the church and the local community who endeavour to provide learners who live in an under-resourced neighbourhood with a comprehensive educational programme which covers their spiritual, mental, physical, emotional and social development.

### **3.4.3 School 3: A private Christian preschool**

The third school (School 3) I selected is a private Christian school with 200 learners between Grades RRR and R. There are five Grade R classes with 25 learners each. The population (18,000) is largely White (64%), followed by Black African (23.8%) and Indian (7.6%). English is the main first language (67.4%), then Afrikaans (14.5%) and Zulu (4.3%). The language of teaching is English.

I chose School 3 because it uses a developmental approach to learning where learners are encouraged to actively explore materials and activities which are designed to meet the emergent interests and skills of the learner (Gordon & Browne 2011:46). Pedagogically, academics are presented as a differentiated curriculum from Grade RRR – Grade R which means that teaching is individualised to meet the various needs of all the learners in one class. The daily programme ensures the social, emotional and spiritual areas of development are equally as important as the cognitive and physical areas. This holistic approach develops good self-esteem and social skills, which enables learners to learn effectively. Therefore, by laying down a strong foundation for academic skills, the fundamentals of reading, writing and mathematics are enhanced.

#### **3.4.4 School 4: A private Montessori preschool**

Pedagogically, Montessori classrooms are prepared in such a way that the learners require the minimum amount of assistance, or interference from the teacher. The teacher's chief role is to observe the learners. Learners are free to move from one classroom to another and from indoors to outdoors and back again. The furniture is the appropriate size for a learner and moveable. Resources are set out on low shelves for the learners to help themselves and little mats are available for them to sit and work on. Learners generally work individually or in pairs at their own pace and competitiveness is not encouraged, for example through the use of rewards and punishment (Gordon & Browne 2011: 367).

The Montessori school (School 4) I selected for this study works within the CAPS framework of government's educational system, but at the same time remains true to the Montessori way. It is a private preschool with 70 learners from Grades RRR to R. The population (11,514) of the area is mainly Black African (62%), then Indian (20.2%) and White (12.2%). The main first language spoken is English (45.6%), followed by Zulu (12.0%), Tswana (6.8%) and Xhosa (6.8%). The language of teaching at School 4 is English. The classes are small with a ratio of 12 learners to one teacher, which creates a home from home environment and provides each learner with special attention. I chose School 4 because the Montessori Method of teaching continues to influence education (Gordon & Browne 2011:36), and the school is well-equipped with concrete educational materials of a high quality.

#### **3.4.5 School 5: A private preschool**

The area where School 5 is situated has a population of approximately 30,000 made up of mainly Whites (60.8%), followed by Black Africans (30.4%) and Indians (5.0%). The main first language is English (68%), then Afrikaans (8.9%), Zulu (5.4%) and Tswana (2.7%).

There is also quite a large “other” population (15.0%) which is made up of people from other countries. School 5 is privately-run and situated within the grounds of the primary school, although it is separately managed. The school has a principal and it provides Grade R teaching only. It has five classes of 25 learners each, with five qualified teachers and one assistant teacher.

Pedagogically, the language of teaching at the school is English. The fundamental aim of the school is for learners to develop a positive and sustaining self-image. The cultural diversity of the learners is acknowledged and embraced in order to enhance their self-image. The school follows an outcomes-based curriculum which includes the literacy, numeracy and life skills learning areas which are in line with the CAPS curriculum. The school has an inclusive education policy which provides learners with the necessary support in the school should they need it.

#### **3.4.6 School 6: A private pre-school**

I chose School 6 for my focus group interview because it is the school where I work as a Grade R teacher. The area where School 6 is located is fast-developing and has a population of 3,860 where the majority of people are White (70.4%), then Black African (22.1%) and Indian (4.3%). The main first language spoken is English (73.0%) followed by Afrikaans (7.6%), then Zulu (4.4%), and lastly Northern Sotho (2.2%). The area also has a large number of “other” first languages spoken which probably consists of foreigners. The language of teaching is English. School 6 has 240 learners between Grades RRR to R with 20 learners in a class. The teachers are qualified and trained and, as well as class teachers, there are specialist teachers for music, physical education and computers. The school’s philosophy is that “city learners” have the unique privilege of learning through exposure to nature, as the school is built on a wetland.

Pedagogically, the natural environment is a platform for calm and integrated learning where learners' confidence and self-esteem are nurtured. Knowledge is integrated because it is relevant and connected to real-life situations. Learning is an interactive process between learner and teacher and the learner is actively involved in his learning. School 6 fosters mutual respect and appreciation for both the environment, and one another. Learners are encouraged to reach their individual potential and to not only think for, but also to believe in themselves. The teaching methodology is learner-centred and includes a culture of communication, collaboration and creative and critical thinking. The curriculum aims to prepare learners to face the challenges of the world and to equip them with the skills to cope well in the more formal learning environment of Grade 1. As School 6 is the school where I teach I discuss how I reduced bias and subjectivity later in the section on the focus group interview (3.5.2).

Table 3.3 is a summary of the area population and number of learners per school. Figure 3.1 provides a summary of the probable percentage of population by race in each school, and Figure 3.2 provides a summary of the probable percentage language spoken in each school.

Table 3.3: Area population and number of learners per school

School	Area population	Number of learners
School 1	31,716	270
School 2	138,000	560
School 3	18,000	200
School 4	11,514	70
School 5	30,000	125
School 6	3,860	240

Figure 3.1: The probable percentage of population by race in each school

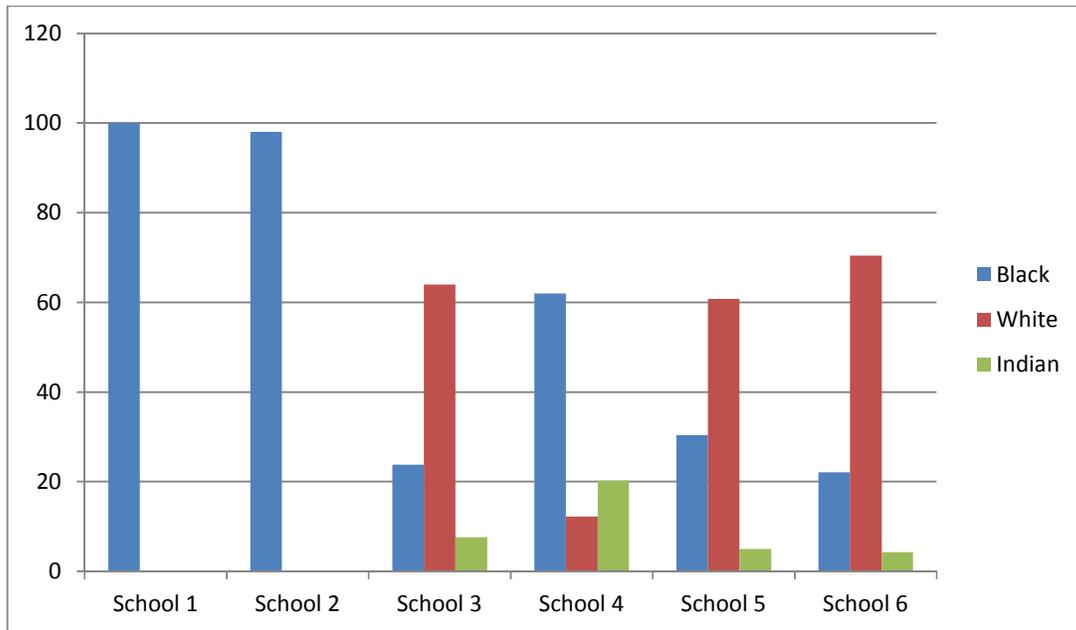
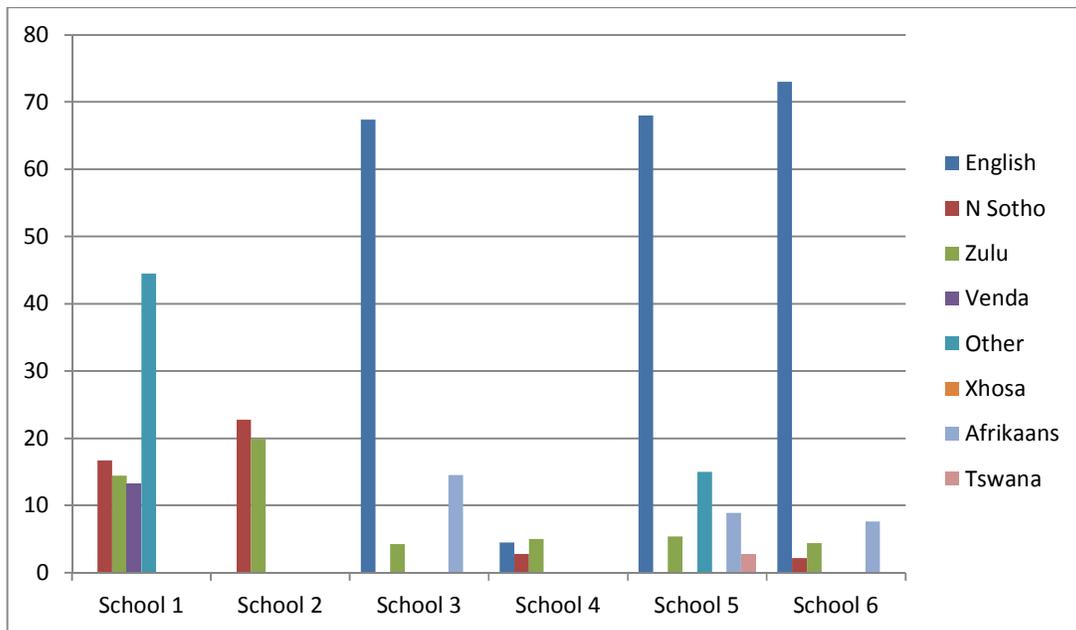


Figure 3.2: The probable percentage of language spoken in each school



### 3.4.7 Access to the research sites

I sought permission to access the sites from the principal at each site. As all the schools were private and independent, I emailed the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA) to ask their permission to conduct a research study at six of their schools. However, they replied that it was not necessary for them to grant permission (see Appendix B), because it is the responsibility of the principals at the respective schools to allow me to carry out research there.

I emailed each principal stating the purpose and intent of my study and requested their permission to carry out my research at their school with a Grade R teacher and the mother of a Grade R learner at each school as participants. In each email I included an example of the letter that I wanted to send to the participants of the study for their perusal and information. I followed up each email with a telephone call to the principal at each school to introduce myself, to make sure that they had each received the email in good order, and to answer any initial questions they might have.

### 3.5 Data collection strategies

According to McMillan & Schumacher (2006:325), qualitative researchers generally use several data collection strategies in a study, one of which is the central method. Table 3.4 tabulates the data collection strategies used in this study.

Table 3.4: Data collection and documentation

Strategy	Details
Individual interviews	Mothers and teachers
Focus group interview	Teachers at School 6
Observations	Photographs taken in classrooms
Research journal	My personal reflections
Data documentation	Voice recordings, handwritten notes and photographs

In case study research it is advisable to collect data from more than one method to ensure triangulation and crystallisation of the data (Rule & John 2011:63). Triangulation uses different kinds of methods or data to study a topic (Punch & Oancea 2014:615). Triangulation of data provides concurrent validity when multiple data collection strategies are used to answer research questions and the results converge (Cohen et al.2011:295). It is a way of corroborating evidence from different participants, such as mothers and teachers; different types of information, such as interviews and journal entries; and different methods of data collection, such as interviews and photographs in themes (Creswell 2013:258). Crystallisation is the validation of results by looking for patterns in the analysis of multiple methods of data collection (Maree & van der Westhuizen 2013:40). In case studies, triangulation and crystallisation are both important for the quality, accuracy, reliability and validity of the research (Cohen et al.2011:295; Creswell 2013:258, Rule & John 2011: 108).

In this study, the main data collection strategies were interviews, a focus group discussion and observations (Creswell 2013:205; Rule & John 2011:63). I also made reflections in a research journal.

### **3.5.1 Individual Interviews**

In case study research, an interview is usually a one-on-one guided discussion between the researcher and participants (Rule & John 2011:64). The researcher develops a set of questions, or interview schedule, to guide the interview. The main data collection instrument in this study was semi-structured interviews. In a semi-structured interview the interviewer has a set of questions about the topic (see Appendices I and J), but there is opportunity for exploring new and related avenues as they arise in the discussion (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:87).

The advantages of semi-structured interviews are the questions are open-ended to initiate discussion, which allows for more flexibility during the discussion (Rule & John 2011:65); and the semi-structured format enables the researcher to identify and explore new lines of inquiry stimulated by the responses of the participant (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:87). The main disadvantage of semi-structured interviews is it is easy to wander off the point (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:87) which means that the interviewer has to regain the focus of the topic.

I sent the principal of each school a letter requesting permission to conduct research at their respective schools (Appendix E) and I included a copy of the letter that I would send to the mother and teacher should they give permission for their perusal. Once permission was granted, I emailed each teacher (Appendix F) and mother (Appendix G) a letter of informed consent, with information regarding this study, inviting them to participate in this study with a consent form for them to sign and return to me.

I conducted one face-to-face, semi-structured individual interview with each of the five Grade R teachers and five mothers from the five different preschools in order to interact closely with them. Furthermore, I carried out a focus group interview at School 6 with four Grade R teachers. I wanted to find out and understand precisely how the teachers teach and prepare learners for reading readiness; what factors the teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness, how teachers address these factors in the classroom, and who else is involved in the learners' reading readiness to address the research questions.

From these interviews, I attempted to understand the participants' worlds by interacting with them and trying to make sense of the meanings they attached to their experiences (Maree 2013:291). I gathered data on their views and opinions regarding the factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners. By interviewing a teacher and a mother at each school and a focus group at School 6, I corroborated the data collected. The semi-structured format

meant that I asked each teacher and mother a series of open-ended questions where I had little control over their responses (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:352). I drew up an interview schedule (see Appendices I and J) to guide my line of questioning during the interviews, but the questions were flexible enough to allow the participants freedom to express their views and opinions. The semi-structured format also enabled me to follow specific lines of enquiry by asking further questions stimulated by the interview. This flexibility allowed me to gain new insights, to probe deeper and to ask for clarification where necessary (Rule & John 2011:65). I used a digital voice recording device to accurately capture the data in the form of the words used by the participants, and transcribed them later. (See Appendix I for samples of transcripts of teachers' interviews and Appendix J for samples of transcripts of mothers' interviews.) I also made notes during the interviews on body language and other nonverbal communications (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:92), which is important in case the recording device malfunctions (Creswell 2013:221). (See Appendix P for samples of notes taken during interviews.)

The advantages of interviews are one-on-one discussions between the researcher and participants and recording verbatim the accounts of the teachers and mothers for accuracy and reliability. The main disadvantages are the time it takes to conduct the interviews (Cohen et al. 2011: 409; Creswell 2013:218) and to transcribe the recordings and notes made. Other disadvantages are respondent distrust, mechanical failure (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:355), interviewer bias, inconvenience for participants, and difficulty of maintaining anonymity (Cohen et al. 2011: 409). To offset some of the disadvantages I planned sufficient time for interviews and transcriptions; I spent a few minutes at the start of each interview explaining the aims of the interview and how their confidentiality and anonymity would be preserved to gain the trust of the interviewees; and I used a digital recording device to prevent mechanical failure (Creswell 2013:221). Interviewer bias is unavoidable but by being aware

of my biases I was able to reduce it and avoid being judgemental (Cohen et al. 2013:421); participants go to the school daily so it was only an inconvenience as far as their time was concerned; and anonymity was maintained by not mentioning the name of the schools or the participants (Cohen et al. 2103:91).

### **3.5.2 Focus group interview**

In a focus group interview, as opposed to a general group interview, the researcher facilitates a discussion among a group of 4 to 12 participants together. This method of interviewing stimulates dynamic interaction, debate and even disagreements between participants, rather than with the interviewer, in order to increase the range of and yield the best data contributed to the discussion (Cohen et al. 2011: 436; Nieuwenhuis 2013c: 90; Rule & John 2011: 66). One of the distinguishing features of the focus group is the interviewer, in this study the researcher, directs discussion among the four people to collect in-depth qualitative data about their perceptions and experiences about a topic, such as reading readiness (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:91). Participants can build on each other's ideas, comments and suggestions to increase the quality and richness of information providing a collective view that would not be achieved from individual interviews (Cohen et al. 2011: 436; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:90; McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 360).The researcher asks a series of open-ended questions about a particular topic to initiate discussion and it is usually necessary to record the participants' responses on a recording device in order to accurately capture what is discussed as well as take notes (Rule & John 2011: 66). The sample of participants should be purposeful (Nieuwenhuis 2013c: 90), similar to and co-operative with each other (Creswell 2013:218), and relatively homogeneous (McMillan & Schumacher 2006: 360).

For all of these reasons, I held a focus group interview. Participants were chosen through purposeful and convenient sampling. I selected the four other Grade R teachers and the principal, who is a former Grade R teacher, at the school where I teach to be participants in

the focus group study. I gave each participant a letter (Appendix D) explaining the details of the study and requesting their permission to interview them. Attached to this letter was an assent and confidentiality agreement for each participant to sign when they agreed to participate in the focus group interview. This was purposeful sampling because the participants are all relatively homogeneous (see [3.4 Sampling Procedure](#)) and they also met the main requirement for my research study which was to generate full, in-depth and reliable data (Rule & John 2011: 64).

It was difficult to remain dispassionate and objective in the focus group interview because the participants were my colleagues and principal. The sample was very selective and I was aware that I might have been biased in the collection and analysis of the data and in the interpretation of the results. Nevertheless, my awareness of and reflection on these possibilities helped to minimise their effects. I was aware that there might be special ethical challenges just because I am a teacher at School 6 too, but I ensured participants were able to give informed consent; I explained to them how I would maintain their confidentiality; and I told them how I would use the data collected from this interview (Punch & Oancea 2014:109). I also realised that asking my colleagues to participate in my research might be a conflict of interest for them as they might find it difficult to refuse, but otherwise would choose not to participate (Cohen et al. 2011:80).

Unfortunately, one of the Grade R teachers was sick on the day and missed the interview. I did not want to postpone it because it would inconvenience the other participants who had made arrangements to be present.

I was not allowed to record the interview, which meant I had to write down everything that was said. Keeping my head down and looking at what I was writing made it difficult for me to take note of any nonverbal cues such as body language and eye contact (Nieuwenhuis

2013c:91). I asked each colleague to add, change or delete anything from the transcript when I presented it to them later for checking. The participants were similar to and co-operative with each other, relatively homogeneous, and known to each other.

The advantages of a focus group interview are to gain a diversity of views; participants build on each other's ideas and suggestions to provide an in-depth view which is not achievable from individual interviews; it generates data quickly which saves time because four separate interviews, for example, would take longer; it is useful to triangulate with other forms of interviewing, and as a supplementary technique it can increase the validity of the findings and the credibility of the study (Cohen et al. 2011: 436; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:360; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:90; Rule & John 2011: 66).

Some of the disadvantages are that focus group samples are small and therefore not necessarily representative; it might be difficult to gather all the participants together in one place at the same time; one or two members might dominate the discussion while others might not be assertive enough to give their true opinions; there might be disagreements that need to be carefully managed by the researcher; and the researcher might find it difficult to control the group to focus on the topic and write notes at the same time (Cohen et al. 2011:436; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:91; Rule & John 2011:66).

I overcame some of these disadvantages by holding one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with other separate individual participants to corroborate the data gathered from the focus group interview. I held the interview at School 6 to make it easier to gather all the participants together. I specifically invited participants to voice their opinion on a particular aspect if they had not already attempted to answer a question, and I redirected their attention back to the focus of the question when the participants wandered off the topic. I did find it difficult to

manage the group and write notes at the same time, because I had to write everything down which meant that I missed potentially important body language and other nonverbal signs.

### 3.5.3 Observations

Observation is an essential method for gathering data first-hand by observing people and places at a research site (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:84). There are four types of observation used in qualitative research, each with varying degrees of involvement of the researcher: complete observer, observer as participant, participant as observer and complete participant (Cohen et al. 2011:457; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:85). I chose to be a complete observer because I merely observed and photographed items in the classrooms as an outsider. It was not necessary for me to become immersed in the setting at all because my observations were informal. As a technique for collecting data, observation enabled me to see, hear and experience things and record my observation, rather than relying solely on the participants' responses to my questions (McMillan & Schumacher: 2006:207; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:84). Observations gave me the opportunity to see how closely what the interviewees said linked to what actually happens in the classroom, because sometimes what people do differs from what they say they do (Cohen et al. 2011:456). I observed items relating to reading readiness in the classrooms. For example, I looked for a book corner, labels displayed on certain items on the interest table and around the classroom, an alphabet poster on the wall, and so forth. (Photographs of what I found may be seen in Chapter 4: Research results and in Appendix 0.) While visiting each school, I asked permission from the principal and teacher concerned to observe their classroom and take photographs of relevant items. I drew up an observation schedule (Appendix K) beforehand so my observations were guided by a set of field questions within the checklist of items to observe (Rule & John 2011:68) and left enough space to add extra items that I had not considered, but which were present in the classroom. Having an observation schedule kept my observations focused.

Some of the advantages of this type of observation as a data collection strategy are that it captures natural behaviour, reduces participant effects, and is the least obtrusive form of observation (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:211; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:85). My photographs captured items relating to reading readiness which were always in the classroom, such as the book corner. I had little effect on the classroom as a participant because it was after school hours and therefore it was just me and the teacher there.

Some of the disadvantages of informal observations are that they are time consuming, the observer has an effect on participants, and the observer may be biased and limited in what she observes and understands (Cohen et al. 2011:459; McMillan & Schumacher: 2006:211; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:85). To reduce the effect of these disadvantages, I scheduled sufficient time for observations during my visits to schools and I gained the confidence of the teachers so that they did not react negatively to my presence in their classroom. Since I only conducted the observations after school hours at each school, I did not have to explain my presence to any learners. I recorded my observations as faithfully as possible, but I recognised that I may be biased and therefore used great caution and reflexivity when writing up my notes.

#### **3.5.4 Research journal**

Critical reflection is an important factor in all research, because the researcher looks back at and evaluates what she has done in the research study in order to improve the quality of the case study (Rule & John 2011:35). I recorded field notes in conjunction with reflections in my research journal (see Appendix M) during the research process. For the purpose of this study, my notes included descriptions of my reflections regarding conversations, interviews, moments of confusion, intuitions and the stimulation of new ideas during the study, as well as any additional information provided by the participants during the interviews (Maree 2013:297). I jotted down ideas and reflections regarding my experiences. The research

journal enabled me to reflect on the process of data collection in order to make the necessary changes when applicable. I reflected on my own abilities as researcher throughout and adapted them where needed (Maree 2013:297). Samples of research journal entries are included in the results chapter as well as Appendix M.

### **3.5.5 Data documentation**

I documented the data collection strategies individual interviews, a focus group interview, observations and a research journal using digital voice recordings, handwritten notes and photographs. I made digital voice recordings of interviews (see Appendix N for samples of transcripts) and also wrote notes on the interview schedule during interviews or as soon as possible afterwards in case of any recording failure (see Appendix P for examples of notes written on interview schedule). According to Rule and John (2011:77), one of the first steps of preparation for working with interview data is to transcribe the recorded interviews. It is best to transcribe data oneself because it is likely that one will include some non-verbal cues in the transcript (Nieuwenhuis 2013a:104). For example, while I listened to the digital voice recordings of interviews and typed the transcriptions, I included inflections of voice or giggles that I had not noticed or managed to write down during the interview. I transcribed the digital voice recordings (see Appendix N for examples) and also made personal reflections on the interviews (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:356) in my research journal (see Appendix M for examples).

I was unable to digitally voice record the focus group interview. Therefore to document the focus group interview I made notes on the focus group interview schedule (Rule & John 2011:64) (see Appendix Q), transcribed the notes (see Appendix R) and wrote personal reflections in my research journal (Nieuwenhuis 2013c:92) (see Appendix M). Furthermore, I asked participants to check the transcript of the notes that I made during the focus group

interview to ensure that I had accurately captured what they intended to say. Any amendments to the transcript that focus group participants requested were made.

With permission from the College of Education, Research Ethics Committee (UNISA), principals and teachers, I took photographs of items in the classrooms to support my observations. I did not photograph the learners. I included some photographs in the results chapter and the remainder in Appendix O. I completed an observation schedule (Rule & John 2011:68) (Appendix K) to remind me what to photograph and also used the same observation schedule to record what I photographed and to make any necessary comments.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:350), reflex records, or research journals should be written immediately after leaving the research site and they should help to make sense of the data collected. For the research journal (Appendix M), I typed up my notes as soon as possible after each interview. Some personal reflections were also noted on transcriptions of interviews (Appendix N).

### **3.6 Data analysis and interpretation**

Qualitative data analysis is a systematic process of organising, coding, categorising, and explaining data based on the values, definitions and meanings that the participants place on a topic of interest, such as reading readiness (Cohen et al. 2011:537; Ivankova et al. 2013:259; McMillan & Schumacher 2006:364). There are several approaches to data analysis, such as conversation analysis (Cohen et al. 2011:575; Nieuwenhuis 2013a:102; Punch & Oancea 2014:417), discourse analysis, narrative analysis (Cohen et al. 2011:581; Nieuwenhuis 2013a:102; Punch & Oancea 2014: 417; Rule & John 2011:79) and thematic content analysis (Creswell 2013:243; Rule & John 2011:79).

Conversation analysis describes the structure and patterns of speech in a conversation in the form of a detailed study of voice recordings and their transcriptions (Nieuwenhuis

2013a:102). Conversation analysis is an approach that focuses on how shared meanings and social norms emerge and develop (Punch & Oancea 2014:417). Discourse analysis looks more at the form, semantics and symbolic use of language in interviews. It helps to uncover the dominant forces in society and the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words that we use (Nieuwenhuis 2013a:102; Rule & John 2011:79). Narrative analysis studies and interprets the stories participants tell and the structure of the story told in in-depth interviews, while simultaneously looking for common threads and emerging themes (Nieuwenhuis 2013a:102). Narrative analysis looks at the stories participants tell about how they understand and experience their worlds and focuses on the language structures more than the content (Rule & John 2011:80). Thematic content analysis entails coding the data collected from interviews in order to identify patterns. The codes are grouped into categories which generate themes. Case study research often uses the system of working from codes to themes to interpret the data and suitable quotations are used to make the themes more meaningful (Rule & John 2011:78). Creswell (2013:238) suggests that in thematic content analysis qualitative researchers should analyse data by reading through it several times, and analysing it each time in order to really understand the data collected from the participants. He also says the researcher brings her own perspective to her interpretation of the findings.

I did not need to deconstruct language as in conversational analysis or discourse analysis, and my interviews were not in-depth stories as in narrative analysis. Out of the four analytical procedures mentioned above I selected thematic content analysis because it is the most appropriate system for my case study.

I read through the interview transcripts and field notes several times in order to become immersed in the data. I then used the method of thematic content analysis (Nieuwenhuis 2013a:101) to code the information by looking for specific key words for which themes (categories) could be identified. Next, I tabulated those themes (see Appendix T for an

example) and made inferences from them in order to address the research question (Maree 2013: 298). I did this by hand, rather than using a computer system of analysis because I preferred to interact with the data closely and the volume of data to analyse was small enough to manage manually.

Interpretation of the data in qualitative research means the researcher gives meaning to the findings of the study based on her personal reflections and experience (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:257). The report also contains thick descriptions of the sites, participants and my reflections (Creswell 2013: 260). Qualitative research is interpretive research, so it was important for me to make sense of the findings by:

- ❖ summarising my findings to provide an overview of the results,
- ❖ including my personal reflections and comments about the meaning of the data,
- ❖ attempting to show how the results compare with the literature study and theoretical framework that I have researched,
- ❖ suggesting possible limitations or weaknesses of the study, and
- ❖ making recommendations for future research. (McMillan & Schumacher: 2006:258).

### **3.7 Issues of trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative designs means the participants and the researcher agree on the descriptions and especially the meanings of events. It is that quality of an investigation and its findings that make people want to read it (Schwandt 2007:299). There are essential strategies to enhance validity which include multi-methods, verbatim accounts, member checking (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:324), credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Maree & van der Westhuizen 2013:38; Schwandt 2007:299).

### **3.7.1 Multi-methods**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:325), multi-method strategies permit triangulation of data because different strategies offer different insights and information. Triangulation of data increases the credibility of the findings. I used several data collection techniques in this study, but the central method was semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. I also used observations and a research journal.

### **3.7.2 Verbatim accounts**

I obtained literal statements of participants by recording their conversations verbatim using a digital voice recorder and transcribing them. I took photographs of items in classrooms. Results of the data analysis were phrased in the participants' language and I interpreted their meanings as closely as possible. I also used direct quotations from the data to demonstrate participants' meanings to ensure validity (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:325).

### **3.7.3 Member checking**

Member checking is where I asked participants in the study to check the accuracy of my account (Creswell 2013:259). I checked informally with participants for accuracy during data collection. Then, once they were completed, I discussed the results with the participants for verification of the meaning I captured. I was able to visit some participants at the sites where the original interviews were conducted. However, I had to email the results chapter to other participants because some teachers had changed schools in the year since the interviews were held. Some participants were no longer contactable so I was unable to check the results with them. Those participants who were available for member checking largely concurred with my interpretations of the results. (See Appendix S for member checking of results chapter.)

### **3.7.4 Credibility**

Credibility or internal validity refers to the extent to which the results of a study approximate reality and are therefore judged to be trustworthy and reasonable (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:471). It is the assurance that other researchers would agree with my reconstruction and representation of the participants' views of their life ways (Schwandt 2007:299). I established credibility by applying triangulation to the methods of data collection and data analysis in order to determine if there were any discrepancies in the findings. I tried to produce findings that are believable and convincing, and I also presented inconsistent findings in order to add to the credibility of the study (Maree 2013:299).

### **3.7.5 Transferability**

Transferability or external validity is the degree to which generalisations can be made from the data and context of the research study to the wider population and settings (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:8). It is the way in which another researcher is able to take the findings and transfer them to other contexts (Schwandt 2007:299). I used rich, thick descriptions of the participants and contexts by supplying clear and detailed information about teachers' and mothers' views regarding the factors that affect reading readiness in Grade R learners. I also described the setting in which those teachers and parents work and live respectively, to ensure transferability (Maree 2013:300). However, since the aim of interpretivist studies is to provide rich descriptions of the participants' perceptions, the aim of this study is not necessarily to generalise the findings.

### **3.7.6 Dependability**

In a qualitative study, dependability, or reliability, recognises that the research context is emerging and developing, therefore it cannot simply be understood as a single moment in time (Jensen 2008b:209). To account for this I linked the results of my research to the data

gathered, made sure the findings were a faithful representation of the meanings intended by the participants and supplied comprehensive, accurate methodological information to enable others to replicate my study (Jensen 2008b:209). In addition, I achieved dependability by employing member checking, triangulation of all data collected during the research process, and elimination of any bias that might have been brought into the study by constantly reflecting on the research process (Maree 2013:299).

### **3.7.7 Confirmability**

Confirmability or objectivity is the degree to which the results of the study could be confirmed or corroborated by other people (Jensen 2008a:113). My use of a reflective journal should ensure as far as possible the results of the proposed study reflect the experiences and concepts of the participants, rather than my biases and preferences. Regular reflection also made me aware of my influence on the data so that I could take action to avoid subjectivity. In addition, triangulation of the data by using multiple methods checked the reliability of my concepts.

By using the strategies discussed here, I hope to assure the reader that the findings in this study are worth paying attention to and the research is of high quality. I also tried to eliminate any bias that might be brought to the study by constantly reflecting on the research process (Maree 2013:299).

## **3.8 Ethical considerations**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:333), qualitative research is quite personally intrusive, so the ethical guidelines include policies regarding informed consent, deception, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and caring. These policies are discussed in more detail in **3.8.1** to **3.8.3**. There were no ethical dilemmas to contend with as the Grade R teachers and mothers were not evidently involved in illegal, abusive, controversial or politically sensitive

activities (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:334). However, this study involved human participants directly, so there was a low risk of inconvenience for them to make the time to be interviewed.

According to Maree (2013:300), it is important to remember research cannot simply be conducted by anyone and anywhere. He further states that according to the Helsinki Declaration of 1972, it is necessary to obtain clearance from an ethics committee when human subjects are involved in any kind of research of an empirical nature. Therefore, I obtained permission from the College of Education Research Ethics Committee at the University of South Africa before conducting any form of research (see Appendix A). I also followed and abided by their ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Maree (2013:300) suggests when working with individuals it is essential to understand and pay attention to the following ethics principles: informed consent, protection from harm and privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.

### **3.8.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation**

Informed consent means I offered participants the option of withdrawing from the study at any time should they wish to without repercussions. I informed them of the intended use of the data (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:334; Punch & Oancea 2014:616), to avoid deception. I gave each teacher (Appendix F), focus group teacher (Appendix D) and mother (Appendix G) a letter in which I introduced myself and explained the title, importance, relevance and purpose of the study. Attached to this was a letter of informed consent for participants to read and sign before starting the interview. This informed consent form made the participants aware that they had the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses, that excerpts from the interview may be included in my thesis, and that the participants may withdraw their consent at any time

without penalty simply by advising me. Furthermore, I obtained verbal informed consent before taking any photographs in the teachers' classrooms.

### **3.8.2 Protection from harm**

I made sure participants were not exposed to any undue physical or psychological harm, by being honest, respectful, caring and sympathetic towards them (Maree 2013:300).

### **3.8.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity**

#### *Privacy*

Privacy is a human right and participants have the right to decide for themselves the extent to which they allow themselves to divulge information to others (Punch & Oancea 2014: 138). The researcher is obliged to maintain the privacy of the vulnerable participant (Cohen et al. 2011:90). I gave participants as much information as possible about the research and how it would be conducted so they could make an informed decision whether to choose to participate or choose not to participate in my study (Cohen et al. 2011:01). To achieve this I made clear to the participants:

- ❖ the importance, relevance and purpose of my study.
- ❖ what their involvement would be should they agree to take part.
- ❖ what their role and rights would be.
- ❖ the approximate length of the interview.
- ❖ what would happen to the information once the interview was over.
- ❖ how safely the data collected would be stored. and
- ❖ my contact details should they have any questions or queries whatsoever.

Another way of protecting the privacy of participants is through confidentiality.

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality means any information that might identify a participant is not made available to anyone else (Cohen et al. 2011:92). I made sure I deleted the names of participants and the schools they were involved with and used code names and numbers instead. For example the teacher I interviewed at the first school described was coded as Teacher 1 for teacher number one. However, I also realised that maintaining confidentiality is difficult to guarantee because, for example, a principal may recognise the identity of one of her teachers because of contextual clues in my research report (Punch & Oancea 2014: 139). To avoid this I used the strategy of anonymity.

### *Anonymity*

Anonymity means the data collected from participants should not reveal their identity in any way (Cohen et al. 2011:91). This is difficult to achieve in one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with participants because the researcher knows who they are (Punch & Oancea 2014:140). The best I could hope to achieve therefore was confidentiality (Cohen et al. 2011:91) and to try and ensure that no-one else could trace the information gathered back to the participants. To achieve this, I deleted participants' names, names of schools, and any other detailed institutional descriptions I deemed relevant, from the data or replaced it with numerical identifiers or aliases (Punch & Oancea 2014:140).

In addition to the ethical aspects discussed under **3.9.1** to **3.9.3**, I continuously conducted the research according to the Ethics and Research Statement provided by the Faculty of Education of the University of South Africa.

## **3.9 My role as researcher**

A research role is a relationship the researcher has with participants and sites in an interactive research study (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:344). There are various roles the researcher may assume, such as complete observer, full or complete participant, participant as observer,

observer as participant, interviewer and participant-researcher (Cohen et al 2011:233; Nieuwenhuis 2013c:85). These roles vary in the amount the researcher's presence impacts on the participants and sites under study and qualitative research usually requires the researcher to be a participant observer or interviewer (McMillan & Schumacher 2006:334). I was an interviewer and participant observer. One of my roles as researcher in this study was as an interviewer when I conducted face-to-face interviews with participants. My role as researcher started when I first requested permission to hold interviews from the principal, teacher and mother at each site, explained the purpose of the research and how I would maintain confidentiality and anonymity. I was also a participant observer because I was able to observe and take photographs of items in classrooms, but I remained uninvolved and did not influence the dynamics of the setting.

There was a possible conflict of interest because some of the data was collected at the school where I teach. My colleagues might have felt obliged to participate in my study because I am their colleague and they wanted to be seen to support my study. I countered this by ensuring that participants gave informed consent and by assuring them of confidentiality. I also reassured them I would not hold it against them if they refused to participate. Furthermore, I was unable to record my colleagues in the focus group interview because our principal felt that would be a conflict of interest.

### **3.10 Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of how I carried out my research study and the reasons for my choices. I defined the research paradigm as interpretivist with a qualitative approach. The research design was a multiple case study design in which I conducted semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview with participants. In the research methodology I explained how the sites and participants were purposefully and conveniently

sampled, which strategies were used to collect data, and how the interviews were carried out. I discussed how a thematic content analysis of the data emerged by coding and categorising the data into themes and how I interpreted the data. I then described how I addressed the issues of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations and how I obtained informed consent from the participants. Lastly, I reflected on my role as the researcher in this study. Throughout the overview of the methodology used in this study I have referred the strategies used to examples and samples in the appendices to make it believable and add to rigour.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the research process and methodology that guided my study. I described paradigmatic perspectives and the research design. I provided a detailed account of the methodology used and procedures followed for data collection and analysis. I discussed quality criteria and reflected on my role as researcher.

In the next chapter, I discuss the results of the data analysis. I present the results of this study according to the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the analysis of the data.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the research process and methodology that guided this study. In this chapter, I present the results of my research according to the themes that emerged during an analysis of the data. I focus on the results and their relationship to the research questions asked. The primary research question was explored by addressing the secondary questions (see Table 4.1).

Primary research question:

What factors do Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness?

Table 4.1: Secondary research questions:

1. How do Grade R teachers address these factors in the classroom?
2. Who are the people involved in the learners' reading readiness?
3. How do they contribute to reading readiness?

Themes that emerged from the data analysis were linked to the primary research question (PRQ) and secondary research questions (SRQs). I have not linked any findings to the type of school or school curriculum where I conducted research because this was not a comparative study. I found that most teachers made similar comments about the factors affecting reading readiness, but where they differed, I discussed it.

Quotations of participants' actual words are provided for an evidence-based inquiry, which gives credibility to the results. I use the quotations to illustrate, for a range of issues or for opposing views.

## 4.2 Results of the thematic content analysis

From the patterns arising from the analysis of the raw data generated during the interviews and focus group interview, five themes emerged: the individuality and maturity of the learner; the learner’s phonological awareness; parental influences; a network of support, and reading and storytelling. I outline these themes and sub-themes in Table 4.2. These themes are supported by statements made by participants during the data collection process, as well as by reflective notes recorded in my research journal (Appendix M).

Table 4.2: Themes<sup>5</sup>

<p><b>Theme 1: The individuality and maturity of the learner</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sub-theme 1.1: Teachers’ perspective</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 1.2: Mothers’ perspective</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 2: The learner’s phonological awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sub-theme 2.1: The learner’s phonic ability</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 2.2: The importance of play</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 2.3: The importance of kinaesthetics</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 2.4: The need for drill, repetition and revision</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 3: Parental influences</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sub-theme 3.1: Parents’ contributions</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 3.2: Home circumstances</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 3.3: Support for teachers</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 3.4: The value of sending one’s child to a good school</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 4: A network of support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sub-theme 4.1: At school</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 4.2: At home</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theme 5: Reading and storytelling</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Sub-theme 5.1: A culture of reading at home</li> <li>❖ Sub-theme 5.2: The relevance of telling and reading stories to learners</li> </ul>

### 4.2.1 Theme 1: The individuality and maturity of the learner

In this theme, participants’ understanding of how the individuality and maturity of the learner affect a Grade R learner’s reading readiness is explored. Two sub-themes (see Table 4.3) were created to show the differences between the teachers’ and mothers’ perspectives.

<sup>5</sup> For ease of reference, I have used a different colour for each theme. These colours are also used for comments from participants.

Table 4.3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 1

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 1.1: The individuality and maturity of the learner from the teachers' perspective	Any reference from a teacher about how learners differ with regard to their previous experience, exposure to experiences, existing knowledge and desire to learn.	References to the individuality and maturity of the learner made by anyone else.
Sub-theme 1.2: The individuality and maturity of the learner from the mothers' perspective	Any reference from a mother about how learners differ with regard to their previous experience, exposure to experiences, existing knowledge and desire to learn.	References to the individuality and maturity of the learner made by anyone else

#### **4.2.1.1. Sub-theme 1.1: The individuality and maturity of the learner from the teachers' perspective**

When a learner enters Grade R, it is important to consider him<sup>6</sup> as an individual; his educational history, exposure to experiences, existing knowledge, ability, and his desire to learn. The teacher may then continue his learning from the developmental level that he is at when starting Grade R. According to the teachers interviewed, not all learners have the opportunity to attend preschool before Grade R; not all preschools provide a well-resourced early education centre; some learners are not developmentally ready to learn phonics yet; and other learners know the letter sounds already and need to be challenged.

Teacher 5 (9-10) admitted: *it's very difficult because kids come from (various schools),* which may imply that they have different levels of capability, experience and exposure to learning. Also, some learners do not have the opportunity to attend preschool *because there's no preschool in many areas, like rural areas, and their only formal education in terms of ECD is only Grade R...so that is why (in the CAPS<sup>7</sup> document) they probably going so low in*

<sup>6</sup> Whenever I refer to a learner as him or her, she or he, his or hers, kindly note that I am referring to both genders.

<sup>7</sup> CAPS stands for Curriculum Assessment and Policy Statement, a government document that provides guidelines for all schools in South Africa to follow.

terms of “okay this is our place, this is where we start (teaching)” (T5<sup>8</sup> 20-23). Therefore, because such learners have not had the experience and benefit of attending a preschool they generally do not have the prior knowledge that learners who have attended a preschool usually have. For example, according to Teacher 5, some learners **come from preschools where they’re highly stimulated, they got quite enthusiastic parents, they got all the media that they use, all the laptops, the Ipads, and everything else so they incidentally already learn many skills** (T5:20-28). Thus, it becomes clear that teachers need to find a way to close the gap between learners who have attended preschool and those who have not.

*Journal entry 20 October 2016: During our member checking interview, Teacher 5 suggested where I said teachers try to “close the gap between learners who have attended preschool and those who have not” it is not clear whether they should drop the strong learners down to the level of the weaker learners or bring the weaker learners up to the level of the strong learners and hold back strong learners in order for the weak to catch up. She preferred to say that teachers may rise to the challenge of closing the gap by finding new methods of teaching and by adapting the curriculum to meet the more individualised needs of each learner in order to accommodate all the learners, both weak and strong.*

When learners do attend preschool, the preschools are not all the same because there are **too many businesses and preschools on the market that are not being properly checked. So you have some good schools that you can see that these children are coming ready ... while the others would come and you just wonder like what was going on at that place** (T5:31-37). Teacher 5 (34-35) indicated that she addresses disparities, such as exposure to phonics and rhyming, by carrying out a baseline assessment first to see where to start teaching the learners. She finds that there are often big discrepancies between learners’ abilities and/or previous learning which means there is a danger of teaching phonics and numbers before certain learners are developmentally ready for it (T5: 45-48).

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<sup>8</sup> T stands for teacher; FG stands for focus group; M stands for mother; and the numbers refer to the line numbers in each participant’s respective interview transcript.

On the other hand, Teacher 5 has some learners who know all the letter sounds already, so they need to be stimulated and challenged further (T5:194-195). She said she has **five (learners) who are fluent in reading their readers now and not pushed, not forced, they are just ready and you just progress them when they are ready... when they are not ready you just don't. But don't put that (limit) there and say "you don't do reading because you're Grade 0<sup>9</sup>"** – I said (to my colleagues) **"don't stop, don't prevent"**, because you're causing behavioural problems, they're getting bored and what for? Why would you stagnate somebody? (T5:218-225). Therefore, it seems that Grade R teachers should not teach learners phonics before they are developmentally ready for it, but nor should they hold back a learner who is already capable of reading.

Teacher 2 acknowledged that **kids are different – some are really slow learners and even though they are keen, their memory fails them ... give the slow learners enough time, attention and praise** (T2: 96-100). Teacher 4 agreed that **some of them are already able to (read) and then you obviously get the ones that are just starting there** (T4:73-74). Teacher 3 (83) felt learners need to be mature enough to have a bit of abstract thought, because a concept like beginning sounds is abstract. She added that it is important not to teach learners to read too young (T3:100).

When asked if there is a defining moment where learners start reading, Teacher 5 replied: **no, not really, because...it's depending on the child, it depends on the family, it depends on the background** (T5:416-418). Teacher 3's response to the same question was: **a child's readiness (for reading) really comes through in their artwork, their willingness to even copy letters, their ability to analyse it** (T3:106-108). According to the teachers, it is important to take learners' individuality and maturity into consideration when preparing them for reading

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<sup>9</sup> Some schools call it Grade O; some Grade R.

readiness because of differences between their preschool experiences, home background and their developmental levels.

#### **4.2.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2: The individuality and maturity of the learner from the mothers' perspective**

In contrast to the teachers' perspective, the mothers' perspective of the individuality and maturity of the learner was a little different. The mothers talked about how some learners seem to be keen to learn to read, while others are not; how older siblings inspire younger siblings to learn to read; and how some learners just seem to pick it up naturally.

Some learners show a desire to learn to read. Mother 3's elder daughter, for example, felt the need to read: **I would say half way through Grade 0 she was desperate to read, but I think it's also a personality type** (M3:81-83). It seems that Mother 3 might be correct in her suggestion that a learner's personality may affect his enthusiasm for learning to read. She explained, for example, that reading was not an enjoyable experience for her older son in Grade 2 although he was a capable learner.

Other learners appear to want to know more and ask questions about sounds and for assistance when they encounter difficulties learning to read. Mother 1 experienced such enthusiasm with her Grade R son: **when we are doing the reading, he will ask "but why is (the sound) like this?" Then we go back to the (THRASS)<sup>10</sup> chart and actually see sometimes (this letter) makes this sound; sometimes (that sound)** (M1:41-43). Mother 1 further explained that she did not initially feel the need to teach her son to read, but eventually realised that she would have to help him when he was influenced by his older brother: **actually he's the one who pushed it... when the Grade 1, my first born started reading, then my Grade R took an interest** (M1:48-52). She went on to describe what happened: **so as this**

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<sup>10</sup> THRASS (Teaching Handwriting, Reading And Spelling System) is a phonics-based programme

one was reading little words he started getting interested and when he was stuck then he would be frustrated and that's why I took it as an opportunity to teach right there (M1:52-55).

To Mother 4 it came as quite a surprise how easily her Grade R son had picked up reading without her even noticing: he was actually far advanced to what I was actually anticipating...because I think it's been maybe three months that I've noticed that he can read.

Mother 4 explained that while the family sat and watched the news bulletin on television at night, her son would see the news ticker flash across the bottom of the screen. By linking what he saw on the news ticker to what he heard on the television, this learner started reading incidentally.

According to the mothers, it is important to take learners' individuality and maturity into consideration when preparing them for reading readiness because of differences in their level of interest in and aptitude for learning to read. For Grade R learners with a literate older sibling, the implication seems to be that this is a positive influence and probable advantage.

In this exploration of the effect Grade R learners' individuality and maturity have on their reading readiness, it emerged that the teachers and mothers have different perspectives. Whereas the teachers focused more on the learner's previous preschool experience and current developmental level, the mothers spoke more about the learner's desire and ability to learn to read.

#### **4.2.2 Theme 2: The learner's phonological awareness**

Phonological awareness is an umbrella term for everything the Grade R child needs to learn about a language and understanding the sound structure of that language. The following sub-themes that fall under the umbrella of phonological awareness were developed from patterns that arose from the data analysis: the learner's phonic ability, the importance of play; the

importance of kinaesthetics; and the need for drill, repetition and revision. In Table 4.4, I outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria that categorised data for Theme 2.

Table 4.4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 2

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 2.1: The learner's phonic ability	Any reference to the teacher's and mother's perspectives of phonics to teach reading readiness.	References to other methods of teaching reading readiness other than phonics.
Sub-theme 2.2: The importance of play	Any reference to the teacher's and mother's perspectives of fun, informal teaching and play to teach reading readiness.	References to other methods of teaching reading readiness other than play.
Sub-theme 2.3: The importance of kinaesthetics	Any reference to the teacher's and mother's perspectives of the use of the body, kinaesthetics, physical objects and toys to teach reading readiness.	References to other methods of teaching reading readiness other than kinaesthetics.
Sub-theme 2.4: The need for drill, repetition and revision	Any reference to the teacher's and mother's perspectives of the need for drilling, repeating and revising information previously taught.	References to other methods of reinforcing what has been taught.

#### 4.2.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: The learner's phonic ability

Phonics is a method of teaching learners to read by training them to associate letters with their sounds (Collins 1994:858). Three methods of teaching phonics emerged from the data analysis: teach the sound of the letters; teach a letter of the week for phonic awareness; and teach letter formation and phonics together, not separately.

Three mothers (M1; M4 and M5) and two teachers (T4 and T5) said they teach the sound of the letters to prepare learners for reading readiness. Teacher 5 recommended only mentioning the letter name *once because it causes confusion* (T5:105). She further explained: *we don't teach them soft and hard sound(s), we only do hard sound(s) – so there's no /gee/, there's no /cee/ it's only /g/ and /c/* (T5:105-107). The extension of teaching letter sounds is analysis and synthesis. Analysis is breaking a simple consonant/vowel/consonant (cvc) word into its three sounds and synthesis is blending those three sounds back into a simple word: *I was doing lots*

of analysis – with me it was going from the bottom (up), so it's like sound, it's a letter and then you do analysis and then you blend it into word (synthesis) (T5:116-118). Therefore, it appears that the value of teaching letter sounds is that it soon leads to reading simple words.

Teacher 4 agreed with Teacher 5 that the letter sound is more important than the letter name at this stage and that it can be confusing for the learners. However, she complained that parents still teach their children the letter names by singing the ABC song with them. She told me: so they know ABC, but what sound does it make...it's very hard for them to think that “okay, but that's the name, why does it make a sound as well?” (T4:91-93).

Nevertheless, there are some mothers who also teach their children the letter sounds. Mother 1, for example, does not simply teach her children the ABC, but the phonetic alphabet as well. She said: I ...have the (phonetic) alphabet for babies like the alphabet sound. So (my son) would know that sometimes /A/ is like this, but sometimes /A/ is actually (spelt) /a/-/e/ (as in tape)...and sometimes the /e/ is the thing that differentiates (M1:37-40). Mother 4 (124-126) agreed that teaching the letter sound phonetically works well because learning in that format makes it easier for the learners to construct words and to pronounce them correctly. Similarly, Mother 5 found the most important aspect when preparing her child for reading readiness was the sounds of the alphabet. She emphasised: I've taught my kids the alphabet, yes they learnt ABC, but it was the /a/, /b/, /c/ (that was more important) (M5:35-38).

According to three of the teachers interviewed (T2; T3 and T5), one of the best ways to help learners learn the sound of the letters is by teaching a letter of the week. Three teachers said that they do a letter a week...for the phonic awareness (T2: 44-45; T3: 32-33; T5: 80). Teacher 5 explained that they do one letter per week – one sound/one letter - we only once briefly mention the letter name ... like “this is letter B (and it) makes sound /b/” and that's

where we stop. The rest is just phonics, phonetically sounding /b/ /b/ /b/ (T5:80-83). She further described how she uses a letter of the week table where she places pictures and objects, some brought from home by the learners, to reinforce the sound of the letter being studied: So I put like, let's say /b/, so you put (a) bear, ball, any items (starting with /b/) and you would put your...labels...in lower case letter(s), - we don't use upper case letters (T5:97-99). Similarly, Teacher 2 (49-54) said at her school she teaches a letter a week and adds on a bit more information every day. Then she repeats, recaps, and adds more to build on the previous day's work to help learners remember. (See Figures 4.1 to 4.3 for photographs of letter of the week tables in the classrooms which corroborate what the teachers say.)

In contrast, Teacher 4 said: we don't follow a specific set letter of the week (T4:116-117). She explained that they used to teach a letter a week until their new principal arrived about a year earlier. The new principal felt teaching a letter of the week was of little value to learners. When I asked her what she teaches instead of the letter a week, Teacher 4 replied: we look at... specific words that kind of group together (such as map, cap, tap) and we work on that and letter sound, sounding it out (T4:104-106). (See Figure 4.4 for an example of grouping rhyming words together.) Grouping simple words together corroborates the analysis and synthesis of simple cvc words that Teacher 5 discussed above.

Figure 4.1: Teacher 5's letter of the week table

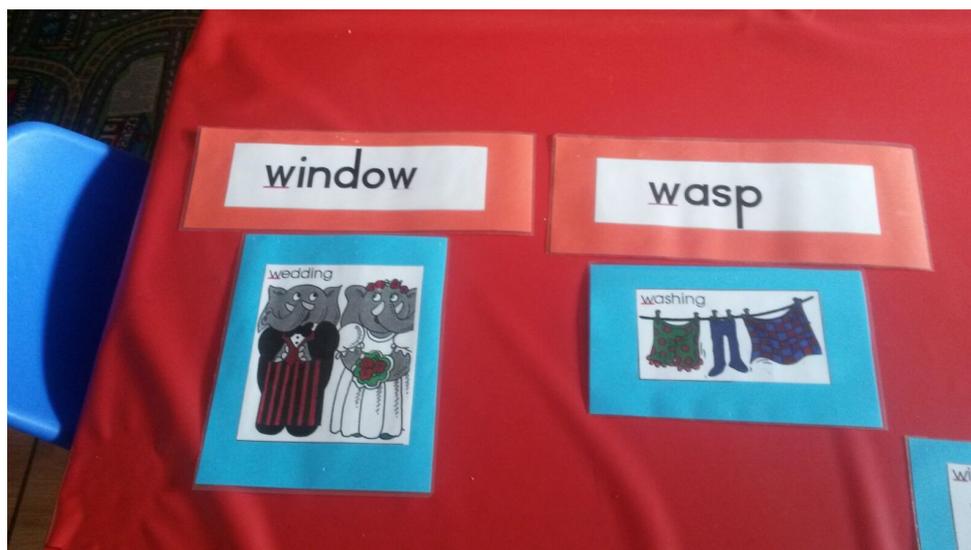


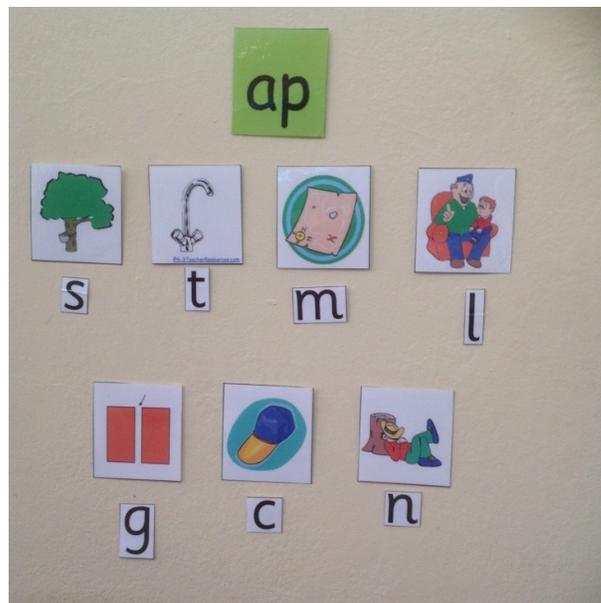
Figure 4.2: Teacher 3's letter of the week table



Figure 4.3: Teacher 1's letter of the week table



Figure 4.4: Teacher 4's example of forming and grouping rhyming words together



It emerged from the data that an important part of integrated teaching is to teach phonics and letter formation together. Four teachers (T2; T3; T4 and T5) supported teaching letter formation and phonics simultaneously: *we do writing and phonics together. So it's not separate at this stage* (T5:153-154). The teachers appear to use a variety of ways to teach learners the correct way to form the letters. Teacher 5 (156-157), for example, encourages learners to *(trace) letters...for eye-hand coordination, to get that feel (for writing from) top to bottom*. Teacher 4 (108-109) mentioned several ways of linking letter formation with letter sounds she finds useful: *we write in sand, we write in the air, and (on) white boards...we make the letters with play dough*. Teacher 3 said when teaching letter sounds, she also encourages spontaneous letter formation by allowing learners to *make little books...and they get to staple them and copy words if they want to and draw (in) their books, and then I'll write the story for them* (T3: 41-44). Making books, copying words, drawing pictures and having the teacher write the story of the pictures helps to link letter formation and letter sounds to writing and reading learners' own stories in readiness for reading.

It became clear during the data analysis that parents are starting to realise learners are learning letter sounds at school, as opposed to letter names, because it soon leads to reading simple three-letter words. A letter of the week is arguably the best way to teach phonics, and forming letters in various media helps to reinforce the letter sounds.

#### **4.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: The importance of play**

From the teachers' responses, it seems one of the best ways to prepare Grade R learners for reading is through play, in informal, spontaneous, fun ways using toys, a variety of physical and educational games and suitable phonics programmes. These activities create in the learner excitement as pre-reading skills develop and they make it easier for him to understand new and potentially difficult concepts.

Teacher 5 commented that it is preferable to explain difficult concepts in fun ways, such as (for) the end sound in words use the metaphor of a ‘plane landing on the last sound (T5:407-411). According to Teacher 5, learners need to play a lot of educational games, word games and physical games such as Musical Statues, Simon Says, to see how kids follow instructions... (and) playing Follow the Leader, so it’s a lot of playing – it has to be fun for this age group (T5: 74-79). (See Figure 4.5 for examples of Teacher 5’s educational games.)

Figure 4.5: Examples of Teacher 5’s educational games



#### 4.2.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: The importance of kinaesthetics

The basic foundation for learning to read is initially kinaesthetic where the learner uses his body to feel the shape and directionality of the letters in a variety of ways and using different media. Phonological awareness is the awareness of sounds within words, but because the Grade R learner is still to varying degrees in the concrete stage of learning, kinaesthetic activities help him to assimilate the more abstract concept of letter sounds. According to four of the teachers (T1; T2; T4 and T5) and one mother (M5) interviewed, this may be actioned in five ways: to feel and touch concrete objects; to walk along the shape of the letter on the carpet; to write the letter in sensory media; to make letters using their own bodies; and to perform the actions to songs.

Firstly, the learner may feel and touch concrete objects, for example shapes (T1:70). The teacher could put felt on the letter so the child can feel it and the direction it goes in (through) sensory touch (T5: 180-182). Mother 5, who was the only mother to comment on the use of kinaesthetics, said: I use the sandpaper letters – so you can feel it...so when we feel we get that sensory integration from our touch as well as the sound that we hear such as /n/ in Naughty Nick<sup>11</sup> (M5:58-62). Secondly, one way of teaching letters through kinaesthetics is to write the letter of the week on the carpet with masking tape so they can walk along it; sometimes I use twigs for them to walk along (T1:121-122). Thirdly, writing the letter in sensory media is another way of allowing the learners to experience the letters through touch and feel. The teachers had a variety of ways to experience this. Teachers 1 and 2 agreed, for example, that the children write the letter in the sand in the sand pit (T1:123-124; T4:108). Teachers 1 and 4 said they encourage the learners to make the letters with play dough to familiarise themselves with the shape and directionality of the letter (T4:109-111). Other examples that were mentioned are to write it in the air, write it on the white boards (T4:108-109) and to finger paint the letter (T1:70). Fourthly, teachers use a number of learners' bodies for making the letter (T1:130-131) and lastly, the Letterland CD has songs that help learners to do the actions with the sound (T2:17-21).

It is evident that participating in kinaesthetic activities while learning the letter sounds may help learners to learn and understand the sounds within words. Kinaesthetics is therefore beneficial for the development of the Grade R learner's phonological awareness and reading readiness.

#### **4.2.2.4 Sub-theme 2.4: The need for drill, repetition and revision**

Grade R learners need lots of drill, repetition and revision in order to remember and achieve automaticity in their prereading skills. Teacher 2 (49-59) said that with Grade R, always you

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<sup>11</sup> Naughty Nick is a character from the commercial phonics programme Letterland.

have to repeat yourself all the time, and every day you have to recap on what you have done yesterday (T2:49-54). She explained that it is necessary to ensure a learner remembers what was taught previously before adding more learning to it: if you see that okay what we have learnt yesterday is /c/-/a/-/t/, a child can remember the sound and you can add on a bit of information (T2:54-56). On the other hand, if the learners have forgotten then you remind them “okay, remember we did this and the /c/ for cat, okay what else?” (T2:56-58). It is important for learners to remember what they learned the day before so the teacher is assured that they have understood it and that it has sunk in. Teacher 5 (247) used the word “drill” to describe how she reinforces what has already been taught: you may call it revision, you may call it drill, or whatever it is, but it goes and sits in the brain (T5:343-344). She said the learners would retrieve what they have learned later and this is a slow process that gets repeated until it becomes automatic and natural (T5:349-352).

*Journal entry 23 June 2015: None of the researchers in the literature study had mentioned the need for drill and practice, yet this is a daily practice in Teacher 2's classroom and my own. I recently attended a training workshop with other teachers from Grade R all the way to Grade 10. High school teachers mentioned among other things how they could see the difference between learners who had benefitted from being drilled with the basics such as times tables and letter sound correspondence in the lower grades and those who had not.*

From the data it is clear key aspects of phonological awareness such as phonics, play, and kinaesthetics in an integrated programme are valuable methods for preparing a Grade R learner for reading readiness. Consistent with their age, Grade R learners need a lot of drill, repetition and revision to reinforce and build on what has been learnt.

### 4.2.3 Theme 3: Parental influences

The way he lives affects the learner and how he learns. Data analysis results show four emerging sub-themes for the theme on parental influences: the parents’ contributions; under-resourced home circumstances; support for teachers; and the value of sending one’s child to a well-resourced school (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 3

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 3.1: Parents’ contributions	Any reference to parents’ contributions such as their knowledge, experience, home language and time available.	References to other people’s contributions to reading readiness.
Sub-theme 3.2: Under-resourced home circumstances	Any reference to under-resourced home circumstances.	References to any other home circumstances.
Sub-theme 3.3: Support for teachers from parents	Any reference to support, or lack of support, for teachers from parents.	References to support, or lack of support, for teachers from anyone else.
Sub-theme 3.4: The value of sending one’s child to a well-resourced school	Any reference to how parents leave the teaching of reading readiness to their child’s teacher and the school.	References to anyone else the parents leave the teaching of reading readiness to.

#### 4.2.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Parents’ contributions

Three important factors which affect reading readiness appear to be the parents and their knowledge and experience, home language and availability. Parents’ contributions to preparing a learner for reading readiness are important, but teachers tend to think parents often get it wrong due to a lack of knowledge and experience. Teachers see the need for educating parents on how best to help their child and parents seem to recognise this need and want to be educated too.

However, according to the data that emerged, teachers do not appear to educate parents enough to help them prepare their child for reading readiness. Teacher 5 (121-125) said: *we need to educate parents because they don’t have the knowledge to teach their child at the*

right developmental level. She suggested the school hold workshops for parents to understand the developmental level their child is at (T5:125-126). Mother 4 agreed: *so I think maybe between the schools and the parents there should be some sort of programme that bridges the gap between them* (M4:110-112). Lack of knowledge about how best to help one's child learn to read is a topic that is close to Mother 4's heart, as she has noticed that teaching and learning have changed since she was a child. She claimed: *as parents I think it's quite difficult for us because we were introduced way back to that old way of learning and we were so sure that even today it's still the (right) way* (M4:107-109). Mother 4 further admitted that it is frustrating to be intelligent and educated, yet not know how to help one's own child learn to read. She stated that: *we (parents) might be professionals and qualified and all that obviously, but how children learn, or how things are done today, it's not how they were done before* (M4:113-115).

An example that reflects the frustration that both parents and teachers seem to feel is the teaching of the ABC. As Teacher 4 noted: *parents obviously teach their kids the ABC song, so they know the ABC – but what sounds do the letters make – we teach the phonetic alphabet now* (T4:89-90). Mother 4 explained how inept she feels about the same concept: *like the ABC that's the most simple thing that I can actually use as an example to you at the moment* (M4:115-117). *We don't know what is expected, we don't know what is it that we are supposed to do, what is right and why did you decide that* (M4: 147-148).

A potential problem teachers encounter is certain parents expect more when it comes to preparing their Grade R child for reading readiness: *enthusiastic parents expect their child to know a bit more so they become a little pushy* (T5:29-30). However, some of the mothers disagreed with that point of view: *I haven't pushed the reading that much* (M5:70) and *(my son) gets to say the words so I mean that's just prep for him, so we don't go deep into reading* (M1:34-35). Mother 1 was also the mother who took the opportunity to start teaching her

child only because the older sibling was learning to read and the younger child wanted to as well (M1:54-55).

Not all parents are conversant with English as their first language, although English is the language of teaching at each of the six schools selected. According to the demographics (see Figures 3.1 and 3.2), Schools 1 and 2 are populated by Black African learners who do not speak English at home. The teachers at these schools teach a letter sound per week with the aid of the Letterland programme. If learners find it difficult to understand a concept in English, teachers are inventive in either translating for them or finding another learner who speaks that learner's language to assist them. Teacher 1 (281-284), for example said: (Sometimes) they understand, sometimes they didn't, but like (when) the Venda has difficulty...I'll ask...them "who is a Venda? Can you please help...what do you call this in Sivenda or in Setswana?" However, she commented that this can be both disruptive and time-consuming in a lesson.

Schools 3, 5 and 6 are predominantly White and English speaking. Teachers in these schools also teach a letter sound per week. School 4, however, is predominantly Black African and learners speak a fairly even mixture of English, Zulu and Sotho. The teachers at School 4 have moved away from teaching a letter sound of the week as they prefer to teach groups of rhyming sounds instead. Mother 4's home language is Xhosa and she finds it difficult to pronounce certain English words correctly (M4:149-151). She and her husband wanted to make learning to read as easy as possible for their children, so they made the decision to change their home language to English to boost their children's self-esteem (M4:49-53).

Other ways parents can contribute to their child's reading readiness include: [reading them bedtime stories from as early as they will listen](#) (T8:18-19) and making use of teachable opportunities. For example, Mother 5 (M5:72-78) described how she used a teachable

moment when she was taking a walk with her daughter one afternoon. The daughter had been looking at the numbers on the houses as they continued along the road, when she noticed that one house had the word fourteen written on it instead of the number 14. Mother 5 took the opportunity to explain to her daughter how to sound out the letters of the word fourteen and how the letters make a word when they are placed together.

It is clear parents want to do their best to help prepare their child for reading readiness, but they do not always know how to do so. Teachers see the need to help parents help their child, but it would appear that not enough is being done in that regard at the moment.

#### **4.2.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Under-resourced home circumstances**

Under-resourced home circumstances seemed to refer to low socio-economic living conditions for learners and a lack of support for teachers from parents. The learners in Teacher 1's class, for example, appear to be well cared for and educated at school in terms of food, equipment and teaching. However, they return home every day to conditions that are quite different. Teacher 1 described a typical situation at her school: *some of the children...live in a squatter camp – there's no electricity there and then they see the tavern (where) many things will happen - so even at school their behaviour is bad (and they swear) because they meet with many naughty ones (who) go to the tavern and drink (T1:185-190).* She continued: *they live together with their mummies and...maybe it's only one room...so sometimes they'll do what I think they'll see ...so it's affecting the children, yes the way they live...* (T1:195-199). Furthermore, Teacher 1 was concerned that some of the learners were neglected because, for example, some would come to school on the Monday wearing the same clothes they had worn to school the previous week. None of the other teachers or mothers talked about the under-resourced home circumstances of learners, but it stands to reason it is a factor that might negatively affect a learner's learning.

When I asked Teacher 1 how she addresses the problem of learners from under-resourced home circumstances in the classroom, she replied that she takes some extra time, usually at play time, to sit with the learners and give them some extra lessons in a variety of ways. She even gives them a hug and some sweets on their birthday so they might feel like other learners (T1:296-301).

*Journal entry 28 July 2015: Although Teacher 1 shared her concerns and experiences with me about the negative home circumstances of the learners in her class, it was evident during my visit to the school that the learners were happy, lively and noisy kids playing on the playground outside waiting for the bus or taxi to come and take them home after school. For those learners who have to return home to the under resourced circumstances that she described to me, I am so thankful that they will return to this school tomorrow where they receive such a loving, caring and resourceful education with this amazing teacher. Evidently, these learners have the opportunity to learn to read and break the poverty cycle that they were born into.*

#### 4.2.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Support for teachers from parents

It seems a lack of support for teachers from parents may be linked to under-resourced home circumstances: *their parents (don't) care about their kids...if you are asking "can you please visit the school because I want to talk with you" ... some they will come, but it's some they (won't)* (T1:222-227). Teacher 1 explained to the parents how they can become involved in preparing their child for reading readiness at an orientation meeting with them at the beginning of the year. She said: *I was talking with the parents first in the meeting: "please if your child says the teacher said let's bring (something for the letter of the week table)", please help and find the thing and tell her okay what's (she) gonna say with this picture? But it's some; I think maybe a quarter of the class...* (T1:231-234). When I suggested it is hard to prepare a learner to learn to read under such circumstances, Teacher1 agreed: *Yes, if (only) the parents will wake up and work together (with the teachers)* (T1:238).

Members of the focus group suggested that the following factors affect parental support for teachers preparing a learner for reading readiness: *issues at home* (T9:44); *parents must be made aware of the child's behaviour... (poor) attendance, lack of exposure (to reading at home), behaviour if they don't listen to you...and (how poor) diet affects them badly* (T8:51-53). Furthermore, Teacher 8 (65) suggested that *teachers should address each issue and get the parents to buy-in*, and Teacher 6 (71-72) agreed that *parents' buy-in is important for setting the tone and (parents') willingness to listen (to their child) is also important*. These suggestions concur with what the other teachers found.

#### **5.2.3.4 Sub-theme 3.4: The value of sending one's child to a well-resourced school**

Parents have an important decision to make when deciding which school to send their child to for Grade R, because it is clear that the onus is on the teachers to prepare learners for reading readiness. For example, Mother 3 freely admitted that her children have been completely guided by the school they attend. She stated: *I don't think I would have known what to do at all* (M3:30-31). She elaborated further: *I haven't really done any preparation for reading outside of what the teachers at school have guided us to do* (M3:38-39). She said this is one of the misconceptions parents have: *I don't think a lot of the parents realise that everything that the children do in Grade R is a pre-reading skill. I think they think it's just left to be play school and the rest will be left to Grade 1* (M3:63-65). Mother 4 agreed with Mother 3 that parents leave the teaching to the teachers at the school: *I'm not gonna take the credit for his progress...the school has done so much...it's the school that has played (the most important role), you know. The whole aim now is to try and get our children into (good) schools – we want the best for them* (M4: 77-78). She confessed later in the interview: *I think I relaxed a bit because I realise that the school is doing more than enough* (M4:175-177). Mothers interviewed seemed satisfied that teachers and schools were doing a thorough job of preparing their children for reading readiness.

From the participant’s statements, it appears there is value in sending one’s child to a well-resourced school. However, a few parents might abdicate responsibility for preparing their child for reading readiness and just leave it up to the teachers at that school.

#### 4.2.4 Theme 4: A network of support

In this theme, participants’ understanding of how other people contribute to learners’ reading readiness is explored. Two sub-themes (see Table 4.6) were created to show the network of support for learners at school and at home.

Table 4.6: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 4

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 4.1: Network of support for learners learning to read at school	Any reference from a teacher or mother about other people who are involved in the learner’s reading readiness at school.	References about other people who are involved in the learner’s reading readiness anywhere other than at school.
Sub-theme 4.2: Network of support for learners learning to read at school at home	Any reference from a teacher or mother about other people who are involved in the learner’s reading readiness at home	References about other people who are involved in the learner’s reading readiness anywhere other than at home.

##### 4.2.4.1: Sub-theme 4.1: A network of support at school

The learner’s class teacher is the person who is most involved in his reading readiness at school. However, there are several other people who may also contribute meaningfully, such as other teachers, librarians and therapists.

Mothers 1 and 2 are agreed that the teacher is obviously involved in the learner’s reading readiness (M1:231-233; M2:226-231). The teacher’s role is an important one for a variety of reasons. Firstly, Mother 5 emphasised the fact that **educators need to be properly trained and qualified and they must be passionate about what they do** (M5:143-144). Secondly, Teacher 5 suggested teachers should challenge and extend all learners, not just those who battle to learn. She said even clever learners must **learn to persevere and struggle, not just find everything**

easy (T5:545-551). It seems that learners who find learning easy may eventually realise they do not have the coping skills and determination to persist when learning becomes more difficult. Teacher 5's son experienced this problem. She explained that he was clever, but because his teacher did not push him and challenge him to learn more, it **created a barrier that he doesn't know how to deal with** (T5:555-556). Thirdly, Teacher 6 said it takes an interested teacher to create a solution to any problem that a learner may have when learning to read, such as recommending an eye test for poor vision (T6:133-134).

It emerged that over and above the act of teaching, teachers need passion for teaching reading, the right training and a professional teaching qualification. Teachers should also challenge and extend each learner's ability, and take an interest in the individual learner's possible barriers to learning. Other teachers at school, including physical education and computer teachers, may also be involved in helping the learner on his way to reading readiness. Teacher 7 in the focus group discussion said: **actually every member of staff would be involved** (T7: 120-121).

Although each of the six schools in the study has a library, Teacher 2 was the only teacher who mentioned the importance of the librarian to help learners learn to read. She said at her school, the teachers take their class to the library at an allotted time once per week. Teacher 2 described how the librarian's knowledge makes the lesson special: **(the librarian) has different books for different ages, so she knows that when it's library time we need to take the kids there and she knows which category to choose the books from** (T2:204-206). She explained that this intrigues the learners and they love going to the library because of the encouragement and attention they receive. She acknowledged that: **library (time) is well spent** (T2:235-236). (See Figure 4.6 for photographs of the library at School 2.)

*Journal entry 23 June 2015: When I had finished taking photographs of her classroom, Teacher 2 asked me if I would like to have a look at the library. The library is a separate prefab building nearby. I was very interested to take a look at it. She had to ask the librarian for the key and she was “very honoured” to hand it over. The library was simply furnished with a teacher’s desk and chair and some cosy rugs and cushions for the learners to sit on. The books were arranged according to grades and topics. The Grade R section mainly offered story and picture books. The non-fictional books are in the higher grades’ and teachers’ sections. I took some photos of the Grade R section which corroborate what Teacher 2 said about the library (see Figure 4.6).*

Figure 4.6: The library at School 2



Three teachers (T3; T6 and T8) mentioned that occupational and/or speech therapists may sometimes be involved in the learner's reading readiness, for example when there is a problem with his perceptual skills, processing skills or auditory discrimination (T3:180-183; T6:110; T8:117-118). It seems that specialists such as audiologists and optometrists may also contribute to a learner's learning. Everything is related, for example, **if a child has problems with vision, that's the person (eye specialist) who will influence (learning to read)** (T6:130-131). Teacher 6 added that technology nowadays is advanced with regard to devices such as spectacles and hearing aids for young learners (T6:132-133).

In Grade R, preparing learners for reading readiness is a team effort. The learner's teacher is the most important person, but all the other teachers in the school, including the librarian, can make significant contributions too. Other experts in their respective fields, such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, optometrists, and audiologists may also be part of the network of support, depending on the individual needs of the learner.

#### **4.2.4.2: Sub-theme 4.2: A network of support at home**

At home, parents are the first and most important teachers. Mother 1 said she checks on her children to make sure they do their homework properly by asking them questions such as: **have you read your books, do you understand it, can you do your verses?** (M1:222-224).

Mother 2 explained that she helps her daughter learn the letter sounds and gives a lot of encouragement and praise to motivate her, for example, when she forgets where certain letters go (M2:226-231). Mother 3 was the only stay-at-home mum interviewed and she admitted that she is usually the parent that helps her children at home (M3: 198-199). She encourages her Grade R child to participate in **arts and crafts and all those fun little things, (such as) mosaicking...so I understand that's all fine motor development, although that's not my motivation behind it – it's just fun** (M3:214-217). Other activities Mother 3 participates in

with her daughter include playing educational games which aid reading skills, such as Spill and Spell and memory games. She also said she reads a lot of bedtime stories to her children and that she sometimes uses audio CDs so that her daughter may follow the story in the book while listening to it (M3:221-224).

It is evident that mothers seem to be more involved than fathers. Fathers were not mentioned often in the interviews and when they were it was more to show how little they participated in their child's reading readiness. For example, Mother 1 said her husband plays an important role in playing sport with their children, but *he doesn't feature in (reading and homework) unless I beg, and if I beg him he'll take out a book and leave it, so he's not a good example* (M1:224-227). Mother 3 acknowledged that her husband *will do reading homework with the kids sometimes* (M3:199-200) but she added that *he travels quite a bit so it's not regular* (M3:226-227).

It is not only parents who are involved in the learner's reading readiness, but also possibly the learner's friends, his siblings and other caregivers. Friends, especially older friends may be a positive influence. Mother 4's Grade R learner can read already. She said her son was the youngest in his group of friends and that *at times I will sit with them before a bookshelf: I will see the books all over (the place) so I'm assuming also that they do a lot of reading* (M4:365-365).

Older siblings may also play an important role in motivating their younger counterparts to want to learn to read. Mother 1 said her older son in Grade 1 taught his younger brother in Grade R a lot of things about reading. She explained: *actually he's the one who taught him how to read in detail I would say. 'Cause now he looks at covers so he would see "m-i-l-k...oh milk, milk - mummy I can read!" So, but it's mostly the brother who contributed to that* (M1:235-240). Mother 2 agreed that an older brother or sister may help a younger sibling

learn to read (M2:223-225). She told me earlier in the interview that the older brother helps his younger Grade R sibling with phonics (M2:180-181). Lastly, Mother 3 was adamant that her older daughter, rather than her son, helps her Grade R child learn to read: *so definitely (the Grade R child and older sister) play “school, school” upstairs, definitely* (M3: 209-210).

Other caregivers such as housekeepers may contribute to the learner’s reading readiness at home. Mother 1 said when she went back to work leaving her first two children at home, she asked her housekeeper to help a bit. However, English was not the housekeeper’s first language so her involvement was limited (M1:200-202).

At home, it seems to be mainly the mothers who become involved in their child’s reading readiness. Fathers are more likely to involve themselves in the more physical, sports activities with learners and may work away from home a lot and therefore not have as much time. To a lesser extent a learner’s older friends may help motivate him to want to read. If a learner has older siblings it is likely that they will also help and encourage him to read.

#### 4.2.5 Theme 5: Reading and storytelling

One way to start preparing Grade R learners for learning to read is by telling or reading stories to them and then talking about the story, which helps learners develop a love for reading. Two sub-themes (see Table 4.7) emerged for this theme: a culture of reading at home; and the relevance of reading and telling stories to learners.

Table 4.7: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 5

Theme	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Sub-theme 5.1: A culture of reading at home	Any reference to parents reading or telling stories to learners; role modelling reading; having a supply of books at home or borrowing books from the library.	References that do not apply to a culture of reading at home.
Sub-theme 5.2: The relevance of telling and reading stories to learners	Any reference to parents and teachers reading or telling stories to learners and discussing the stories afterwards.	References that do not apply to parents and teachers discussing, reading or telling stories to learners.

#### 4.2.5.1: Sub-theme 5.1: A culture of reading at home

Two teachers emphasised the importance of creating a reading culture to cultivate a love of reading in learners at home. Teacher 4 (150) said that parental involvement was important because *if (the parents) don't speak to the children and encourage reading at home and tell bedtime stories etc. and expose children to that then they don't understand why they must do it at school* (T4:150-154). Similarly, Teacher 7 said it is important for parents to expose their children to books in order to stimulate and encourage them to want to read (T7:45-46).

The mothers, however, seemed to think that one or both parents did create a culture of reading at home and Mother 1 explained why she thought this was an important factor affecting reading readiness. She said: *I think it's the environment. If there isn't a culture of reading at home, then the kids don't see the need. So if all we ever do - mum, dad, everyone's watching TV - why would they see the need to pick up a book* (M1:68-71). When I asked Mother 1 how she creates this culture of reading in her house, she explained that she herself reads many books and that she role models reading for her daughter. Mother 1 demonstrates to her daughter the correct way to read by opening a picture book and asking her to describe what she sees or “reads” in the pictures. The child then describes what she sees in the pictures saying the words slowly as if reading them out loud (M1:76-81).

Mother 1 added that once her elder son starts doing his Grade 1 homework, the other children in the house do “their homework” too. Her younger children take out books, draw, cut out pictures, or whatever else they want to do as long as it is book related (M1:112-116). When they get tired, she might put a movie on such as Rapunzel as a reward, because she has already read that story to them (M1:122-124).

Mother 4 said that she is studying for her honours degree, so the only reading she has time for is her course material (M4:274-279). However, she continued: *with the father, it's actually*

the opposite. So I'm not too sure whether (our son) took that from him...he's forever reading...but...he doesn't read to them so much, I always have to beg him to read to them. So I'm not too sure whether (my son started reading) because of his (genes, or) whatever from his dad? Maybe it's in the family? ... But I know the dad loves reading (M4:279-288). It appears that due to his father modeling a love of reading in the family, Mother 4's Grade R son is reading already. Perhaps the mother is also a good role model, even if she does not realise it, as she is studying and reading for her postgraduate degree.

According to the teachers and the mothers, a culture of reading in the home environment is an important factor for reading readiness because it provides important links between learner and parent(s) and between learner and teacher. Parents do understand the need for creating a reading environment at home.

#### **4.2.5.2: Sub-theme 5.2: The relevance of telling and reading stories to learners**

Telling and reading stories to learners was a topic the focus group participants in particular enjoyed discussing in their interview. Teacher 6 (14) said: *you start by reading to them... (and encourage a) passion and love for quiet reading.* Similarly, Teacher 9 (33) agreed that *telling them stories* was important and Teacher 8 (18-19) confirmed that learners need *exposure to reading, so reading them bedtime stories can start from as early as they will listen.* Teacher 7 (20-22) summarised how learners progress through various stages of reading. She explained that learners start by looking at pictures in books, then reading the pictures, and then making up a story about the pictures. Eventually learners learn letter sounds and make words by linking the sounds together. Learners then start incidentally reading words that they see often, such as simple cvc words and logos. Teacher 9 (33-34) agreed with Teacher 7's description, but also mentioned the younger Grade 000s usually just start with listening to stories.

Once learners are used to listening to stories in Grade R, teachers start expanding the learners' knowledge and understanding of reading by talking about the story afterwards. Teacher 1 said: you read them the story, maybe Noah and (the) ark...and then we'll talk about that story: "What is this picture – what's happening, can you see?" (T1:74-76). Furthermore, Teacher 1 (112) reads the short story about each letter sound in the Letterland book. Each story is accompanied by bright illustrations to help the learner remember the sound of each letter. Teacher 4 supported this when she said she also uses the Letterland stories to reinforce a letter sound for the learners (T4:114). She added that discussing the stories is important because it helps to test their understanding of their own language...if they don't understand what you're telling them then how are they supposed to just follow plain instructions, never mind starting to put letters together and words that (have) no meaning to them (T4:76-80). (See Figures 4.7 and 4.8 for photographs of Letterland resources used in schools which corroborate what the teachers said.)

Teacher 1 takes the story discussion further by inviting the learners to read the pictures back to her (T1:82-83) and tell her stories about their experiences too (T1:165). To involve the learners in story telling she also encourages them to "come tell me what have you seen there on the TV" - they tell the story what have they seen, or the weekend story and come and tell what happened at home on the weekend (T1: 166-170).

Figures 4.7: Teacher 3's Letterland lower case pictorial alphabet



Figures 4.8: Teacher 1's learner's drawings in Letterland work book



The mothers were very involved in reading stories to their children: *I read (my daughter) stories every night* (M5:82-83) and *I read my children stories* (M1:32). Mother 1 felt the need for her children to love books: *I want my kids to love books. So that's why I have developed quite a big library and I read (to) them* (M1:49-51). Mother 2 also takes time to take out a book and read it to her daughter. Her daughter enjoys listening to and asking questions about the story (M2:103-106). On the other hand, Mother 4 said she prefers to take her child to the library: *we decided, my husband and I, that every Saturday we (would) try to go to the library and get books (as many) as we can and try to read those books* (M4 178-180). However, Mother 4 found that when visiting the library, there were challenges involved and questions to be answered. She did not know, for example, how many books learners should read per week, or how many times the same book should be read to the learner (M4:181-184).

*Journal entry 8 July 2015: Here is an opportunity for teachers to assist parents with the reading readiness of their child perhaps by sending a book from the school library home with each learner every week. Teachers know which books would interest and be at the right level for the learners so if the library has enough books to manage this I think it would benefit both parents and learners. We do this at the school where I teach and the learners love library time when they may choose a book to take home for their parents to read to them. I use this as an opportunity to read and discuss the title of the book each learner chooses and we guess what the story might be about.*

Learners seem to benefit from having both parents and teachers read stories to them and help them develop a love of reading. Teachers have their own particular way of reading stories and inviting discussion afterwards or encouraging learners to tell stories back to them. Parents also have different ways of making stories available to their children whether they build up their own library, visit a local library or buy books.

#### **4.3 Summary of the chapter**

In this chapter, I presented the results of the research and described the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis. I related the results to the research questions and I stated the criteria for what I chose to include and exclude in the results discussion. Then I discussed each theme and sub-theme in greater detail to give the reader as close a picture of the results as possible. I quoted participants verbatim to support and add credibility to my discussion.

I explored the need for teachers and parents to take the individuality and maturity of the learner into consideration for reading readiness. Phonological awareness proved to play an important role as far as the learner's phonic awareness and the benefits of play and kinaesthetic activities are concerned. The need for continuous repetition and recapping of skills taught was discussed. I considered the role that parents play and how their home circumstances might affect a learner's reading readiness. Furthermore, I looked at the extent

to which parents support teachers and the value of sending their child to a well-resourced school. Apart from teachers and parents, it emerged that there are several other people who may play a significant role in preparing the learner for reading, such as his older friends, older siblings and housekeeper. Lastly, I investigated the importance of developing a culture of reading at home and the relevance of telling and reading stories to learners.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I presented the results of my study and linked them to the research questions. In the following chapter, I discuss the findings of the study. I also situate the results of my study within the framework of literature on the topic and the underpinning theoretical framework.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the results of the study. In this chapter, I discuss my findings and anchor them to the relevant literature and theoretical framework. I explore what I find is common, different and unexpected between the results of my study and what the literature says.

### 5.2 Anchoring the findings to the literature and theoretical framework

I discuss the findings and then link them to the literature I reviewed and the theoretical framework. I relate each of the five themes (see Table 5.1) that emerged from the results of the data analysis to the findings of other researchers and theorists. The first theme I explored was the individuality and maturity of the learner.

Table 5.1 Themes

<b>Theme 1: The individuality and maturity of the learner</b>
<b>Theme 2: The child's phonological awareness</b>
<b>Theme 3: Parental involvement, knowledge and experience</b>
<b>Theme 4: A network of support</b>
<b>Theme 5: Reading and storytelling</b>

#### 5.2.1 Theme 1: The individuality and maturity of the learner.

In this theme, participants' understanding of how the individuality and maturity of the learner affect a Grade R learner's reading readiness was explored. This study found that learners starting Grade R tend to arrive with different educational backgrounds and experiences. Similarly, Davin & van Staden (2005:94) found, for example, that while some learners are already starting to read in Grade R, other learners are not fluent in the language of teaching at their schools. Mohangi et al. (2016:71) also found that "diverse learner backgrounds" was a challenge schools in rural areas encounter.

The current research study showed that some learners are not yet developmentally ready to learn phonics and phonemic awareness, and yet, others already know letter sounds and need to be challenged. My finding is similar to that of Joubert et al (2013:244) who say that: “learners start their schooling at different levels of phonemic awareness and therefore teachers need to facilitate and teach phonemic awareness explicitly for Grade R”. My finding also ties in with Piaget’s notion of equilibrium versus disequilibrium where the teacher must know what stage of literacy each of her learners is at and then stretch them to reach their individual next stage of learning (Woolfolk 2010:49). The finding of the current study indicates that learners are not all on the same level academically, developmentally and experience-wise, therefore teachers need to take these differences into consideration when teaching them. My finding ties in with Bandura’s notion of self-efficacy where a learner learns at his own pace according to his own ability without having to compare himself to someone else (Woolfolk 2010:350). In other words, teachers need to cater for the individuality and maturity of the learner when preparing Grade R learners for reading readiness and try to find a way to close the reading readiness gap between learners who have attended preschool and those who have not.

The finding in this study that the individuality of the learner needs to be considered concurred with the findings of Davin and van Staden (2005) when they discussed the two main methods of teaching reading: the whole language approach and the phonetic method. Firstly, Davin and van Staden (2005:105) stated that one of the advantages of the whole language approach to teaching reading is that skills are taught as the learner needs them to determine the meaning of the text, which means that learners learn to read at their own individual rate. On the other hand, the literature also tells us that one of the disadvantages of the whole language approach is that some learners find it hard to remember words that they have seen and find spelling difficult later on at school. Therefore, the whole language approach is not necessarily

advantageous to all learners as a method for learning to read (Davin & van Staden 2005:105) as it does not take into account the individuality of the learner. Secondly, Davin and van Staden (2005) found one of the disadvantages of the phonetic method is that all learners must be on the same level and they are all taught in the same way, which shows a lack of concern for learners' individuality. The multisensory approach is a third approach to learning to read that I discovered in the literature. One of the advantages of the multisensory approach is that it appeals to each learner's individual style of learning (Avington 2012:40). This advantage is supported by my finding that teachers need to find the right teaching method to suit each learner's individual needs and developmental level.

This study found that irrespective of preschool attendance and experience, learners develop differently. Some are slow developers, and need more time and attention in order to acquire the necessary pre-reading skills. Other learners are already able to read when they start Grade R, so differences in learners' ability to learn to read need to be addressed. Similarly, in the literature review, Gordon and Browne (2008:439) and Woolfolk (2010:56) found that building on prereading skills takes time and has tremendous individual variation in knowledge and skills relating to reading, which is why it is known as emergent literacy, or readiness for reading. Furthermore, according to Johnson (1999:13), the term "reading readiness" suggests learners need to reach a certain level of physical and neurological maturation before they are ready to learn to read. It is unlikely that all learners will achieve physical and neurological maturation at the same time.

The results of this study showed reading readiness is a gradual process and that it may not be possible to determine when a learner would begin reading. The teachers that I interviewed said that reading readiness depended on the learner himself, his family and his background. This finding concurs with Davin and van Staden (2005:82) when they say that learning to read is a gradual process. They also found that the process of learning to read was affected by

the learner's home and school environment and his physical, perceptual, intellectual, language and emotional development.

However, my study did not find home language important for the learner's individuality. Other literature also comments that if the language of teaching is English, it is much easier for a learner to learn to read in English if his home language is English (Grove & Wetterberg 2011:19). Furthermore, Grove and Wetterberg (2011:20) found the amount of teaching time, availability of materials and whether learners are taught in their mother tongue all affect how easily learners learn to read (Grove & Wetterberg 2011:20).

This study found that some learners show a desire to learn to read as they want to know more about skills such as letter/sound correspondence. These enthusiastic learners ask their parents for assistance and explanations when they encounter difficulties in learning to read. Similarly, Ali et al (1980:14) found that reading to learners is valuable because it encourages learners to love books and to want to learn to read for themselves. According to these authors, the real motivation for learners to want to read comes from being read to. Furthermore, the literature tells us that a multisensory approach to learning to read helps a learner process and retain language knowledge more efficiently (Moats and Farrell in Neumann et al. 2009:315), which in turn motivates the learner to want to read for himself. One reason why a young learner might want to learn to read suggested by my research was the positive influence of an older sibling who could already read. Woolfolk (2010:57) does not specify an older sibling as such, but my findings concur with the author's that the more families are involved, the better their children's literacy is developed.

Lastly, my research found that some learners learn to read without anyone really noticing. For example, one mother realised one day that her son had probably started reading about three months earlier and thought that it must be because he started reading the news ticker flashing

across the bottom of the television screen while watching the news bulletin. My findings support Davin and van Staden (2005:101) when they say that environment print, or words which learners see often, helps learners relate the written words to the objects they represent and often results in them reading these words without even realising it.

I conclude the discussion of this theme by claiming that my findings generally concur with the literature that teachers need to take the individuality and maturity of the learner entering Grade R into consideration when teaching pre-reading skills. However, while the literature highlights the importance of home language and the language of teaching as factors that affect reading readiness, the findings from my study did not place emphasis on these factors. The next theme to emerge from the results of the data analysis was the learner's phonological awareness.

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: The learner's phonological awareness**

According to literature reviewed (Anthony et al. 2007:119; Bailet et al. 2009:337; Schuele & Boudreau 2008:5), phonological awareness was one of the most critical skills that a Grade R learner needed in order to be ready for reading. Findings from the present study support the literature base as participants spoke at length about the Grade R learner's acquisition of phonological awareness when learning to read. Participants generally used the term "phonics" to describe this method of teaching learners to read, whereas authors in the literature review used the term "phonetics".

My study shows that mothers and teachers teach the letter sounds to prepare learners for reading readiness. This supports the literature base that says the learners work with letters and sounds to improve phonological awareness (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:6). Learning the letter sounds also links to Piaget's notion of schemes (Woolfolk 2010:32). The learner recognises a letter symbol (small scheme), then a letter and its sound (new, more advanced scheme), and

then a group of letters to make a word, and so he builds on his learning. Participants in my study pointed out that it is preferable in Grade R to teach only the hard sounds of the letters, rather than the soft sounds which may be confusing at first. The literature study did not necessarily distinguish between hard and soft sounds, but it did find that “some phonemes should perhaps be avoided in teaching phonological awareness” (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:12).

Participants in this study also cautioned against teaching letter names with the letter sounds because that too may confuse a young learner. However, the findings of the present study differ from the literature which suggests that the learner’s ability to learn letter-sound correspondence relates directly to his knowledge of letter names which helps him understand the alphabetic principle (Bailet et al. 2009:337).

Furthermore, my study indicated that teaching the letter sounds phonetically actually helps learners to construct and deconstruct simple words and to sound them out correctly. Constructing simple words links to Piaget’s theory where the learner has the ability to construct knowledge (Ali et al. 1980:10) by developing and amending his own knowledge (Gordon & Browne 2008:117). Once a learner feels comfortable with letter sounds, the next stage is analysis and synthesis of simple consonant/vowel/consonant (cvc) words. This confirms the finding of the literature base that segmenting initial and final sounds leads to blending sounds into cvc words, then segmenting cvc words into sounds and eventually deleting and manipulating phonemes to make and change cvc words (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:6). The present study shows that analysis and synthesis of cvc words soon leads to reading simple words, which in turn motivates the learner to want to learn to read. Similarly, Schuele and Boudreau (2008:9) found that improvement in word decoding leads to recognising words quickly and accurately, which leads to thinking not only about sounding

words, but thinking about their meaning. Skilled word decoding leads to fluent reading and therein lies the value of teaching letter sounds.

According to the literature reviewed, a learner's phonological awareness is the best predictor of his later ability to read and write in Grade 1 (Anthony et al 2007:114; Bailet et al. 2009:337; Neumann & Neumann 2009:257; Schuele & Boudreau 2008:7). Therefore, it is possible to identify learners who have not yet mastered phonological awareness by mid to late Grade R and predict that they would be the learners who are most at risk for not being ready to read in Grade 1. My study did not really find that skills learnt in Grade R could already predict possible future problems in a learner's reading ability, but it did find that phonological awareness was an important factor in the learner's readiness for reading. Teachers in Grade R do not necessarily have any knowledge about how easily their learners read in Grade 1, so that kind of continuity is possibly lacking. I think that knowing and understanding the importance of the learner's phonological awareness indicates that teachers would intervene if they found a learner was battling in this regard. Therefore, teachers in my study might not have specified that poor phonological awareness predicts that a learner would battle to read the following year, but I think that it could be implied.

According to the literature study, researchers gave attention to phonemic awareness and its importance for early reading development (Apel 2009:42). Phonemic awareness is an awareness that words are made up of individual sounds (Joubert et al. 2013: 309). Teachers and mothers in my study talked mainly about phonics, a method that focuses on phonetics which studies the formation and pronunciation of speech sounds. Therefore, for the practical purposes of this discussion and for the reader, phonemic awareness, phonics and phonetics are considered to be more or less interchangeable terms for learners learning the sounds represented by letters. In that case my study corroborates what the literature review says about the importance of teaching Grade R learners the sounds of letters.

My study found that most teachers use teaching a letter of the week as a useful strategy for teaching the letter sounds. This supports the literature base which says, for example, that many preschools use a “letter-of-the-week framework” for phonological awareness (Schuele & Boudreau 2008:5).

According to the present study, a second useful way of preparing Grade R learners for reading was through play. Free play and playing physical and educational games linked to reading skills make learning to read fun and motivate the learner to want to learn to read. Similarly, the literature study found that the best way for learners to learn to read in a relaxed way is to use the fun activities involved in a multisensory approach where learners are involved in learning through play (Avington 2012:10; Davin & van Staden 2005:107).

According to the present study, a third way of helping learners along the path of learning to read was kinaesthetically, or through the body. This supports the literature study because one of the pathways to learning to read used in the multisensory approach is spatial and motor memory. Developing spatial and motor memory incorporates many kinaesthetic activities which develop different parts of the body while teaching prereading skills (Avington 2012:19). Similarly, Neumann et al. (2009:313) discuss the tactile tracing of letters and using whole body movements to aid learners’ learning of letter sounds. Avington (2012:71) also recommends learners mould play dough to form letters and to walk along ropes that are arranged in the shapes of letters (Avington 2012:38) to kinaesthetically feel the shapes of the letters. Lastly, performing the actions to songs is a kinaesthetic method of teaching prereading skills and singing songs is orally kinaesthetic (Avington 2012:19).

To conclude this theme on the learner’s phonological awareness, I proffer that my findings concur with the literature that teachers need to teach letter sounds as part of the letter of the week strategy. Teachers should furthermore take into consideration the learner’s phonic

ability, the importance of play and the importance of kinaesthetics when teaching prereading skills. The next theme to emerge from the results of the data analysis was parental involvement, knowledge and experience.

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Parental involvement, knowledge and experience**

According to the present study, one of the most valuable contributions a parent can make is to read stories to their child at bedtime. Similarly, the literature study found that parental involvement is important because learners tend to find it easier to learn to read if their parents read stories to them (Ali et al. 1980:12). Researchers (Ali et al. 1980:14; Gordon & Browne 2008:439; Johnson 1999:13; Neuman 2014:2) talk about the importance of adults showing learners how to hold and turn the pages of a book; how they should read the same book to the learner again and again, and discuss the story with him and so forth. The word “adults” implies that parents as well as teachers should be responsible for carrying out these activities with the learner. Homes that encourage a reading culture have a lot of books and parents read to their children for pleasure (Woolfolk 2010:57). This also ties in with Bandura’s notion of triarchic reciprocal causality where the environment (reading culture at home) motivates the learner to want to read, so he believes he can do it (Woolfolk 2010:350). However, not all homes have such resources.

My study indicated that some homes are under-resourced which means that, for example, due to their low socio-economic living conditions parents do not have money to buy books or other reading material. Hence, under-resourced home circumstances may imply that the learner’s opportunity to learn to read may be negatively affected. This substantiates the findings of the literature study where researchers found that learning to read is negatively affected by the lack of resources in a learner’s low socio-economic home environment (Davin & van Staden 2005:82; de Witt 2007:9; Luther 2012: 36). Learners from under-resourced homes are also less likely to have parents that can read to them (Luther 2012:37).

The present study found that teachers address the problem of learners from under-resourced home circumstances by creating opportunities to give them extra lessons, often during outside playtime. Teachers also give these learners special attention to help them feel like other learners from adequately resourced homes. These findings corroborate what the literature says about the importance of teachers showing respect for and giving extra assistance to young learners from under-resourced homes to help them learn to read to improve their lives (Luther 2012: 36).

#### **5.2.4 Theme 4: A network of support**

The current study found that in the school environment, teachers were obviously the main people involved in the learner's learning to read, followed by specialist teachers, librarians, speech therapists and occupational therapists. The teachers were expected to be trained, qualified and passionate about preparing young learners to be ready to read. On the other hand, the literature study was mainly written in the passive form which meant that it did not mention teachers, parents or adults for much of the discussion. When caregivers were mentioned it was mainly the involvement of teachers (for example, Davin & van Staden 2005:101), and adults (for example, Gordon & Browne 2008:439) in teaching reading, although it did find that peer tutoring involved older learners in helping younger learners to improve their reading ability (Topping et al. 2006:300).

This study also indicated that in the home environment, mothers are the usually the first teacher for a skill such as reading. Fathers were generally involved in more physical activities such as ball skills. This study furthermore found that older siblings also played a significant role in helping and motivating their younger siblings to learn to read. Vygotsky used the term scaffolding for assistance from older learners and other people, as it provides support for the learner (Oguz 2007:11). However, the literature study did not find it important to distinguish between mothers and fathers, but simply called them parents (for example, Ali et al. 1980:12)

or adults (for example, Gordon & Browne 2008:439) leaving it to the reader to discern who the adults were.

### **5.2.5 Theme 5: Reading and storytelling**

The present study found that by creating a culture of reading at home, a love of reading was cultivated in learners. The reading culture grows from parents exposing learners to books, reading to learners, role modelling reading to learners and planning time for learners to read at home. Similarly, the literature study found that the whole language approach to learning to read requires a print-rich environment at home so that learners have access to a variety of good books and parents who read to them and to themselves (Woolfolk 2010:473). The learner observes his parents reading and writing and this encourages him to want to read and write something for his parents to read back to him (Davin & van Staden 2005:92; Joubert et al. 2013:113). This shared activity links to Piaget's constructivist theory which claims that knowledge of reading is constructed while the learner is actively involved in reading activities at home. By modelling reading, parents motivate their child to want to learn to read too (Ali et al. 1980:10). Similarly, according to Vygotsky's socialcultural theory, parents' modelling reading at home encourages learners to adapt their own learning to this social norm (Johnson 1999:5). Bandura's social cognitive theory also finds that when learners observe adults modelling enjoying reading for pleasure, it makes them want to experience that too (Woolfolk 2010:349). Furthermore, Bandura's notion of vicarious experience says that if parents model success in a reading activity, and the learner identifies positively with them, his self-efficacy will be raised (Woolfolk 2010:352).

### 5.3 Summary

The discussion in Chapter 5 links the findings of the present study to those of the literature base and theoretical framework, according to the five themes that emerged from the results of the data analysis. It is clear that the first theme, the individuality and maturity of the learner, relates well to the literature study as many similarities were found. My study found that learners enter Grade R with varying backgrounds, experiences, developmental levels and knowledge, a fact which agreed with the literature base. I related this fact to both Piaget's notion of equilibrium and disequilibrium, and Bandura's concept of self-efficacy. I claimed that teachers need to find a way to bridge the gap between learners' unique individual levels of development and needs.

Unexpectedly, my study differed from the literature study which found that a learner learns to read more easily in his home language. This may be due to learners in the schools sampled being conversant in English, the language of teaching.

In the discussion of the second theme, my study agreed with the literature study that phonological awareness is arguably the most important skill a learner needs for reading readiness. My study's finding that the way a learner constructs knowledge while acquiring phonological awareness supports both Piaget's notion of schemes and his constructivist theory. Unexpectedly, my study emphasised which sounds should be taught and that letter names should not be taught, which this literature base did not seem to find important. Analysis and synthesis of simple words were found to be equally important in both my study and the literature base. The literature study found phonological awareness is an important predictor of a learner's future reading ability. However, my study did not place emphasis on this. My study's findings of the importance of play and kinaesthetic methods of preparing learners for reading readiness supported the literature study. I claimed that my findings

largely concurred with those of the literature base that phonological awareness is a critical factor in the reading readiness of learners.

In the third theme, my study found that the most significant contribution a parent could make is to read stories to their child(ren). This finding linked easily to the literature base and I was also able to relate the finding to Bandura's notion of triarchic reciprocal causality. However, this study found that under-resourced homes negatively impact on the learner's preparation for reading readiness, a finding that substantiated the literature base.

In the fourth theme, my study was concerned with people other than teachers and parents who are involved in the learner's learning to read. This differed from the literature base which did not place any importance on this factor. I was, however, able to link other people assisting learners to Vygotsky's notion of scaffolding.

Lastly, in theme five, my study found that a reading culture in the home environment ignited a desire in learners to learn to read. This finding successfully supported the literature study. I also linked my study's finding to Piaget's constructivist theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Bandura's social cognitive theory and Bandura's notion of vicarious experience, which is a source of self-efficacy.

I found that I was able to successfully relate my study to the literature base and the theoretical framework. There were some unexpected differences between the present study and the literature study, but I have described them and explained my possible reasons for the discrepancies. These differences suggest the reason for this present study and the gap in the literature that it fills.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I situated the results of my study within the framework of literature on the subject and the theoretical framework. My intention was to illustrate corroborations as well as differences between the literature, theoretical framework and my findings.

In the following chapter, I present my final conclusions based on my research findings. I present these in relation to the research questions that guided my study. I also present possible contributions of the study as well as recommendations for future research and training.

## **CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 5, I anchored the results of my study within the literary and theoretical frameworks on the subject of factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners in selected schools in Gauteng Province. In this chapter, I answer the research questions that guided this study and formulate conclusions based on the research. I then discuss the potential contributions of the study, as well as the limitations faced. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for further research, training and practice.

### **6.2 Summary of research findings**

#### **6.2.1 Key findings from the literature review**

In the introduction to the literature review, I discussed the value of this study by referring to the importance of being able to read in order to communicate using the written or printed word. Yet the literacy levels of Grade 4 learners in South Africa according to PIRLS (2011) remains low at 36%. Many of the skills needed for learning to read are acquired when learners are in Grade R. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by teachers and mothers.

I first investigated what some of the current global trends are in learning to read (see 2.2). It was evident that the literature placed emphasis on the detrimental effects of poverty on and the consequent importance of teaching young learners learning to read in California and Australia. In order to improve the learning and teaching of reading, it seems that various policies and programmes providing guidelines for teaching reading were recommended and put into place in countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. China and South Africa are collaborating on a research initiative to explore the

reading practices of Grade R teachers in their respective countries. It seemed likely that South Africa may follow these global trends in learning to read and that is what I investigated next.

When investigating local trends about teaching reading in South Africa (see 2.3) it emerged that we are also faced with the challenge of many learners living in under-resourced conditions, especially in rural areas, which negatively impacts on their literacy levels. However, peer tutoring seems to be working well in schools in Tzaneen to try and improve reading skills. Similar to the global drive to create policies and programmes, South Africa has implemented the CAPS programme to address its literacy problems.

In the next section (see 2.4), findings from literature indicated that reading skills are acquired in a gradual, complex process which is affected by the young learner's physical, perceptual, intellectual, language and emotional development as well as home circumstances. Three approaches to learning to read emerged from the literature study: the whole language approach, the phonetic method and the multisensory approach. Each approach has some advantages and the whole language approach and phonetic method have some disadvantages. Therefore the most practical strategy seemed to be a combination of the best of the three approaches to prepare young learners to learn to read.

Previous researchers found that certain pre-literacy skills, such as phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge and rapid automatic naming (RAN), were useful predictors of the learner's later reading ability (see 2.5). If the learner's ability in these skills may predict his future ability to read, then a lack of ability in these skills might be reduced with intervention and thus increase his chances of learning to read.

### 6.2.2 Key findings from the current study

The main finding formulated from the results of the study was learners' reading readiness is affected by certain influences in their lives. Learners enter Grade R with different backgrounds, life experiences, interests and capabilities; therefore no one-size-fits-all teaching method can help all learners learn to read. Teachers need to find the most suitable combination of the methods for teaching prereading skills for each learner's individual needs.

It emerged from the data that the learner's letter sound knowledge, which falls under the umbrella of phonological awareness, is the most critically important skill for the learners' reading readiness. Teachers teach letter sounds phonetically and once learners have learnt the sound of a few consonants and a vowel, they are soon able to construct and deconstruct simple words using letter cards and to sound them out correctly. By the time learners can do this they are already starting to read.

Another finding was that parents are the first teachers in the learners' lives and parents' home circumstances, knowledge, experience, available time and own love of reading are all important factors affecting the preparation of the learner for learning to read. Parents who read and tell stories to their child and model reading for pleasure engender a culture of reading at home that creates in the child a desire to want to learn to read for himself. The research findings indicate that positive parental involvement supports the teacher's teaching at school. Teachers are obviously the main educators at school, although specialist teachers, librarians, specialists and therapists may also assist in the learner's acquisition of reading skills.

## 6.3 Research conclusions

To reach the research conclusions, I restate the initial research questions and provide an answer to each question. These answers are my research conclusions. The purpose of the current study was to explore factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners as understood by teachers and mothers. In Chapter 1, I posed research questions to guide this inquiry. In this section, I address those questions. I first answer the primary research question and then answer the secondary research questions which support the primary research question.

### 6.3.1 Primary question: What factors do Grade R teachers and mothers find affect reading readiness?

The first factor affecting their reading readiness is the developmental level of each learner entering Grade R is different, as each learner brings a unique life experience, prior preschool experience, previous exposure to learning, and academic aptitude to the classroom. Some learners come from homes where parents take an interest in and support their learning, whereas other learners come from a low socio-economic background where basic necessities such as enough food to eat and somewhere safe to sleep are the priority. Some learners attend preschool before starting Grade R, while other learners have not had this opportunity for prior learning. Some learners have an aptitude for learning to read, while others are disinterested or late developers in reading. Each of these factors contributes to the reading readiness of learners. Teachers need to try and find a way of closing the reading readiness gap between the different developmental levels of the learners. The second factor is that learners also need to be mature enough to have some abstract thought because reading requires the decoding of symbols depicted in black marks on a page. Readiness to learn to read becomes evident in

learners' artwork and their interest in copying letters when they realise that letters make words and may be read.

The third factor affecting reading readiness is that learners need to be willing to learn to read. Some learners show a desire and passion for reading by asking questions about it. This often becomes evident when they want to know more about and even try to follow the letters or words on the page while someone is reading them a story. Sometimes, learners may pretend to "read" a book out loud according to the illustrations or remembering how it was read to them previously. The findings of the study show that being read to encourages learners to love books and motivates them to want to learn to read. Sometimes an older sibling who can read inspires a younger sibling to want to learn to read too. Teachers need to find a way to capitalise on this enthusiasm and stretch the learner's learning while it is still easy to do so. However, some learners challenge a teacher's teaching skills when they show little interest in learning to read. Then teachers should spare no effort in finding innovative, fun ways to arouse the learner's interest.

The phonological awareness of the learner is an important fourth factor affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners. Phonological awareness encompasses skills such as knowledge of alliteration, rapid automatic naming and rhyming. However, according to this study the most critical phonological skill needed for reading seems to be letter sound knowledge. Learners need to know that each letter of the alphabet has a sound and that saying certain sounds together can make a word. Once learners learn three or four letter sounds, for example /c/, /a/ and /t/ they can very quickly start forming words, such as, to continue this example, "cat". If they learn the /m/ sound next, learners can manipulate the letters by replacing the /c/ with the /m/ to make "mat". This stimulates learners as they already feel they are starting to read. It is necessary for the learner to achieve automaticity in letter sound knowledge.

The fifth factor is that learning to read should be fun and concrete for this age group (5-6 years). Play creates excitement in the learner and makes it easier for him to understand potentially difficult reading concepts. The learner is still in the concrete, tactile and physical phase of learning so kinaesthetics help him to understand more abstract concepts such as letter sounds through using the body.

Parents' knowledge, experience, home language and availability make up the sixth factor that affects the learner's reading readiness. Parents do not always have knowledge about how to prepare their child to learn to read. They might have the experience because they learned to read at school, but times have changed and so have teaching methods. Therefore parents may not be aware of the way reading is currently taught at school. This might negatively impact on the learner's learning because of a lack of consistency between school and home and simultaneously frustrate parents who try to help their child to learn to read, but do so incorrectly. If the learner's home language differs from the language of teaching it makes it harder for parents to help their child pronounce letter sounds correctly and learn to read in the language of teaching. Lastly, it may be difficult for families where both parents work to find the time to make themselves available to support their child in learning to read at home.

Under-resourced home circumstances and low socio-economic living conditions form the seventh factor because they might cause behavioural problems for some learners which may negatively affect their readiness for reading. Under-resourced home conditions may mean that parents do not have spare funds for purchasing books and that they may not be able to read to their child or model reading for pleasure.

Lastly, but importantly, reading and telling stories to learners is a worthwhile eighth factor contributing to the learner's reading readiness. Being read to at home encourages learners to want to read and it provides consistency between home and school because reading is valued

at school. Parents should model reading as a pleasurable experience and provide suitable books for their child to enjoy. This study found that learners learn to read more easily if their parents read stories to them in a reading culture at home.

It would appear that there are eight factors affecting the reading readiness of learners that emerged from the data and which also align with themes that emerged from the data as seen in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Aligning the eight factors affecting reading readiness with emergent themes:

The 8 factors that affect reading readiness and the emergent themes they align with	
The learner's individual developmental level	Theme 1: The individuality and maturity of the learner.
The learner's maturity	
The learner's desire to learn to read	
The learner's phonological awareness	Theme 2: The learner's phonological awareness
The learner's need for play and kinaesthetics	Theme 3: Parental influences
The learner's parents' contributions	
The learner's socioeconomic living conditions	
Reading stories to the learner	Theme 5: Reading and story telling

In the next section I answer the question on how Grade R teachers address each of these factors in the classroom.

### 6.3.2 Secondary question 1: How do Grade R teachers address these factors in the classroom?

In order to address the challenge of learners arriving in Grade R with varying life experiences, preschool experiences, previous exposure to learning and academic aptitude, teachers may carry out some form of baseline assessment in the first few weeks of the year to determine where and how big discrepancies may be. The teacher could then use this information to formulate a strategy to accommodate differences between learners. Teachers should not teach learners prereading skills before they are developmentally ready, or mature enough to have some abstract thought, but nor should the teacher hold back learners who

already know letter sounds and need further stimulation. Teachers should teach to the developmental level of each learner. When some learners show little interest in learning to read, teachers seem to seek innovative ways to spark their enthusiasm, such as using the metaphor of landing a plane on the last letter of a word to teach the end sound.

When teaching phonological skills, teachers generally refrain from teaching letter names, soft letter sounds and capital letters to avoid confusing learners. Instead they prefer to teach the hard letter sounds which leads to sounding out the letters of short words, which in turn leads to analysis and synthesis of words and eventually reading. Teachers teach the phonetic alphabet rather than the ABC. They find it practical to teach one letter per week and have a letter of the week table in the classroom with pictures and objects reinforcing the sound of the letter of the week. Teachers label objects for incidental sight reading and learners practice saying the sound of the letter for auditory discrimination. Some teachers prefer to simply group similar rhyming words together such as map, cap, and tap and work on that sound instead of teaching one letter per week, but the end result seems to be similar. In order to achieve automaticity in letter sound knowledge, teachers drill, repeat, revise and recap what was taught the previous day. If the learners remember the sounds then the teacher adds to their learning; if not, then the teacher repeats the information and drills it until the learners can say the letter sounds automatically.

One of the best ways to make learning to read fun, yet still concrete and physical for the learner is to teach phonics and letter formation together. Learners practice writing the letter of the week in the air; in different sensory media; on white boards; by moulding it in play dough; and by painting it. Kinaesthetically, learners feel and touch concrete objects such as textured letters; they make the shape of the letter with their bodies; walk along an outline of the letter taped onto the carpet; perform the actions to songs and finger paint the letter. To

incorporate learning to read into learners' play, teachers use physical, educational and word games and phonics programmes with songs and stories with colorful pictures of letters.

Parents do not always have the time, knowledge and experience to help their child effectively at home. Teachers may use parent orientation evenings or organise workshops to guide parents on how best to help prepare their child for reading readiness. To address under-resourced home circumstances and the low socio-economic living conditions that some learners experience, some schools provide breakfast and lunch, as well as supply all the equipment and resources needed for teaching. Teachers sensitively handle behavioural problems with learners from low socio-economic environments as the learners may have been exposed to and negatively influenced by events and situations beyond their understanding. The indication is that teachers also take extra time at play time or after school to give extra reading lessons when needed. Teachers also go out of their way to give these learners hugs, sweets on their birthday, and so forth, to make them feel special and ready for learning.

Teachers teach according to stages of reading. They first encourage learners to listen to stories and then progress to discussing the story afterwards. Incidental reading, for example, of logos soon follows, then picture reading, and then looking at and describing pictures and reading them back to the teacher. The teacher encourages learners to tell him or her the story of what they watched on TV, to relate what they did over the weekend, and to make up a story and tell it to the group. Lastly, the teacher exposes learners to single letter sounds and then groups of letters that make words. Some teachers read the Letterland story about each letter sound for reinforcement.

The teachers pointed out eight factors affecting reading readiness and how these factors may be addressed when preparing Grade R learners for reading readiness. See Table 6.1 for a summary of the eight factors that affect reading readiness and how to address them in the

classroom. It would appear that teachers have the knowledge and expertise to assist learners in a variety of meaningful, practical ways to prepare them for reading.

Table 6.2: The eight factors affecting reading readiness and how to address them in the classroom

The 8 factors that affect reading readiness and how to address them		
	The learner's:	To address the factor in the classroom:
a)	Individual developmental level	Teach the learner from his individual developmental level
b)	Maturity	Bring weaker learners to a higher level rather than bringing stronger learners to a lower level
c)	Desire to learn to read	Find fun ways to ignite a passion for reading
d)	Phonological awareness	Teach a letter sound each week
e)	Need for play and kinaesthetics	Play games and apply kinaesthetics
f)	Parents' contributions	Educate parents on current teaching methods
g)	Socio-economic living conditions	Understand and give extra assistance
h)	Being read to	Read and tell stories to the learner

In the next section I answer the question on who is involved in the learners' reading readiness.

### 6.3.3 Secondary question 2: Who are the people involved in the learners' reading readiness?

At school, the learner's class teacher is the most important person involved in the learners' reading readiness, followed by other teachers at the school, such as the librarian and the physical education and computer teachers. If a learner has special needs, then intervention by an occupational therapist, speech therapist, audiologist or optometrist may be recommended. At home, parents are the first and most important teachers. Older siblings, friends who can already read, and other caregivers may also assist in the learner's reading readiness.

It seems there are a limited number of people involved in the learners' reading readiness with parents and teachers as the main contributors. In the next section I answer the question on how the people involved in the learners' reading readiness contribute to reading readiness.

### **6.3.4 Secondary question 3: How do they contribute to reading readiness?**

At school, the learner's class teacher firstly should contribute all the practices that address the factors affecting reading readiness discussed earlier in 6.3.2. In addition, this study's findings show that the learner's class teacher and any other teachers involved in the learners' reading readiness should also be trained, qualified and passionate about what they do. Teachers should challenge and extend all learners, including those who are capable, not just those who experience problems with learning. It takes a competent teacher to identify and create a solution for problems with learning to read. The librarian's knowledge makes the library lesson special as she selects books that are appropriate for the learner's developmental level and age for reading. In this way she encourages in the young learner a love for books and reading. At school, or at a practice recommended by the school, occupational therapists and speech therapists may help learners who experience barriers to reading readiness due to, for example, weak perceptual skills, processing skills or auditory discrimination. Similarly, specialists, such as audiologists and optometrists, may assist learners with hearing and visual barriers respectively, which might hinder their progress in reading.

At home, parents contribute to the learner's reading readiness by checking that learners do their homework properly and that they understand it. Parents encourage, praise and motivate their children and find fun activities to do such as mosaicking and playing educational games that promote reading skills. Parents may create a culture of reading at home by modelling reading, providing audio CD stories for their children to listen to, exposing them to books to stimulate them to want to read, reading stories to them, creating a love for books, and by taking them to the library. Older siblings may have a positive influence on the younger sibling's reading skills by setting a good example, motivating him to want to read and by helping to teach him read. The learner's friends and other caregivers may contribute to varying degrees in ways similar to those of the older siblings.

Involving and utilising the expertise of as many relevant people as possible aligns with **Theme 4: A network of support**. Parents and teachers are the most important people affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners. Therefore, a collaborative effort between teacher and parents would positively influence the reading readiness of learners. Neither the teachers nor the parents seem to feel enough is being done in this regard, so this is an opportunity for improvement. The initiative could come from the teachers because they know what parents need to be educated on, but the support should then come from parents making the effort to attend the workshops and meetings. Parents need to know that an older sibling, if the Grade R learner has one, is likely to teach and assist the younger sibling to read. The learner's friends and caregivers may also be involved in the learner's preparation for reading.

#### **6.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, I would like to recommend the following in an attempt at helping to improve our country's literacy:

- a) Recommendation 1: At a national level, policy makers could investigate the eight factors that affect the reading readiness of Grade R learners that emerged from this study and determine whether or not they could be included in a national educational policy to assist in further improving the nation's literacy levels.
- b) Recommendation 2: At a national level, a better recognition could be given to Grade R teachers for the valuable, critical teaching they provide in the form of an improved pay and benefits policy and recognition for their professionalism.
- c) Recommendation 3: At provincial and district levels, education leaders could investigate how closely the schools in their areas follow the eight factors that affect reading readiness and perhaps suggest that they try the factors that they are not

addressing to see if it improves literacy rates at the schools. This investigation could run for four years from Grade R to Grade 3.

- d) Recommendation 4: At a school level, teachers together with their principals could determine what parents need to be educated on with regard to reading readiness, perhaps by asking the parents what they think too in order to improve collaboration between teachers and parents.
- e) Recommendation 5: At a school level, teachers should discuss and debate the suggested eight factors from this study and determine how best to use them or improve on them in their own classrooms.

## **6.5 Avenues for further research**

I would like to suggest the following avenues for further research:

- ❖ Conduct a similar research study at government schools to see if the same factors affect the reading readiness of their Grade R learners;
- ❖ Conduct a similar research study on remote, rural Grade R learners to see if the same factors affect their reading readiness;
- ❖ Conduct a follow up research study on Grade 1 learners to see the effect the factors addressed in Grade R have on their reading ability; and
- ❖ Conduct a similar research study in other provinces to determine a pattern between them which could possibly be used to initiate a national policy to improve the reading readiness of Grade R learners;

## **6.6 Limitations of the study**

Although this study was carefully prepared, I am aware of its limitations. First of all, I used a multiple case study design for this research study. A limitation of such a design is that the findings cannot be generalised because of the small number of participants and research sites

(Punch & Oancea 2014:271). However, given that the purpose of qualitative research is not necessarily to generalise, but rather to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Rule & John 2011:104), I did not consider this to be a problem.

Secondly, I deliberately used a case study approach rather than focusing on the entire education system. This has potentially deprived the study of insights that would be gained from the experience of reading readiness as practiced in other schools. Nevertheless, by focusing on practice within the six schools selected, I hope that the findings may connect with the experiences of the participants, readers and beneficiaries of this study (Punch & Oancea 2014:275).

Thirdly, I only used private preschools in Johannesburg as research sites to minimise confounding variables, therefore my findings might not translate to other types of school in other areas. This limitation led me to suggest that future research should include government schools in other provinces. Nevertheless, it is likely that my findings could translate to other private schools and to other schools located in other large cities such as Pretoria and Cape Town in South Africa.

## **6.7 Final remarks**

There are two aspects that I would like to mention that have not been discussed in the findings, conclusions or recommendations. Firstly, it became clear in the discussion of findings that most of the findings of this study concurred with the literature study and theoretical framework. I find this claim exhilarating, because it might imply that Grade R teachers are getting the reading readiness of Grade R learners right and that the seeds sown now will bear fruit by Grade 3, which means that our country's literacy levels will significantly improve. The continuing low literacy rate in South Africa was the inspiration for this study so this is exciting news indeed.

Secondly, through this study, I have found that the Grade R teachers that I interviewed are awe-inspiring for the important role they play in society. They are hard-working, dedicated, passionate, knowledgeable, loving and nurturing. They always work more than the required number of hours and teach more than the curriculum recommends. They are at the same time humorous, lighthearted and very willing to share their wisdom with a researcher like me. It was a privilege to interview them.

For me personally, this research study has been a daunting mountain to climb, with amazing vistas along the way of insights into other teachers' teaching worlds. I had to be careful during my interviews not to try and poach teaching ideas and concepts from those teachers who so graciously gave of their time, knowledge and experience. I also had to avoid steering the conversation into directions that interested me in my personal teaching capacity and try and ensure I follow my list of questions. It seems that once teachers get together there are endless problems, suggestions and methods to discuss, analyse and improve through the sharing of ideas. I have laughed at and with wonderful principals, teachers and mothers while hammering each piton into the rock face of the mountain I was climbing. I have cried many tears of frustration too at the hugeness of the task of writing this thesis. Best of all, I have learned an enormous amount of valuable information which is helping me to be a better Grade R teacher to those entrusted in my care. Someone asked me along the way what I was going to do with my Master's Degree once I had finished it. I explained to her that that was unimportant; I was already applying what I was learning every step of the way in my classroom.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

According to the findings of this study, it is apparent that there are eight factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners. This study has explored the meaningful, practical

strategies teachers use to address these factors in the classroom, identified the key role players and explained how they contribute to the reading readiness of Grade R learners.

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## Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Certificate



### Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

**S du Plessis [08022887]**

for a M Ed project entitled

**Factors affecting the reading readiness of grade R learners: Exploring the gap between theory and practice**

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue.

  
Prof VI McKay  
Acting Executive Dean: CEDU

  
Dr M. Elmassens  
CEDU REC (Chairperson)  
[mcdtc@netactive.co.za](mailto:mcdtc@netactive.co.za)

Reference number: 2015 MARCH/**08022887**/MC

18 MARCH 2015

**Appendix B: ISASA's letter confirming their permission is unnecessary:**

Simon Lee (simonl@isasa.org)

2015/05/05

To: sue du plessis

Dear Sue,

This is to confirm that ISASA unfortunately cannot grant permission for research to be conducted in independent schools. We are a voluntary association rather than a governing body, so we have no legal authority to make a decision of this kind. Permission would need to be obtained directly from the school, or where the school belongs to a larger group (such as a Crawford school) possibly from the group head office.

Best regards,

Simon Lee

## **Appendix C: Letter to principal requesting permission to conduct a focus group interview:**

### **Request for permission to conduct research at (name of school)**

**Title:** Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice.

Principal's name

Principal's office

Address of school

Telephone number of school

Dear (name of principal),

I Sue Du Plessis am doing research with Professor Kamleshie Mohangi in the Department of Education towards a Master's degree in Education at the University of South Africa (UNISA). We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice".

The aim of the study is to contribute to education practice. Your institution has been selected because it is located in the Johannesburg area, it is an English medium private school and it is the school where I, the researcher, am currently employed. The study will entail interviewing grade R teachers in a pilot focus group study in order to explore the gaps between theory and practice as far as reading readiness is concerned. I attach a copy of the letter that participants will receive for your perusal. The benefits of this study are to contribute to and improve education practice. I will provide feedback to the participants in the form of a draft copy of my data analysis in order to verify and validate my findings.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Du Plessis

P O Box 4150

Northcliff

2115

11 May 2015

Dear (Teacher's name),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study that I, Sue Du Plessis, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice" at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Professor Kamleshie Mohangi. Permission for the study has been given by your principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of reading readiness in education is substantial and well documented. Reading competency is a vital communication tool for education and is an important life skill too. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve teaching practice. I will be interviewing teachers and mothers at five other schools too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve a group discussion of approximately thirty to forty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. There is no compensation or reimbursement for participation in the study.

With your kind permission, the group discussion will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0837874453, or by email at [sue\\_dplessis@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_dplessis@hotmail.com).

I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Du Plessis

**Focus group assent and confidentiality agreement**

I ..... grant assent that the information I share during the group discussion (focus group interview) may be used by the researcher, Sue Du Plessis, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's name (please print):

Participant's signature:

Researcher's name (please print):

Researcher's signature:

Date:

## Appendix D: Focus group permission letter to teachers:

P O Box 4150

Northcliff

2115

11 May 2015

Dear (Teacher's name),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study that I, Sue Du Plessis, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice" at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Professor Kamleshie Mohangi. Permission for the study has been given by your principal and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of reading readiness in education is substantial and well documented. Reading competency is a vital communication tool for education and is an important life skill too. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve teaching practice. I will be interviewing teachers and mothers at five other schools too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve a group discussion of approximately thirty to forty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. There is no compensation or reimbursement for participation in the study.

With your kind permission, the group discussion will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0837874453, or by email at [sue\\_dplessis@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_dplessis@hotmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Du Plessis

**Focus group assent and confidentiality agreement**

I ..... grant assent that the information I share during the group discussion (focus group interview) may be used by the researcher, Sue Du Plessis, for research purposes. I am aware that the group discussions will be digitally recorded and grant assent for these recordings, provided that my privacy will be protected. I undertake not to divulge any information that is shared in the group discussions to any person outside the group in order to maintain confidentiality.

Participant's name (please print):

Participant's signature:

Researcher's name (please print):

Researcher's signature:

Date:

## **Appendix E: Letter to principals requesting permission to conduct research:**

**Title:** Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice.

Name of principal

Principal's office

Address of school

Telephone number of school

Email address of principal

Dear (Principal's name),

I Sue Du Plessis am doing research with Professor Kamleshie Mohangi in the Department of Education towards a Master's degree in Education at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice".

The aim of the study is to contribute to education practice. Your institution has been selected because it is located in the Johannesburg area and it is an English medium private school. The study will entail interviewing one Grade R teacher and one mother of a Grade R learner in order to explore the gaps between theory and practice as far as reading readiness is concerned. I attach a copy of the letter that participants will receive for your perusal. The benefits of this study are to contribute to and improve education practice. I will provide feedback to the participants in the form of a draft copy of my data analysis in order to verify and validate my findings.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Du Plessis

**P O Box 4150**

**Northcliff**

**2115**

29 April 2015

Dear (Teacher's name),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study that I, Sue Du Plessis, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice" at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Professor Kamleshie Mohangi. Permission for the study has been given by your principal and the Ethics Committee of the college of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of reading readiness in education is substantial and well documented. Reading competency is a vital communication tool for education and is an important life skill too. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve teaching practice. I will be interviewing teachers and mothers at four other schools too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately thirty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. There is no compensation or reimbursement for participation in the study.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0837874453, or by email at [sue\\_dplessis@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_dplessis@hotmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Du Plessis

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice” in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant’s name (please print):

Participant’s signature:

Researcher’s name (please print):

Researcher’s signature:

Date:

## **Appendix F: Letter inviting teachers to participate in the study:**

**P O Box 4150**

**Northcliff**

**2115**

29 April 2015

Dear (Teacher's name),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study that I, Sue Du Plessis, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice" at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Professor Kamleshie Mohangi. Permission for the study has been given by your principal and the Ethics Committee of the college of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of reading readiness in education is substantial and well documented. Reading competency is a vital communication tool for education and is an important life skill too. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve teaching practice. I will be interviewing teachers and mothers at four other schools too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately thirty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. There is no compensation or reimbursement for participation in the study.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0837874453, or by email at [sue\\_dplessis@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_dplessis@hotmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Du Plessis

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice” in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant’s name (please print):

Participant’s signature:

Researcher’s name (please print):

Researcher’s signature:

Date:

## **Appendix G: Letter inviting mothers to participate in the study:**

**P O Box 4150**

**Northcliff**

**2115**

29 April 2015

Dear (Mother's name),

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study that I, Sue Du Plessis, am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice" at the University of South Africa (UNISA) under the supervision of Professor Kamleshie Mohangi. Permission for the study has been given by the principal and the Ethics Committee of the college of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because you have a child in Grade R and therefore have knowledge and experience related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. The importance of reading readiness in education is substantial and well documented. Reading competency is a vital communication tool for education and is an important life skill too. In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. This information can be used to improve teaching practice. I will be interviewing teachers and mothers at four other schools too.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately thirty minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. There is no compensation or reimbursement for participation in the study.

With your kind permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 0837874453, or by email at [sue\\_dplessis@hotmail.com](mailto:sue_dplessis@hotmail.com). I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Du Plessis

## CONSENT FORM

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “Factors affecting the reading readiness of Grade R learners: exploring the gap between theory and practice” in education. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participant’s name (please print):

Participant’s signature:

Researcher’s name (please print):

Researcher’s signature:

Date:

## Appendix H: Focus group interview schedule:

<b>1</b>	<b>How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>How do you address these factors in the classroom?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>

<b>4</b>	<b>How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? – In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>How do they contribute to reading readiness?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
	<b>Teacher 5</b>

<b>7</b>	<b>To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?</b>
	<b>Teacher 1</b>
	<b>Teacher 2</b>
	<b>Teacher 3</b>
	<b>Teacher 4</b>
<b>Teacher 5</b>	

## Appendix I: Interview schedule for teachers:

1.	How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?
2.	What factors do you find affect reading readiness?
3.	How do you address these factors in the classroom?
4.	How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? – In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?
5.	Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?
6.	How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?
7.	To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?
8.	What do you view as the gap between theory and practice?

## **Appendix J: Interview schedule for mothers:**

1.	<b>How do you prepare your grade R child for reading readiness?</b>
2.	<b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b>
3.	<b>How do you address these factors at home?</b>
4.	<b>Where did you get your inspiration and ideas from?</b>
5.	<b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b>
6.	<b>How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?</b>
7.	<b>Are you aware of the CAPS document?</b>

### Appendix K: Observation schedule:

	Item to observe	Tick	Photo	Comments
1	Book corner			
2	Posters with writing			
3	Theme table with writing			
4	Labels on theme table items			
5	Posters with common environment words			
6	Labels in classroom			
7	Mark making area			
8	Alphabet on wall			
9	Letters for children to make words			
10				
11				
12				
13				

## Appendix L: Data collection record:

Data collection record															
Interviewee	Date of interview	Transcription draft completed	Interview for member checking	Edited after member checking	Duration in minutes	Number on digital recorder	Reflections completed	Line number and delete names	Data analysed						
									Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
School 1															
Teacher 1	28 July '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	45:51	000121_001	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother 1	05 Aug '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	20:15	000129_001	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School 2															
Teacher 2	23 June '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	21:29	130906_002	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother 2	23 June '15	Yes	unavailable	N/A	20:48	130906_001	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School 3															
Teacher 3	19 June '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	23:26	130902_002	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother 3	04 Sept '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	27:25	000301_001	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School 4															
Teacher 4	08 July '15	Yes	Email sent	N/A	27:27	000101_001	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother 4	08 July '15	Yes	unavailable	N/A	33:54	000101_002	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School 5															
Teacher 5	25 Nov '15	Yes	20 Oct '16 (Email)	Yes	42:22	130801_004	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mother 5	25 Nov '15	Yes	SMS sent	N/A	07:15	130801_003	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
School 6 - Focus group															
Teacher 6	26 Aug '15	Yes	Not done	N/A	30 mins	unrecorded	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher 7	"	Yes	17 Oct '16	N/A	"	"	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher 8	"	Yes	20 Oct '16	N/A	"	"	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teacher 9	"	Yes	21 Oct '16	N/A	"	"	Yes	Yes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Appendix M: Reflective journal (sample)

**19 June 2015:** Interview with Teacher 3 was held at the Christian school at 14h00 with one of the Grade R teachers.

This was my first interview and I was both excited and nervous. I now realise that it is important to have a checklist of “things to take with you on an interview” because there are so many things to remember. Consent forms, checklists, camera and digital voice recorder for starters. I was a few minutes early so I was able to look around the classroom before the interview. Teacher 3 had hosted Father’s Day in her classroom earlier that day so her classroom was not set up the way it normally would have been. Nevertheless it was a print-rich classroom and I knew that this would be a good interview.

Teacher 3 was young and enthusiastic and an absolute pleasure to interview. She was very open and honest. In fact it was so natural chatting to her I occasionally forgot that this was supposed to be an interview. I interrupted her a few times with my own anecdotes and I could see once or twice that this – annoyed is too harsh a word, but she wouldn’t allow it to interrupt her flow. I must remember to keep quiet and LISTEN! But it’s difficult to find the right balance, because you need to encourage further communication by nodding and humming and appearing to agree with statements made. Also I find it necessary to comment every now and again to encourage further discussion.

I found that Teacher 3 was thinking about my earlier questions whilst answering later ones because when I thought the interview was over I luckily asked her if there was anything else she wanted to add. There were a few items and they were most relevant so I slotted them into the

right place in my transcript. So I think it's important to appear relaxed at the end and anticipate further discussion, rather than jumping up to leave.

I was also able to take some photographs of displays in Teacher 3's classroom. Unfortunately she had taken down her book corner and writing area to make space for the dads earlier that day. So she promised to set them up again on Monday and send me some photos of them.

Teacher 3 seemed relaxed throughout the interview; although she was startled when I asked her what factors do you find affect reading readiness? She laughed, nervously, almost hysterically I think, as if caught off guard. She hummed and hahed quite a lot while answering the question. Teacher 3 obviously thought she hadn't answered it very well because she added some ideas at the end of our discussion. She also seemed to feel awkward when I asked her about how her training had prepared her to teach reading readiness. She definitely seemed to think that Unisa was lacking there and that it was a disadvantage not to have one-on-one lecturing. I think that's the whole point of distance learning, though. Although it must be a general problem because I know that Unisa has introduced e-tutors now to help bridge the gap between lecturers and groups of students by tutoring daily online. I don't know what this has to do with my thesis at this stage.

Teacher 3 thinks that spending a few years training with different teachers (like an internship) is the best way to learn. I agree with her and I think a lot of schools are paying students a nominal salary to study full time in their employ under the supervision of experienced teachers. The schools then employ these students once they're qualified. This gives the student the kind of training that Teacher 3 benefitted from and it gives the school an idea of the student's capability when looking for new staff. I'm not sure how relevant this is to my thesis at this stage, but it's interesting.

So, what have I learned?

1. Have a checklist of items needed for the interview.
2. As part of my introduction remind the interviewee that what we say is confidential and anonymous.
3. Don't fall into the trap of telling anecdotes about my own experiences – it wastes time and interrupts the interviewee's train of thought.
4. Don't let the interviewee wander too far from the question I have asked, no matter how interesting I may find it.
5. Remember that I am interviewing for my thesis, not trying to steal ideas from my interviewee to use in my own classroom.
6. I also think that taking photographs with my iPad will produce better photos than my little camera – and it's easier to download them to my thesis by email. (I discovered through trial and error that my little camera was in fact far easier to download to my thesis and the photos were very good!)

## Appendix N: Samples of transcriptions and coding

Line	Speaker	Interview	Comment
1 2	Interviewer	How do you go about preparing a grade R child for reading readiness?	Question 1
3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11	Teacher 2	Ok we start cos what we concentrate on is Letterland – that’s where we have our phonics whereby we start with a “a” for an apple. If a child can say “a” that’s where it starts. When a child can say c-a-t so then that’s the format then as soon as they can say c-a-t the faster they go /c/ /a/ /t/, then /c/at/, /c/at/ they end up saying cat so now you can say it. So that’s how we prepare. Obviously you have the slow learners and you have fast learners; obviously we concentrate on the three letter words. They are much simpler, they are short and easy to grab and easy to format and so.	Analysis  Slow learners and fast learners  Three letter words
12	Interviewer	So you are actually... so you do the c-a-t.	
13	Teacher 2	Yes the Letterland	
14	Interviewer	Oh, ok, so you are actually already teaching them to read.	
15	Teacher 2	To know the sound yes.	Know the sound
16	Interviewer	Do they look at the letters as well or just hear the sound?	
17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	Teacher 2	The CD that we have, is a Letterland CD, they hear the songs, there’s a song that goes with the letter, there’s a sound, and there’s a picture as well so it goes hand in hand. It makes the students, the kids, very simple; it makes them...it’s easier for them to learn with the song, and the sound from the CD, the songs, and the pictures as well. We have cards whereby there’s a picture of “c”, there’s a cat; and then you build up a story as well. This is a c-a- cat ok – so this cat...the, the handwriting – there’s a song as well for the handwriting as well, just for cursive so those, those things they work hand in hand.  It’s easier for a child to learn yes and to remember as well if he can learn and say oh there’s a song whereby it says: ( Teacher 2 sings) “Clever cat says c in words, c in words, c in words	Letterland CD Sound, picture song  Cards with picture of “c”  Integrate  Letterland incorporates love for things related to words Easier

30		Clever cat says c in words”	
31		It’s also the love for that animal, the cat as well.	
32	Interviewer	Yes, oh that’s lovely. (Writes “song helps”) Do you do anything	
33		over and above Letterland? Or do you find Letterland has everything	
34		you need?	
35	Teacher 2	Letterland has everything we need exactly, everything we need	Quote – for phonics, Letterland and integration  Life skills Letterland
36		because there’s the sound, there’s colours as well, with the pictures,	
37		so colour coordination as well is there, um, how many cats, maths is	
38		also in there. How many cats can you see, oh there’s one cat – how	
39		many eyes does a cat have – oh there’s two there, how many mouths	
40		– one, you see. So it goes all <u>hand in hand</u> as well. What does a cat	
41		like to eat? Oh it drinks milk, ok. There’s also <u>life skills</u> as well if	
42		they include it as well. <u>It goes well hand in hand</u> using the	
43		Letterland.	
44	Interviewer	Do you find you use...do you do a <u>letter of the week</u> ?	<u>letter of the week</u>
45	Teacher 2	Yes	
46	Interviewer	do you find the letter of the week becomes like a theme for you, like	
47		you say now from cats, apart from the reading and the milk and	
48		that’s the life skills.	
49	Teacher 2	Yes, definitely because with grade R always you have to <u>repeat</u>	Repetition, recap, building on what’s already been learned add new information remind
50		yourself all the time, and every day you have to <u>recap</u> on what you	
51		have done yesterday so that you can see if a child can remember	
52		what you were doing yesterday and can <u>add more</u> . If you see that	
53		okay what we have learnt yesterday is c- a- t a child can <u>remember</u>	
54		the <u>sound</u> and you can <u>add on a bit of information</u> . If they have	
55		forgotten, you <u>remind</u> them okay <u>remember</u> we did this and the “c”	
56		<u>for cat</u> , okay what else? Then you put out the card, “what card is	
57		this”? You will see them <u>getting excited</u> and putting their hands up	
58		“ma’am, <u>I remember</u> , its “c” it’s cat!” So then you know what you	
59		did <u>yesterday its sinked in in their minds</u> and they can <u>remember</u> -	
60		that’s what we want.	

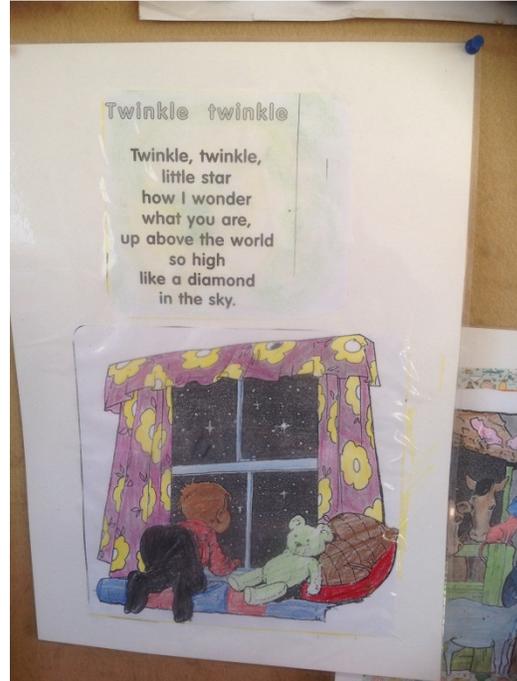
Data analysis of Mothers' Q1: How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?

23 24 25 26 27	Interviewer	Ah, so you've got your girl. Lovely. Good! Um, alright you told me the other day that er you are actually teaching your child a little bit at home how to read? Cos my focus is on reading and getting a child ready for reading, and I want to hear from a mother's point of view – what do you do to get your child ready to learn to read?	Question 1: How do you prepare your grade R child for reading readiness?
28	Mother 1	I have alphabets all over my wall and...	Alphabets on the wall
29	Interviewer	Is this at home?	
30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45	Mother 1	Yes, at home. And he can recognise the sounds - he can say the sounds, he recognises them, he can say them and whenever we read, I read them stories. Whenever we read then when I see a simple word I get him to say it. Words like "pan", "pop" easy three letter words. Then he gets to say the words so I mean that's just prep for him so we don't go deep into reading and when I read I point as I read along and when we get to that word that I want him to say then he'll say it. I also have um the alphabet for babies like the alphabet sound. So he would know that sometimes an /A/ is like this but sometimes /A/ is actually an /a-e/ and sometimes the /e/ is that thing that differentiates. So that helps because when we are doing the reading, he'll say "but why is it like this?" Then we go back to the (THRASS) chart and actually see sometimes it makes this sound; sometimes this. So then that's preparing him although he's not at that level yet. But he can do basic reading. He can read basic things around.	01:51 Recognise and say sounds Stories simple cvc words, point as I read along parent involvement is prep alphabet for babies (phonetic alphabet) a>e changes the sound of the a child asks why sounds are like that (THRASS) chart Parent prepares him basic reading
46 47	Interviewer	Good. What, um, what made you feel the need to teach him at home?	

<p>48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55</p>	<p>Mother 1</p>	<p>At first, I did not feel the need – actually he’s the one who pushed it. <b>At home I felt the need for them to love books.</b> I want my kids to love books. So that’s <b>why I have developed quite a big library and I read for them.</b> But when the grade 1, my first born started reading, then my grade R took interest. So as this one was reading little words he started getting interested and when he was stuck then he would you know be frustrated so that’s why I took it as an opportunity to teach right there.</p>	<p>Child asked to be taught to read <b>to love books</b> older sibling reading made him interested Parent involvement</p>
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## Appendix O: Samples of photographs taken for observations

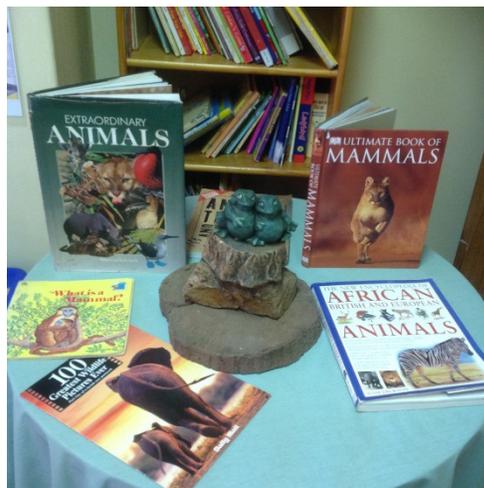
School 2- examples of posters on the walls of the classroom for a print-rich environment



School 1 – examples of theme posters and weather chart for a print-rich environment



School 4 – examples of a print-rich classroom



## Appendix P: Samples of notes taken during interviews

000101\_001

Teacher 4

47  
8 July 2015

**Appendix I: Interview schedule for teachers:**

1.	<p><b>How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?</b></p> <p>14yrs Dbn teaching coll - UK 4-5yrs Supply teaching 2yrs Primary School, London, 3yrs Gr. R. Dubai 7yrs not teaching 4yrs here. 2 boys - 11 + 8yrs. Down's. Stories, vocab development Check understanding, games</p>
2.	<p><b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b></p> <p>Understand language - parents play big role. Hearing &amp; pronunciation, willingness to learn - want to read esp. boys - make up own stories. Parents involve @ home - bedtime stories</p> <p>Phonics - Know letter sounds Picture matching → vocab. Practice writing → sand, air etc. directionality holding paper child's health can have a bad day</p>
3.	<p><b>How do you address these factors in the classroom?</b></p> <p>Do activities to interest boys - act puppets, story characters No library - wd help. Guide parents Health - refer them to specialist. &amp; speech.</p>
4.	<p><b>How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? - In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?</b></p> <p>20 yrs ago. African Story board props, pup. theatres, teach of read not ed enough Pick up from other TE. Trial &amp; error to start off w.</p>
5.	<p><b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b></p> <p>Parents - siblings read to them. They cd read to younger sibs, Teachers, Family</p>
6.	<p><b>How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?</b></p> <p>Enthusiasm, love for reading and their interests.</p>
7.	<p><b>To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?</b></p> <p>Yes - so basic, too basic, not limited by it Montessori - object + build cards w. letters</p>
8.	<p><b>What do you view as the gap between theory and practice?</b></p> <p>Home situation so important. Sp probs OT probs impact a lot As advanced these days...</p>

Teacher 2 interview

130906\_002 vinda

Started w. aftercare - college - Professional child care Coll,  
 Did pract @ diff schools to get the hang of it. = Cd Preparation  
 Pract are where you learn & have to discipline. (27) kids

1.	<p><b>How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?</b>                  About 4 yrs. Letterland = phonics, "a" for apple that's where it starts. CAT say it faster = eat. Have slow + fast learners. Start w 3 letter words. CD method = sound + smg + pic for ea letter - makes it easier for kids. Build up a story as well. Smg for handwriting too. To learn + remember. Smg helps. Letterland has everything you need = colour + words.</p>
2.	<p><b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b> lots of recap + repetition and add to it. Rewind if kids have forgotten.                  Factors - if child is ready to read - when they can remember the sound. Differences in sounds. work on S and give extra time to ch. Show me "c" - use picture, &amp; cards. Maybe memory is that. 3 gr R Ts.</p>
3.	<p><b>How do you address these factors in the classroom?</b>                  After hours. In main ring do songs + rhymes - put on A3 laminate w pic. Hand in hand - pic, words, &amp; rhyme. Sequencing too.</p>
4.	<p><b>How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? - In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?</b> You MUST go to a college. Barn T having love of kids. Pract are best cos you're in the class. Full exposure. gd idea - words. Have to introduce theme etc. Don't push ch who's not ready. Start simple w. 3 letters. Tell stories, listening skills, ask qs. Show pics - its where</p>
5.	<p><b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b> love of reading starts. Teacher, library - <sup>lesson</sup> age app books - take kids to her - knows kids. Take ch. T accompanies ch. Ch love it. Feel special &amp; he knows he can do it. <u>Method</u> w. new books give workshops for diff ages. Big books w big pics. Parents if they have time? Sm image wd lead to kids.</p>
6.	<p><b>How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?</b>                  No elec too water. Far from library. Diff types of problems. Ch are well fed so ready to learn!</p>
7.	<p><b>To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?</b>                  we use it but letterland is way to go - easier they grasp it - it works!                  Phonics, sound, blending - what we do is gd. on right track.</p>
8.	<p><b>What do you view as the gap between theory and practice?</b>                  Def<sup>ing</sup> gap - in class you forget th. + look at ch. what can I put out. Think alternatives + wot individually. make for ea ch is different.</p>

Mother 3

Appendix J: Interview schedule for mothers:

4 yr 6 yrs daughter son 8 yrs 11 yrs daughter

1.	<p><b>How do you prepare your grade R child for reading readiness?</b>          Guided by school - not herself.          Only start reading to 4 yr 1.          Pre-reading skills in 4 yr 0.          Start late.</p>
2.	<p><b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b>  <u>Time</u> "Usborne series that guides them to reading"          reading system          Ma had never time for reading.  <u>Knowledge</u> - reading stories to them when you go.          Different culture - put sch. cult.          Access to library - no need for it          Kids Google.</p>
3.	<p><b>How do you address these factors at home?</b>          Schools are so thorough - no issues with OT - maybe speech.</p>
4.	<p><b>Where did you get your inspiration and ideas from?</b>          Friend - learned - anxious helicopter mum  <u>Mums &amp; Tots</u> enc. reading stories          ↳ informative on development.          School doesn't inform much only if there's an issue,          kids under pressure</p>
5.	<p><b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b>          School, mum, hubby w homework. Housekeeper          order sister not brother. Play school, school, <sup>hivach</sup></p>
6.	<p><b>How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?</b>          Encourage arts &amp; crafts &amp; activity books = fine motor dev + fun, Reading stories, bedtime          Usborne series &amp; audio CDs - games spell &amp;          spell - memory games.</p>
7.	<p><b>Are you aware of the CAPS document?</b>          No - heard of it -</p>

Kum -

Mother S.

1.	<b>How do you prepare your grade R child for reading readiness?</b> ADHD son 10 yrs. daughter gr. 0. Kiska sounds of alphabet - abc - Montessori sensory feel the letters w. sand while saying. Letter land as well. Enviro print. Read stories at night.
2.	<b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b> * Time - quality * Physical aspect - no strong core → irritability → lack of focus & concentration * Knowledge & experience
3.	<b>How do you address these factors at home?</b> Stay at home mum so has time as opposed to one that works. involvement - sensory interaction - exercises to strengthen core & integration. → reversible - doesn't x midline Applying knowledge.
4.	<b>Where did you get your inspiration and ideas from?</b> Kum Experiences w. older son
5.	<b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b> Educators
6.	<b>How do they (people mentioned in 5.) contribute to reading readiness?</b>  <i>Educators need training Passion</i>
7.	<b>Are you aware of the CAPS document?</b> Yes.

## Appendix Q: Focus group notes made on interview schedule

: Focus Group Interview schedule:	
1	<p><b>How do you prepare a grade R child for reading readiness?</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b> read to them. Phonemic awareness &amp; auditory B &amp; exercises - for closure - all those pre reading skills</p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b> exp to reading - bedtime stories. Tower games - S matching cards - association exp v. young</p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b> incidental reading, pic dict, → logos &amp; pic ✓ reading, make up an stories. Simple sounds - sound foreground/background.</p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b> vis discrim. l → R signs + diff's, eye tracking shape → pics → words + sounds - to recognise diff's tell letters. vis perception sequencing telling stories</p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b> Start from 000 - listening Passion &amp; love for quiet reading.</p>
2	<p><b>What factors do you find affect reading readiness?</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b> Emotion, delayed development. Visual &amp; ears B Attitude of adults. Chn whose dads read to them have higher IQ. Physiologically ok. - kids who</p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b> Hyperactivity, behaviour sleep-tired. and sit still L issues @ home listening skills health</p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b> lack of exposure, stimulation ✓ Dyslexia. Parents etc.</p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b> Anxiety, Attendance, exposure - enough S Behaviour, Diet</p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b></p>
3	<p><b>How do you address these factors in the classroom?</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b> Parents awareness - behaviour - assess needs → L therapy. In pictorial form too show them what's happening in day = decoding</p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b> hyper → wenna, move around - give exercises. ✓ structure 1st thing wd it be different. Depends at w class.</p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b> Address ea issue + buy in S Assess yourself too - realise why chn like to be, but late nights - consider what it cd be</p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b> create a routine - settling in → churches B Attend to individual needs. Early parents buy in important.</p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b> Assess</p>

4	<p><b>How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? - In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?</b>  <i>Be open - not close minded</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b>  <i>S Not enough. 10 mins @ Lisa - for parent interviews - to engage not to say + not. Shortcuts + equipment in classroom. 'Tricks' to learn</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b>  <i>V College doesn't. Would have app experience. Give perfect examples + you change it around.</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b>  <i>B Teach prac - beauty of prac. Moved away from it. watching a sd T. Practical person = good old fashioned ideas - process thru rep. lotsa examples</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b>  <i>L Remedial - gave examples of behaviour - knew not to look for. Methodology was there - in the practical exp.</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b>  <i>Things change quickly over schemes + progrs - must keep up w. it</i></p>
5	<p><b>Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b>  <i>L Phy Ed = gross m, OT + Sp Therap. I.T. whizzes of reading exps - emp influence</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b>  <i>B Sp Therapists; TV influence - not always pos -&gt; impact. 'lets learn to read' buy the programme. Xtra materials eg drama classes. Granny. Ts work collaboratively</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b>  <i>V Helpers @ home - Parents, Teachers. Every member of staff eg computers older siblings led to younger sibs + family members</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b>  <i>S Learn daily even read to kids.</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b></p>
6	<p><b>How do they contribute to reading readiness?</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 1</b>  <i>B vision -&gt; that person must be available in this dev. Technology - glasses. Coloured text for yellow 4 dyslexia interested T to create a solution</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 2</b>  <i>V var.</i></p> <p><b>Teacher 3</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 4</b></p> <p><b>Teacher 5</b></p>

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basics  
in place

To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?	
<b>Teacher 1</b>	Helpful. Follow it & you give them the basic B Reading has overlaps Progression. Allows for recap. Apply it & assess the way it says.
<b>Teacher 2</b>	Do first & then look back @ caps. if missed S put it in. We go way over + above it. Teach words not a caps requirement. Independence etc.
<b>Teacher 3</b>	Caps covers most - guideline L Being privileged we add to it.
<b>Teacher 4</b>	caps starts w list sp. reading L eulog
<b>Teacher 5</b>	- no splinter skills. continual assessment = no splinter skills.

## Appendix R: Focus group transcription:

Focus Group Interview: 26 August 2015			
Line	Speaker	Interview	Comment
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Interviewer	Thank you very much all of you for agreeing to this interview. I appreciate your time and your willingness to do this, I really do. Thanks (principal) for allowing me to hold this interview. I'm going to write down as much as I can, but I don't want to inhibit the flow, either so I will come back to each of you afterwards to check that what I have written down is what you said, or wanted to say. You can also add to or delete things that I have transcribed. It is really about what you want to say.	Introduction and rapport building
9 10	Group	Some discussion and comments from the group – I did not write these down yet because it is still part of the rapport building.	
11 12 13	Interviewer	My study is about reading readiness for Grade 0s and that will be the focus of this discussion. The first question is how do you prepare a Grade 0 child for reading readiness?	Question 1: How do you prepare your Grade R child for reading readiness?
14 15 16 17	Teacher 6	You start by reading to them. Phonetic awareness and auditory skills and exercises – for closure – all those pre reading skills are important – they have to start learning them. Passion and love for quiet reading.	Reading  Phonetic awareness
18 19	Teacher 8	Exposure to reading, so reading them bedtime stories can start from as early as they will listen, eye training,	reading
20 21 22	Teacher 7	Incidental reading, such as logos, then picture reading, looking at the pictures and reading, making up a story - and then exposure to single sounds and then words.	Phonetic awareness
23 24 25 26 27	Teacher 9	Start with visual discrimination, left to right, similarities and differences, eye tracking, lots of similarities and differences starting with shapes and pictures then to sounds. Visual discrimination is extremely important so that they can recognise the difference between “b” and “d”	Phonetic awareness

28	Teacher 7	and foreground/background, associations,	Phonetic awareness
29	Teacher 9	All the visual discrimination. Visual perception is very important	
30 31 32	Teacher 8	The tutor games that we play – matching cards, opposites, reading a picture, sequencing, they need exposure from a very young age - puzzles	Games reading a picture
33 34	Teacher 9	Sequencing, telling stories, beginning reading, the 000s are starting with listening	reading
35	Interviewer	What factors do you find affect reading readiness?	Question 2: What factors do you find affect reading readiness?
36 37 38 39 40 41 42	Teacher 6	Emotion, delayed development, physical aspects such as vision and ears. Attitude of the adults. Children whose Dad reads to them have higher IQ. They listen to a man's voice. Sometimes when you really want them to listen something different helps. Auditory and visual are so important. Ability to concentrate, Physiologically okay – kids who sleep – who are tired – can't sit still - health	Individuality of child Parents
43 44	Teacher 9	Hyperactivity, poor listening skills would affect their learning - issues at home, listening skills	
45 46 47 48	Teacher 7	Lack of exposure, lack of stimulation for books, dyslexia, lack of encouragement from parents. My husband reads to my children. They find it more fun and exciting and they listen better cos it's not the norm in my household.	parents Added after member checking
49 50 51 52 53	Teacher 8	Anxiety, some children are very emotional – you can learn what you want but if you read you're not going to read. Eyes and ears. Attendance and exposure – if they haven't had enough – behaviour if they don't listen to you – Dad's normally the disciplinarian in the family too. Diet affects them badly	Individuality of child Parents
54	Interviewer	How do you address these factors in the classroom?	Question 3: How do you

			address these factors in the classroom?
55 56 57 58	Teacher 9	Parents need to be made aware of the child's behaviour, what he's doing – assessments. With a hyperactive child you need the routine – for example, this is the time you pack up, in pictorial form as well – show them what is happening throughout the day	Parents must be made aware Routine Pictorial form to show routine
59 60 61 62 63 64	Teacher 7	With the hyperactivity if you know they are constantly moving around at story time you can give them a few exercises to do. If we did story time first thing in the morning would the results be different? I suppose it depends on the class that you have. Maybe for a child like D...l last year if you tell the story in the morning he probably would have enjoyed the stories	Exercises Routine change
65 66 67 68 69	Teacher 8	Address each issue and get the parents to buy in. assess yourself too – don't jump to conclusions, take the time to realise why this child is like this now – what factors keep happening, is it because of the late nights, is it because it's straight after snack – you take into consideration what it could be	Get parents' buy in Routine Settling in activities, Pictorial form = decoding
70 71 72	Teacher 6	Create a routine – settling in activities, pictorial form is decoding. Attend to the individual child's needs. Parents' buy in is important for setting the tone, willingness to listen.	Parent's buy in and willingness to listen
73 74	Interviewer	How has your teacher's training prepared you for this? – In what ways did it help; in what ways was it lacking?	Question 4 How has your teacher's training prepared you for this?
75 76 77 78 79	Teacher 7	I don't think that college actually prepares you enough, they give you guidelines. I did the remedial part of it and they did give you examples of behaviour – you knew what to look for when you came into a classroom. I still remember my lecturer at college and how she drilled the language experience	drilled

80		approach to us. I think they give us the guidelines and the	
81		perfect example and then you have to sort of change that around	
82		for the kids, using those principles and guidelines.	
83	Teacher 6	The practical teaching prac, that's the beauty of the course that I	
84		did because there was a lot of practical time and now they are	
85		moving away from that. What influenced me more was	
86		watching good teachers – their ideas were phenomenal, ageless	
87		and good old-fashioned ideas and she gave practical examples	
88	Teacher 8	Unisa's not (moving away from teaching prac) – they make you	parents
89		do a lot, but it should be more. You see a good teacher... They	
90		don't prepare you enough for parent interviews. That's one of	
91		the most important aspects of your school work but they don't	
92		teach you how to engage, what to say and what not to say – that	
93		comes with experience. And your things in your classroom –	
94		the shortcuts and the tricks of the trade that you learn only after	
95		making a mistake and then you realise you need to fix it	
96		or...you don't get recognised or looked at to work in the first	
97		year unless you've had some kind of experience, but then how	
98		do you get it? Be open – a lot of teachers that I've worked with	
99		are closed minded and only want to do what they know	
100	Teacher 9	That's a problem – the background information on important	
101		issues. I think that all those years ago the methodology was	
102		there – they taught you this is the basic way you teach reading –	
103		you do this in sequential order and so the methods were there.	
104		But you still needed to go for practical periods. And things	
105		change so quickly. I think that what I learned at College has	
106		changed – the different programmes and things – you've just	
107		got to keep up with it	
108	Interviewer	Who else is involved in the children's reading readiness?	Question 5:
109		Obviously it's the teacher.	who else is involved in the children's

			reading readiness?
110 111 112 113 114 115 116	Teacher 6	Speech therapists – TV plays a huge influence and it’s not always a positive impact. There was a programme called “Let’s Learn to Read” and it was boring but very good – it was teaching the kids to read. You could buy this programme. And if a child’s involved in extra-murals, such as drama classes - it’s exposure. If grandparents read to their children. Parents influence children too – if it’s a positive experience	People involved in reading readiness  read Parents
117 118 119	Teacher 8	If the child has problems, go to OT, speech specialists and so on. We used to have a mum come and read to the children and listen to them read.	
120 121 122 123 124	Teacher 7	Every member of staff would be involved including PE, Computers, everybody. Helpers at home can be involved. My helper at home reads to T...n. It’s just different coming from a mum, or dad. Older siblings can also read to younger siblings and other family members.	People involved in reading readiness
125 126	Teacher 9	The more IT whizzes they are for example Reading Eggs – computer influence. That programme has just made them fly.	
127	Interviewer	How do these people contribute to reading readiness?	Question 6: How do they contribute to reading readiness?
128	Teacher 9	We’ve basically covered that	
129	Teacher 8	Yeah we did cover that	
130 131 132 133 134	Teacher 6	It relates back to each and every thing – if there’s a problem with a child’s vision that’s the person that’s going to influence. Technology’s amazing if you think of some of the kids that wear glasses – we just didn’t have that. It takes an interested teacher who creates a solution.	People involved in reading readiness  Quote!
135 136	Teacher 7	I know they use coloured lenses for dyslexia – it’s yellow – I don’t know too much about it but I know at my old school we	

137		used to put <u>yellow</u> transparencies on top of their reading	<u>Added after member checking</u>
138		material to help them read. <u>Everybody has a different approach</u>	
139		<u>to reading – some are funny, serious, more dramatical - using</u>	
140		<u>change of voices, etc.</u>	
141	Interviewer	To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy?	Question 7: To what extent do you implement the CAPS policy? What are the challenges and how is it helpful?
142	Teacher 6	I think the CAPS document is helpful. It allows for <u>recap</u> – you	<u>recap</u>
143		keep going back to make sure everyone is or the whole class is	
144		engaged. They want you to assess it as you go along. In our	
145		phase CAPS is a very solid base to work from because it really	
146		does cover everything. I don't think we realise how much we	
147		add to it. We do project it and there's a summary and then a	
148		C.....d summary of what we add on. We put the basics in	
149		place – no splinter skills – continuous assessment means there	
150		are no splinter skills.	
151	Teacher 9	I think that if you do follow it – your CAPS covers most and	
152		you get that guideline of what you should cover, what you	
153		should do. Obviously being a privileged school we can add to it	
154	Teacher 8	Maybe it's because I am new but I find I do first and then I look	
155		back at CAPS which is probably the wrong way round – I	
156		should be looking and then doing. So I do and then I look back	
157		and if there's anything I've missed I put it in which is probably	
158		the wrong way because you should be doing it in order. We go	
159		way over and above it. We're teaching things that are not a	
160		CAPS requirement such as dress yourself and pack your own	
161		bag and walk into school by yourself – independence, that type	
162		of thing. You are teaching all that stuff so it's more than just	

163		what you're supposed to do in CAPS. Or what you're told to do.	
164 165	Teacher 7	That's the way the CAPS is planned – it starts off with your <b>reading</b> <b>listening skills, reading</b> etc.	
166 167	Interviewer	Thanks everyone for all your input and contributions. I really appreciate it.	Close off.

## Appendix S: Member checking results

### 20 October 2016 - Teacher 5:

Unfortunately, Teacher 5 was unable to meet with me at a time and place that would suit both of us, so she asked me to email it to her and this is the response she emailed back to me:

Dear Sue, sorry for delayed feedback on your theses. Well done on your hard work, it was an absolute pleasure to read about your research and the comparison between the teachers and parents, I totally agree with your findings.

If I may, I would like to suggest a slight change on the page 5; (T5:20 -28)..... Thus, it becomes evident that teachers need to find a way to close the gap between learners who have attended preschool and those who have not.

(It sounds like teachers are trying to close the gap between the strong and weak learners, not clear is it by dropping down to the level of weak or bringing up to the level of the strong learners and do we stagnate the strong learners in order for the weak to catch up).

If you agree, I would rather say that teachers are facing the challenge in finding new methods, different approaches and adapting the curriculum to more individualised needs of each learner in order to accommodate all the learners, weak and strong. Unfortunately, inexperienced and young educators are fearful to make any changes, and instead of using the curriculum as a guidance they follow it word by word resulting in many learners not being supported and they all loose out.

..... Obviously if you agree with that..

On the page 21 spelling mistake, just before (M5:72-78).....kind of piecing them together to make a word. ( Perhaps, placing them together to make a word), since didn't make much of sense while I was reading it.

The rest of the work is fantastic. Good luck and all the best.

If you need more clarity on the above mentioned, please do not hesitate to call me (0823428464)

Kind regards,



**17 October 2016 - Teacher 7:-**

Teacher 7 is a colleague and it was easy to arrange a time and place for an interview. She read through the chapter quite slowly and nodded and hummed as if in agreement with something she read from time to time. However, when I asked her what was wrong she just shook her head and carried on reading. When she finished she gave me a hug and said: “Your chapter thesis is very impressive...it’s perfect. Very interesting read. Well done”.

**17 October 2016 – Teacher 2**

I emailed School 2 and requested permission from the principal to interview Mother 2 and Teacher 2. However, they have a new principal. Luckily he phoned me to tell me he has taken over from the previous principal and knows nothing about my research. We had a long chat as he wanted to know all about it and how his school had become involved. He was very supportive and told me I could interview Teacher 2 any time, I must just phone her, but Mother 2 has moved to another school some distance away and although he kindly gave me her phone number it does not seem to work. I phoned Teacher 2 and we agreed to meet on the 19 October.

**19 October 2016 – Teacher 2:**

It was lovely to see Teacher 2 again, she is so bubbly and enthusiastic which is quite motivating. She asked me what had taken me so long and when I showed her the results chapter she said “How, is it that long, just one chapter! Oh my word! Now I see why it is taking so long. Must I read all of this now?” I said yes please so she took me to her classroom where it was a bit quieter to read it. She stopped and chatted about many things she read along the way and she really enjoyed where I had quoted her verbatim: “Oh my word! Did I say that...like that? And I’m a teacher! Oh my word!” Eventually she came to the end and she was actually quite emotional to think that her words were really going to be in a book. She loved everything I had written and did not want to change anything. I promised to give her a copy when it was finally done.

**19 October 2016 – Mother 3:**

Mother 3 is very busy at the moment with her three children in different stages of year end, exams and extra-mural activities so she asked if it was possible to email her a copy of the results chapter. I emailed her a copy but had to follow up with her on 1 November to see if she had read through it yet. She WhatsApped me back to say: “So sorry Sue. Completely forgot to reply. Did read it. Very involved! That was definitely hard work on your part. Eventually just scanned for M3! You were right on point as far as my comments were concerned. Thank you. All the best with your submission. Will pray for favour for you”.

**19 October 2016: - Teacher 3:**

Teacher 3 has subsequently moved house and now teaches at another school, so it took a bit of tracing to find her again. She now lives too far for us to get together so she said I should email it to her. I followed up on her two weeks later and she replied by WhatsApp: “I am so sorry but I haven’t had time. It is a lot of pages and I have other commitments. I will get to it ASAP. I am sure you have integrity and accurately portrayed my opinion”.

**20 October 2016 - Teacher 8:**

Teacher 8 is also a colleague and it was easy to arrange a time and place for an interview. She read through the chapter quite quickly and just raved about it saying “you represented me perfectly, thank you! Wow it’s amazing the research you have done...well done!”

**21 October 2016 - Teacher 9**

Teacher 9 is also a colleague and she wanted to take the results chapter home to read in private, so I thought that would be fine because she could always phone me or chat to me the next day if she had any queries about what I had written. She returned the chapter the next day and just commented: “It is all fine, no changes needed, thank you.”

### **27 October 2016 – Mother 5**

Mother 5's daughter has just about finished Grade 1 and she was not interested in being interviewed again. So I emailed the chapter to her and she smsd me two days later to say "Hi, I have read the report. I don't think I have anything to add or remove. I wish you everything of the best".

### **01 November 2016 – Update:**

So far I have been unable to get any response from either Mother 4 or Teacher 4. The principal at School 4 happily gave her permission for me to email the chapter to Teacher 4 and said that I must phone her secretary the next morning to try and get contact details for Mother 4 because her child has obviously moved to a primary school. However, neither the teacher nor the mother has contacted me which is a bit frustrating.

I have asked Teacher 6 for an interview and she said as soon as she has a moment she will let me know.

I emailed the principal at School 1 to request permission to interview Mother 1 and Teacher 1 who both work at the school, and she said that would be fine but could it wait until after reports were finished. I did not want to tell her that I had a deadline for November 15, but I will interview them anyway when they are ready.

### **Comment:**

I did not expect it to be so difficult to get hold of people for member checking. Firstly, it is disappointing that a teacher and a mother have moved away in the meantime. Secondly, mothers did not seem to be keen to be interviewed, as if they had lost interest in my research now that their child has just about completed Grade 1 already. Thirdly, this is a bad time of year for everyone, me included, as people just don't have the time to sit and be interviewed.

**Appendix T: Example of table of themes used in coding the data**



## Appendix U: Samples of notes made on observation schedule

*Teacher H.*

**Observation schedule:**

	Item to observe	Tick	Photo	Comments
1	Book corner	✓	✓	
2	Posters with writing	✓	✓	
3	Theme table with writing	✓	✓	
4	Labels on theme table items	✓	✓	
5	Posters with common environment words ?	✓	✓	
6	Labels in classroom	✓	✓	
7	Mark making area	✓	✗	
8	Alphabet on wall	✓	✓	
9	Letters for children to make words	✓	✓	
10	<i>library</i>	✗	✗	
11				
12				
13				

Teacher 3

Observation schedule:

	Item to observe	Tick	Photo	Comments
1	Book corner	✓		
2	Posters with writing	✓	✓	has the poster like a washing line
3	Theme table with writing	✓	✓	"Meals" theme with labels
4	Labels on theme table items	✓	✓	"L" table with items and labels
5	Posters with common environment words	✗		
6	Labels in classroom	✗		
7	Mark making area	✓		
8	Alphabet on wall	✓	✓	
9	Letters for children to make words	✓		
10	library	✓		<sup>and</sup> every week, library person, (cass) auditory exercise - half a class at a time.
11	washing line	✓		
12	Number words word clues in pictures		✓	See number line (washing line) above.
13	Art work with child's words in writing		✓	

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